

Materials Production Course (Phase I)
20-26 November 2006
Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh

Day I - 20 November 2006

Session I – Introduction

Introduction to Nirantar: The course on Materials Production has been designed by Nirantar, a resource group working in the area of gender and education. Nirantar believes that access to information is of critical importance to all. However, several groups, particularly women-rural, poor and neo-literate, do not have access to information. In order to meet the information needs of rural audiences, Nirantar has been working for over ten years on creating informative and interesting materials for adult readers. Since 1992 we have been producing Pitara, a news and features magazine in simple Hindi for readers with limited years of education. Nirantar has also initiated Khabar Lahariya, a local newspaper produced by a group of rural women journalists in Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh. The newspaper is written in the local language Bundeli and is distributed to over 2500 readers in the district. Nirantar has also been involved in training activists of other NGOs in publishing and producing their own material.

Other than its work in the area of materials an important part of Nirantar's mandate is to strengthen the capacities of organizations for women's education. This includes dimensions relating to perspective, pedagogy and curriculum development. Increasingly Nirantar has also undertaken research and advocacy initiatives that can enhance the learning and empowerment opportunities for women. We view Education in a broad spectrum, defined as a learning process and inclusive of access to information, literacy and processes of critical reflection.

Chitrakoot: Chitrakoot is among the poorest districts in the country and has a large proportion of the population living below poverty line (BPL). It has among the poorest female literacy rates – 49% - and this figure is arguably lower for Dalits, adivasis and other marginalised groups. The area is also characterised by violence against women, particularly Dalits, and is also infamous for the influence of dacoits and thugs. Sex ratio of the district is as low as 872. In short, the area is extremely poor on the various dimensions of human development and gender. Probably being physically located in an area which is reflective of economic, social and political poverty would add to the conceptual and practical understanding of the inequities, and help in enhancing sensitivities – which the course hopes to influence.

Additionally, it has been a field area for the organisers – Nirantar – for the past decade or so. Not only is there a connection with and understanding of the area and the people, Nirantar also supports rural women journalists to run a local paper – Khabar Lahariya. Hence, this is the location where the participants could see and experience a successful model of material being produced and used locally.

Participants: There were a total of twenty six participants from 13 organisations in this phase of the course. The group members introduced themselves and their organisations. They were also asked to indicate in what capacity they had been involved in materials production work thus far.

Session II – What expectations have people come with?

After the round of introductions, everyone was given cards on which they were told to write about the expectations with which they have come for the course.

The first set of expectations had to do with the **quality of material that is produced**. The participants said that they expected to go back with skills that would help them to incorporate creativity, simplicity, effectiveness and attractiveness in the existing materials and curriculum that they use.

Another set of expectations pertained to **perspective building**. People had expectations like this one – “I want to get a comprehensive understanding of gender.” They also wanted to know how to effectively present news and views, and what considerations to keep in mind while deciding the content of materials.

Some participants had the clear articulation that they wanted to pursue the **production of periodicals, or improve the quality of the periodicals that they already produced**.

SESSION: SIGNIFICANCE OF ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

The participants were divided into three groups and given nineteen articles, which they were asked to read and organise into a newsletter/newspaper format. The participants were asked to identify a target group for whom they would prepare the material, they were asked to select from among the articles given to them, they were given the freedom of editing the articles in whichever way they wanted to and to present it to the entire group.

Presentations and discussions

Members of the first group said that their target group would be neo-literate women and children studying at the primary level. They named their newspaper “Vividha”. They included the article on self-help groups and women so that it would help to give women an example of how they too can deal collectively with their problems. The article on population explosion and its relation to ‘lack of knowledge’ and poverty was also included for orienting readers to issues of development. For children’s interests, the group said that they had included the story about adolescents, jokes, the story on ‘Akbar and Birbal’, and the story about the ant.

When they were asked which articles they would include in a newsletter for themselves – for literate people – they said they would include the one on child labour, the one on gender – “Stree ko bhi chahiye poora akash” and “Yeh kaisa insaaf” – about the nurse who was given the High Court order to marry the man who raped her.

At the end, the facilitators made a few comments-they brought to the notice of all participants that the group had assumed that lively stories and pieces would be of interest to children only. Is it not true that adults – men and women, neo-literates or literates – would also enjoy reading these pieces and enjoy the humour?

The other important aspect was that the group's presentation brought out the challenges of reaching multiple readers. For instance, since the target readers were children as well as adult neo-literate women, the articles should have been organised in a manner that is easily read by the different groups. Perhaps in such a case, the pages should be divided for different readers or on the basis of different issues.

The other point that was highlighted was something that had already emerged in the discussion. It pertained to the article on "World population day", which assumed the 'ignorance' of the poor and non-literate people. The question was raised that is this the message we really want to give out? Do we really want to address the readers in this patronising tone? Is it not critical to acknowledge that they already have the awareness, understanding and consciousness about issues that affect their lives?

The other question that was raised was - why do we always choose articles that give out 'messages'? Is it necessary that neo-literate adult women should always be 'given' information? We must realise that they may merely be interested in literature, in stories, in jokes and in interesting pieces. It is not important to always look at 'social messages'. Providing messages and giving information are two separate aspects of material production and have to be dealt with in separate ways. In fact, providing information should be accompanied by providing analysis skills, so that readers can gauge for themselves the credibility and value of the articles and of the information.

The other thing that was pointed out was the fact that it is not always important to tell 'success stories' – like the article on SHGs and on the adolescents' support group. In order to effectively make a point about something, sometimes it is better to talk about the failures and struggles, the nuances of the event or phenomenon, and the different ways of approaching it.

The second group said that their target readers were adolescents, men and women in communities and people in voluntary agencies. They called their newsletter "Saksharta Sandesh". They selected a wide range of articles – 'success stories', serious as well as humorous articles about struggles of women and their aspirations, and news, views and information about the world.

The other observation that the group members made was that we cannot put too many radical stories all at once and assume that it would change attitudes and change society simply because it takes time to bring about social change. It is not fair, nor is it realistic, to have too many or too high expectations about the impact that materials may have on readers. Finally, there were questions raised about why we feel that there is a difference in the issues we understand and the issues that neo-literates understand? It is a matter of simple language and access – some may have had more and some have had less exposure. Therefore, in producing good literacy material, we need to reduce distances in language and presentation, but not in issues. It is a matter of method. Language can be made simple, but situations and realities cannot be made simple. And the same issues can be of interest to all – irrespective of age, class, caste, gender, or any other divisive category.

The third group prepared their newsletter for women readers. They selected a variety of

articles on women's issues, entertainment, humourous pieces and select success stories.

In the ensuing discussion, some group members raised the point about "Shankar ki akal" wherein the woman was portrayed as the one who had to step back and keep quiet in order to restore peace in the family. The group brought the discussion to the impact of socialisation and said that these processes are very strong and characters in this story clearly depict these strongly socialised roles.

In tying up the session, the facilitators reiterated the following points as learnings that had emerged from the morning's exercise -

- 1 First of all, we need to identify the needs of the people in the areas where we work.
- 2 We need to understand that their need for interesting, informative material is not very different from ours.
- 3 We also want to expose them to new information, information that broadens their horizons, so we need to take critical discretionary decisions.
- 4 There has to be a basis for drawing analysis. There should be certain criteria for doing it and the tone of the presentation should not be imperative, ordering, or patronising (e.g. - "The poor are responsible for dirt and lack of hygiene and sanitation.")
- 5 There is a need to include detective stories, love stories, jokes, and other entertaining material to add variety and creativity in materials and to ensure that the readers' interest remains intact.
- 6 Particular attention should be paid to how a particular caste and community group is represented in our material.
- 7 We must evolve ways of making sensitive representations of the marginalised and vulnerable groups.

PRESENTATION: STATUS OF MATERIALS IN THE COUNTRY

The next session was an input session to orient the participants about the status of readership and materials available in India for literacy and education. The facilitators presented the findings from the National Readership Study (2006) which is an annual survey to assess availability and accessibility of media. The main findings from the survey were as follows -

- 1 Readership of dailies has increased by 60 lakh people.
- 2 Press has reached 45% coverage in urban areas and 19% coverage in rural areas.
- 3 About 35 crore people are 'literate' but do not have access to materials - not due to lack of resources, but due to non-availability and non-accessibility, due to lack of material in regional languages, or by being written in difficult language. In short, the materials prepared are basically inappropriate.
- 4 News, politics, sports and films are popular areas for which reading material is easily available.

The facilitator also made a presentation on Sevanthi Ninan's survey in Madhya Pradesh, for which the main findings were as follows - (please see Annexure)

- 1 Maximum dailies are acquired by Panchayats – for which they have budgetary support.
- 2 Usually a local page is put together for the local paper by local ‘stringers’. The implications for this are that local news coverage is better, but there is absolutely no analysis in it. The news items normally pertain to deaths, accidents, etc. There is very little news from outside the district. The nature and extent of news coverage is not enough to put pressure on governance structures.
- 2 There are more libraries in cities than in rural areas, but the nature of materials is not reader friendly, and neo-literates are almost never able to access it.
- 3 Broadly, it can be said that there is no ‘literate environment’ in India.
- 4 It is necessary to have a library at least per 3000 population.

SESSION: EXAMINING LANGUAGE, PERSPECTIVE AND CONTENT IN MATERIALS

In the next session, the participants were divided into four groups and were given a number of articles to read. Two groups were given articles on the issue of sex selective abortion and two of them were given articles on the issue of water. They were asked to comment on the pieces with regard to the use of language, the perspective portrayed and the nature of content.

The first two groups got articles on the issue of sex selective abortion. The groups commented on the fact that simple and dramatic language had been used in the article about Punjab. In the title itself, there was a juxtaposition of Punjab’s ‘hariyali’ (greenery – referring to prosperity) and the graphic representation of the violence (use of the term ‘red blood’) in sex selective abortion.

In the other article, the group averred that the perspective was not gender sensitive. The focus of the article is that ‘men will not have a partner if sex selective abortion is allowed’. This portrays the instrumentality of women as ‘wife’ and ‘producer of children’ and does not speak at all about the violence and injustice of the act. Further, women are not able to complain to anyone and somewhere the article represents that she is not responsible for ‘wanting a boy’.

The other two groups had readings on the issue of water – “Pani ke sankat se ubarna hai to jal prabandhan seekhiye” and “Barsaat ho na ho barf aur water park to banenge hi”. In commenting on the language, they said that the first article is a long one while the other is a specific case study. Language in both articles is difficult, especially in the first one. The first article also gives a sense of patronising. In the title itself, there is a reference to the fact that the article is about ‘teaching’ something. There is an underlying presumption that the reader is ignorant and should read the article to ‘improve their lives’.

As regards perspective, in the first article, the onus of under-development and lack of water is put almost entirely in the hands of the poor. In the second article it is very clear who is doing ‘wrong’ and exploiting the poor. While the first article has included several issues together, and there is too much information congested into it, the second one throws open debate and questions in a very non-threatening manner and is written in an

easy manner.

Having analysed the articles on this basis, the facilitators guided the discussion towards the conclusions

- while selection of material we need to be very careful about the point that we are trying to make and not try to cover too many issues.
- it is usually most effective to try to place a single issue/case, keep it at the centre of discussion throughout the text of the article and use it to make the point about larger issues and macro realities.
- care should be taken to ensure that the perspective is made clear and enabling, and that it does not further stereotypes. Depending on the nature and purpose of the piece, the article should clearly depict the stands taken by the author. If it is for the purpose of raising questions about injustices, the author cannot take neutral stands. As in P. Sainath's article about the water park, the political stand should be made clear.
- in writing, the language used should be simple, without trivialising or simplifying the issue. Choice of words, information and messages should be done carefully.
- it is important to ensure that the writing style is easy and flowing. If there is some chronology and system in the write up, and links between paragraphs, it makes for better reading. Instead of writing in a patronising and preaching tone, the author should raise questions, so that the reader's curiosity and interest is sustained and communication is effective.
- in presenting arguments, it is best to take the help of facts and figures in order to strengthen a point. However, this data should also be accompanied by systematic analysis that is relevant to the point that we are making. In addition, the source of the data obtained should also be indicated.
- appropriate use of visuals – figures, photographs, etc – can help to enhance and enrich the article. An attractive title can also help to add drama to the article. Language and phrases that raise questions and curiosity for the reader may be used in the title.

Day II - 21 November 2006

READING: DISCUSSION ON 'MEDIA KA APNA KSHETRA' BY P. SAINATH

The discussion around this article largely pertained to the aspects of how the poor are victims of globalisation and of the commercialisation of media. The best example given by the author to reflect this is how the main papers carry the story on Lakme fashion week and of the industrialist Laxmi Mittal's son's wedding, but have no mention of farmer suicides that are on the rise. There is widespread coverage of news about the stock exchange and Sensex but no stories about the privatisation of basic services or about the

lack of employment opportunities in rural areas. In short, there is no critical analysis and no questioning about what is happening around us.

In the opinion of the group members, one of the main reasons for this was that fact that money is 'running the show' and media is all in the hands of business and corporate houses. Participants averred that ownership of media is in the hands of capitalist factions. Therefore, due to pressure from 'above' and due to the agenda and policies of the 'powerful' news coverage becomes biased. One of the members said that media has today become a 'peshha', a corporate activity and hence, we cannot expect it to cover politically challenging issues. Rather, they are made to report on 'mainstream' issues.

The participants raised concerns about who is producing knowledge and who is producing the paper? Also, who is reading these papers? What effect does it have in determining their values and attitudes? The discussion that followed helped to bring to the forefront the fact that class, literacy status, gender and caste are dimensions that implicitly determine what news is covered, and whom it reaches. There were questions raised about the lack of coverage of the news that is really relevant for the common man.

The group members expressed concern about the fact that 60% of the expenditure in mainstream media is on advertisements. Earlier there were rules that the first page should not have advertisements and maximum space should be reserved for news. Now, on the other hand, there has been allocation of limited spaces for news items. In today's consumerist society you can presumably not put news of drought on the first page along with advertisements for refrigerators. And one of the main reasons for this is the fact that funding for media is coming from industrialists, capitalists, political parties, and other people with economic, social and political clout.

However, at the end of the discussion, the facilitators veered the discussion to the fact that today there is some space and opportunity for alternative media. There are some journalists who themselves belong to marginalised groups and have found a space in mainstream media – like Dayamani Barla (from Jharkhand). Additionally, organisations and groups working at the grassroots can well use alternative media to influence and to pressurise.

GENDER

As part of the first phase of the materials production course, a session had been planned with Madhavi Kuckreja of 'Vanangana' (Chitrakoot, UP) to orient the participants on issues relating to gender, gender relations and institutions that influence the lives of men and women.

SESSION: Madhavi asked everyone to take fifteen minutes to prepare a presentation – in whatever form – about what is special today about their being a 'woman' or 'man'.

All the participants as well as the facilitators took part in this exercise. They prepared

their presentations in the form of pictures, poetry and prose and then presented in front of the larger group (see Annexure). Through these presentations, the group members learnt a great deal about each other and about each others' talents. They also learnt that various people within the group are at various stages in their lives. They learnt that in spite of the differences, common human relations and emotions bind them all together.

This exercise was followed by a game of 'passing the parcel'. The punishment that the one holding the parcel had was to pick up a chit, read out what was written on it, begin a discussion on the topic and then let the group take the discussion forward. The sentences on which discussion was generated were as below.

1 Afreen works in office and she also works hard to maintain the health and happiness of her family. Everyone in her office feels that they should help her out.

There was an acknowledgement that there are some provisions that are made for helping women in some situations. For instance, they are entitled to maternity leave and other benefits. However, when there is someone ill at home, the woman is the one who feels a social pressure to take leave and don the cap of 'caring' and looking after people. Division of labour in homes is often gender biased. The 'good woman' image says that women should work well at home as well as in the office. Why are there such expectations from her and not from the man? There were some discussions about the wellbeing of people – who is it for, whose responsibility is it, who is actually taking the responsibility, who is making the decisions, and who is in control.

1 Radha was very disheartened when she gave birth to her third daughter. She thought she would go in for a tubectomy operation, but her heart and mind was not fully convinced.

The group members discussed that a woman is often socialised in a manner that makes her think that it is imperative to have male children. Since society puts so much pressure on her to give birth to a boy, she starts to think that she really wants a boy and that she would not get the respect that she would if she had a son. In her mind, Radha even thinks about a tubectomy operation but in many ways, her mind is not her own. There are mechanisms operating in society that ensure that society furthers values that forces women to look after her in-laws, to 'worship' her husband, etc. She almost never has control over her own fertility.

Very rarely are women able to get out of this trap. Most importantly, the group debated on the question - are we ourselves free from the socialisation processes? Is our mind ever our own? We have internalised so many traditions, customs, superstitions and fear. Our roles determine our feelings and actions. Do we contribute to maintaining status quo?

2 Rani believes that dressing up is nice to show love for lover and husband

The group began the discussion around the fact that dressing up is a nice thing to do. But somewhere there is a belief that there are certain norms for dressing a certain way and any other way will not get acceptance. For instance, a participant narrated – "My neighbour is 60-65 years old and she dresses up a lot. When we ask her she says 'he

(husband) will love me more'. Therefore, she also advises me to dress up so that my husband would also love me more." Married women are often questioned about whether they would wear bangles, 'bindis', etc. There are different cultural norms in different societies. For instance, in some cultures, men also traditionally wear earrings.

Even among the group assembled, when Madhavi admired Brajesh's shirt, some people laughed because it was of a bright colour and it was probably odd for a man to wear bright colours.

- 3 *Kamla and Arvind let their daughter study up to the B.A. level. She wanted to go to Delhi to work. Both parents thought that once she is married she can do what she wants. After all, it is no joke having a grown up ('sayani') girl at home.*

The discussion revolved round the fear and insecurity that parents often have about letting their unmarried girls out in the world to work or study. The general feeling is that if she is married she would no longer be the responsibility of her parents and then she can do as she likes if her husband and in-laws allow her to do so. In Indian society, women often get a 'license to freedom' after marriage. The group members felt, therefore, that although we have opened up the skies for our children and taught them to dream, we have managed to limit their sky and their aspirations as well.

This debate brought to the group to articulate that women are generally considered a 'commodity'. In her native home it's the parents who decide for her; after marriage it is her in-laws who make these decisions on her behalf. The dichotomy lies in the fact that although the parents encouraged their daughter to study as per her wishes, they are limiting her choices for her career decision. After all, if you really respect her wishes then you would let her go.

- 4 *Tanuja and Rafique had an inter-religion marriage. When the marriage was about to break, people said that's what happens when you marry of your own choice.*

The members began the discussion by saying that today many arranged marriages are also breaking. Why should we believe that only marriages of choice are breaking? There are obviously several reasons for marriages breaking. And it was the opinion of some members that when we stop marriages of choice we stop the decision-making.

SESSION: INSTITUTIONS AFFECTING THE GIRL CHILD/WOMAN

This was a session that would help the group to identify the nuanced role that various institutions play in influencing and determining the lives of women. Madhavi led this session by drawing the picture of a girl on paper and threw a question open to the group – what are the various aspects in this girl's life that affect the way she grows up, what her values are and how do people treat her?

The first institution that the group members suggested was – *education*. They said that education helps to open up choices but does not 'empower' a girl. They opened up the debate that it is not safe to assume that education alone empowers. For instance, does this

mean that non-literates are not capable of taking decisions? And are all the decisions taken by literate persons the best decisions? This brought the group to the debate around what kind of education is important. Rather than the curriculum that is currently taught in educational institutions, practical ('vyavharik') education is important. Moreover, in practice certain kinds of courses give preference to men (e.g. – technical courses, agriculture) and some give preference to women (e.g. – home science). This has implications for role division in the future and in building long-term stereotypes.

There are also obvious problems in the way textbooks are written and different groups are represented. For instance, we hardly find any reference to role models like Kalpana Chawla (astronaut) or Sania Mirza (tennis player), but we have textbooks full of Mirabai (as a devotee of Lord Krishna) and of Rani Lakshmi Bai (who is portrayed as a 'mardani'/masculine woman involved in the freedom struggle of 1857).

The other institution that the participants identified was *family and society*. They said that as a girl grows she gets various signals from people around her. Right from birth there are different responses. At the birth of a boy, people beat a copper ('patal') vessel, while there are no celebrations on the birth of a girl. In childhood there are differences in the way that people respond to boys and girls. To start with, they are given separate toys to play with. Boys are usually given cars and guns, while girls are given dolls and cooking utensils to play with. This automatically puts them in differential roles. Over the period of growing up, girls and boys are often given different signals like – “Girls can be painters, boys cannot”, or “Boys cannot be dancers”.

The values are reflected even in food habits and health care practices within cultures. For instance, children often grow up seeing their mothers eat last, and eat less. Hence, girls internalise the same values. When children fall ill, parents often respond differently to the needs of girls and boys. Discrimination in accessing health care and education opportunities are ingrained in socialisation processes. The third institution that the group identified was – *market*. The discussion revolved round various aspects of the market and economy that are responsible for keeping women marginalised. A simple example that was quoted was the fact that there are no toilets in many schools. For girls, especially after starting the menstrual cycle, this has been a major reason for dropout and discontinuing studies. It is strange that something so simple should be responsible for limiting the access of girls to their basic rights.

Another aspect of the market that was discussed was that women often have no control over finance. They do not have access to it and do not have decision making power in this regard. They do not own property. At the time of marriage girls' parents often give 'dowry'. As a result there is a general sense of being burdened with the expense of educating girls, of finding a suitable groom and of paying dowry as well.

Yet another area within the market where women get left behind is in the technical field. Since they do not have access to technical education, they have limited exposure and lower income. And the feeling parents have is that the expenses involved in giving girls technical education is not worth it because they will ultimately go off to their in-laws' place and contribute to their household. Hence, limited access to education is closely related to financial autonomy and these are the factors that are responsible for women's

inferior position in the economy and market.

The next important institution that the participants identified is – *media*. They made the point that media and market are closely related to each other because the use of the woman and her body as a commodity is used by the media for selling objects and ideas. There are undignified and inappropriate representations of women as models and ‘objects’. For instance, ‘under-clad’ women are the attraction of advertisements for motorcycles. And ‘over-clad’, ‘homely’, women are shown in advertisements for selling pressure cookers, sewing machines and other ‘feminine’ pursuits.

Press coverage of events is also gender insensitive. For instance, in a large number of reports of elopement, it is always shown as the girl who runs away. The onus is never on the man. Even in report of harassment, abuse and rape, events are merely sensationalised and the ‘blame’ is directly or indirectly put on the woman, without being sensitive to the injustice or the real issue concerned.

The *law and police* is another aspect, related to society, which influences the lives of women in many ways. One of the participants pointed out that the justice system, including lawmakers, is often based in ‘religion’. Neither are the laws gender sensitive, nor those making it and least of all those implementing and upholding it. One other related institution that makes laws and is responsible for governance is *politics*.

Religion is today also a very important institution that guides how women are treated. And society is the basis for construction of religion. History and literature have also contributed to this process. For instance, in the Ramayana, it is Sita, not Ram, who has to undergo the ‘trial by fire’ (‘agni pareeksha’).

There are several inequities in the rites and rituals that are based on religion. For instance, girls are discriminated against in several religious spaces and occasions due to beliefs of impurity about the menstrual cycle. Remarriage of widows does not have acceptance. The practice of ‘purdah’ is widespread in Hindu caste society. The participants also discussed that in many ways the market and media also further and promote religion.

Another institution that affects the lives of women is that of *healthcare*. One of the aspects within this is that health care for women focuses only on reproduction. Even the government programme for it is called the ‘Reproductive and Child Health’ programme. There is focus on women’s fertility and how to control it. Contraception for women is promoted, and the politics of body and fertility are ignored.

At the end of the session, the facilitator tied up all the discussions. She summarised all the debates by saying that all the institutions that had been identified are interlinked. They affect and are affected by each other in many ways. It is a web of factors and relations that influence a woman, or indeed a man, in society. She concluded by saying that through years of struggle we have probably managed to clear the web a little bit around us, but a long struggle is still ahead of us. And we would have to intervene within each and every institution if we really want to see change.

SCREENING OF AND DISCUSSION ON THE FILM 'DOR'

The group members were of the opinion that the question that the film poses to viewers is – are we ever able to live life on our own terms? Whose dream are we living? Do some of our dreams always remain unfulfilled and incomplete? And is this not so much more for women?

Day III – 22 November 2006

This was followed by an exercise carried out in small groups. The group was divided into four and the groups were given different articles to read. These reading materials had been selected from mainstream media reports, NGO publications and school textbooks. The objective of the session was to use certain criteria to analyse the articles for the way they portray gender stereotypes, and their level of gender sensitivity. The criteria for analysis were as follows –

- 1 Representation of men's roles, responsibilities and image
- 2 Representation of women's roles, responsibilities and image
- 3 Representation of social structures

Group 1 was given the following articles – 'Faisla', 'Vibhagiya jaanch', 'Ab na ayega mazaa pyar mein' and 'Goreyya ke liye'. Group 2 had to read 'Vanprasth mein baap bane', 'Champa', 'Faisla' and 'Varissth police adhikari'. Group 3 was given 'Nari jagran', 'Bahu lakshmi', 'Saza mujhe manzoor nahin' and 'Doosri Radha' to read. And Group 4 had the following readings – 'Radha ka pachtawa', 'Yadon ke sahare' and 'Baa aur babu'. The discussions around each of the articles are summarised in subsequent paragraphs.

'Faisla' – The groups reading this said that the article clearly portrays how power and decision is in the hands of the man and the woman is a helpless entity. In spite of that it has subtle signs of revolt and in the end the woman uses her power to vote against her husband and he loses the elections.

'Vibhagiya jaanch' – This was a news report on a senior Police officer who had started worshipping Krishna in the form of his beloved. The Police officer considered himself to be Radha, the beloved of Krishna. The role of the man that is portrayed indicates that people should feel threatened when a 'manly' police officer adopts a 'feminine' image. There is a break in certain images – for instance, a 'strong' police officer adopts 'female' image and is even called 'nautanki'. The issue is over-sensationalised because he is a very senior police officer and the image he adopts is almost diametrically opposite from what he 'should be'. This challenges and threatens the basic social structure that is perpetuating patriarchy.

'Ab na ayega mazaa pyar mein' – The title is not directed towards Gudiya. Neither can she hope to get back her old love, nor is she going to be able to live happily now. In fact, now she feels 'impure' for having married again. Therefore, for Arif she cannot be acceptable. Somewhere he would think that she should have waited for him – she is his

‘property’. The image of the ‘adarshwadi’ (law-abiding) woman is furthered. Hence, the title probably implies sympathy for Arif for whom there is no more fun - ‘ab maza nahin ayega’.

Very clearly, love and wanting is not the woman’s prerogative. There is no focus on her situation or her future. What would she do? Why is her child called illegitimate? The child is Gudiya’s – why should we be concerned that the child is Taufiq’s or Arif’s? In the entire article, there are only two lines about Gudiya – the focus is on Arif’s return, not on Gudiya’s agony. There is a focus on sympathising with Arif – who is so ‘patriotic’ and was fighting for the country – and no talk of Gudiya. In short, there is sensationalisation and trivialisation of the matter. Media houses like Zee TV had organised the Panchayat and telecast this. But after a year when Gudiya died, there was no coverage at all. Why do media select certain stories and ignore the rest? The writer has powerfully presented his point of view – in favour of Arif. And it clearly portrays the perpetuation of the patriarchal norms and structures.

‘Goreyya ke liye’ – This article portrays a powerful as well as an emotional man and a dependent and weak woman. There is implication of the perpetuation of social structures. It gives the message that men are able to resolve problems and are strong. Very subtly, and very non-threateningly and simply, stereotypical roles are represented.

‘Vanprasth mein baap bane’ – This is a sensationalised story about an old man who had multiple wives in order to have a male child. The title itself indicates how the matter has been trivialised. Masculinity and virility has been given over-emphasis, while the woman is portrayed as a child-producing machine. While man’s sexuality/virility have been celebrated there is nothing in it for women except performing the function of procreation – giving birth to a male child - for furthering the generation.

‘Champa’ – In this article very clearly the woman is shown as suppressed. She is not allowed to go out. In fact, when her husband dies, she has feelings of ‘freedom’ rather than of ‘sadness’. Although her husband dies of alcohol abuse, people say that she is responsible for his death. After becoming a widow, she tries to break certain norms and practices. An example of this is when she goes to fetch water even though widows are socially not allowed to do so. She tries to be independent and also involves other women to take charge of their own lives. She uses her own decision-making skills. The woman is shown as one who handles housework as well as the demands of outside work. In some ways, the activities that she encourages are furthering the gendered division of labour and perpetuating stereotypes about women’s work, like sewing.

In this article Champa’s situation is shown to change very rapidly. There is too much simplicity in the writing – and all is in ‘black’ and ‘white’. The important internal struggles, pain, complexities and dilemmas are not reflected. Hence, the nuances of her struggle are ignored and there is little reality in the writing. The suggestion is that we can simplify presentation, but simple language but should not simplify the issues.

‘Varishth police adhikari’ – In this piece there is information as well as analysis. The woman is portrayed as a ‘puppet’ and represented in traditional roles. The image of the man is stereotypical.

‘Bahu lakshmi’ – In this article, the image of the man is shown as ‘supreme’. The woman’s work in the household is in certain roles. In the article there is an interesting shift from the perception of the woman as ‘unlucky’ to eventually being considered ‘lucky’. However, throughout the piece there is no mention of her name or identity. The adjectives that are used for describing her are ‘kalmui’, ‘kifayati’, ‘kamkaji’, ‘ghar chalne wali’, etc. No clear distinction is made between the ‘natural’/‘biological’ and the socially constructed aspects of these characteristics. This is obviously perpetuating stereotypes about the way women ‘should be’. Since this piece is from a school textbook it is likely that children end up internalising these stereotypes.

‘Saza mujhe manzoor nahin’ – This article is about a couple who have been married for two years and then the woman gets raped. The man is shown as insensitive, scared, one who does not want to listen to his wife and does not accept his own weaknesses. Rather than her trauma, he is scared that she will get pregnant and is concerned about keeping his face in society. He’s not shown to have much concern about her well being or her mental state. He even stops talking to her and wishes she would commit suicide.

‘Nari jagran’ – This piece reflects a woman’s roles, responsibilities and expected behaviour in different relationships. The article has a limiting perspective and perpetuates the existing social structures.

‘Radha ka pachtawa’ – In this article, the woman’s image is that of a helpless, dependent woman who is made to do all the work since she is non-literate. Her identity and life revolves round her husband. She is kicked out of the house when he becomes ‘lapata’ (lost). He later tries to educate her because he wants to present her in a certain way in society. The woman is portrayed in traditional stereotypical roles.

‘Yaadon ke sahare’ – In this article too the woman is shown as helpless and her life revolves round her husband. The man’s image is that of a powerful person who always stays drunk. The woman draws strength from living on memories of the days when her husband was not like that.

‘Ba aur babu’ – This article also perpetuates the stereotype that the woman (Baa – Kasturba Gandhi) should be ‘pativrata’ (devoted to her husband). She is without identity, while the man is all-powerful and ‘great’. Women invariably have to have to depend on someone for an identity – whether it is father, husband, brother or son. ‘Baa’ is shown as a ‘follower’. She is a mother, a nurse, ‘sewa mein lagi hain’ (in service) and the portrayal is such that she is shown as the one with the problems, not Gandhi. It reflects that she is the one who has problems with ‘untouchables’. There is also a hidden reference to ‘maryada purushottam ram’.

From the observations and points made by the group members the main understandings of the session may be summarised as follows:

- 1 Media presents a certain image that perpetuates existing stereotypes. Men and women are bound in certain roles and responsibilities and media contributes to the construction of masculinity and femininity around these roles, which are then

- ‘internalised’ and adopted by people who are exposed to media.
- 2 In writing a piece, it would make for effective communication if the writer paid attention to style, content, perspective and language. It is best when it is kept simple, but without simplifying the issue.
 - 3 Sometimes media uses ‘drama’ and ‘sensation’ to make a point that is extremely threatening to the status quo. For example, the story about a police officer taking up feminine identity was so threatening that the author used drama and exaggeration to emphasise his point.
 - 4 In total contrast, ‘Champa’ is written in too simple a language and the presentation is equally simple, but unfortunately the issue has also been over-simplified and the complexities were ignored.
 - 5 Visuals can also add to the ‘sensation’ of a story. To illustrate, in Gudiya’s, story the picture used is that of a ‘baraat’ – a wedding procession – which implies a celebration (return of the war hero) and totally ignores the injustice to Gudiya. Pictures and visuals used should be appropriate and sensitive.
 - 6 Another important point made by one of the group members was that it is very important to portray the real picture and then comment on it instead of just directly making representations of opposite roles and images. This can put off the reader. One of the participants quoted that in Rajasthan, in advertisements for promoting milk consumption among children, earlier there used to be a boy’s photograph. Now the campaign posters and hoardings include the picture of both a girl and a boy. This, however, merely depicts an ‘ideal’ and does not reflect the current discrimination against the girl child.
 - 7 Similarly, often we think that by making equal numbers representations it is enough to bring about change. This is merely an over-simplification of the real situation and does not make for effective writing and communication.
 - 8 Most significantly, gender does not only refer to women. In any discourse on gender it is important to talk about men and women. We do talk more of women because women’s concerns have hardly ever reached the mainstream – and they are definitely more marginalised. But we also need to be sensitive to men’s needs and understand masculinity and femininity well, not men and women.

SESSION: ‘CASTE AND MEDIA’ BY SAHELI (NIDHI, SHWETA)

Resource persons from Saheli made a presentation with a focus on caste and the politics of media. Based on a survey conducted by them among 300 journalists, they engaged with the following questions –

- 1 Who takes decisions about what to cover and how?
- 2 Who has the power to take these decisions?
- 3 What are the representations of caste?

In the discussion that ensued, one of the participants made the comment that the media had covered the anti-reservation news fairly dramatically – in ways that it stood out and was remembered by people. It was done mostly through public opinion surveys or through the coverage of events, rallies, etc. There were certainly many more representations and coverage of stories against reservation than there were for

reservation. This naturally implies that the media is biased and the opinions it showcases are also biased. Another participant said – “Anti-reservation rallies may not have been purely anti-reservation. There may have been specific demands – for the creamy layer factor, consideration of economic criteria, etc. We should look at both sides of the story.”

Caste in films

This presentation by Saheli showed how film media represents certain caste and community groups. There were three short clippings from different films, as given below:

- 1 ‘Lagaan’ – In this, there is a stereotypical representation of ‘Kachra’ as a Dalit – even the name crudely suggests his caste - as ‘untouchable’ whom the existing members did not want in the team.
- 2 ‘Sujata’ – In this, a Dalit child is brought up in an ‘upper’ caste family. She is portrayed as shy, apprehensive and homely, and not made to feel a part of the family.
- 3 ‘Setu’ – This clipping showed how a Brahmin (‘upper’ caste) girl is made fun of by some boys.

Some of the points that emerged from the subsequent group discussion are as follows –

- 1 The stereotypical portrayal of Christians and Muslims in films should also be a matter of concern.
- 2 Although the last clip showed discrimination against an ‘upper’ caste woman, it is probably not the same as the historical and unforgivable injustice against those marginalised by virtue of their ‘lower’ caste. But there is a need to show both sides of the story.
- 3 The media representations, and its impact on our values and attitudes necessitates that we become conscious about socialisation processes.
- 4 In the ‘Lagaan’ clip, it became very clear that ‘utility value’ and mutual need often helps to overcome barriers. For instance, ‘Kachra’ was useful as a spin bowler in the cricket team and the team desperately needed to win the match against the British. Hence, despite the initial resistance, they took the Dalit boy into their group.
- 5 The ‘Setu’ clip illustrated how if a Brahmin is in company where ‘lower’ castes are more in number, she may feel threatened. In a positive light, this aspect can be seen as a strategy wherein the ‘less powerful’ can sometimes draw strength from numbers.
- 6 The politics of divisiveness is very deep. There are divisions even within Dalits. And women are the most Dalit of all.
- 7 Language plays a very important role in furthering these divisions and care must be taken to avoid the inappropriate use of the caste word likes ‘Chamar’, etc.
- 8 One participant raised the question about why all pro-Dalit slogans and messages were to be seen outside public toilets.
- 9 One member said that reservation has often been misunderstood and we must be careful to avoid that. Reservation has invariably been interpreted to mean ‘exclusion from other seats’. The interpretation that people make is that - only the 33% seats reserved for women are for women; the rest are for men. This is a gross

- folly in interpretation.
- 10 One of the facilitators narrated the story about how Bhanwar Meghvanshi (a Dalit from Rajasthan) who was earlier a RSS/VHP worker did a turnabout and changed his stands after a personal humiliation. At a VHP gathering when Meghvanshi offered to feed VHP leaders at his house, they realised that he was a Dalit. They made an excuse and pushed off to eat at some other place. Since then he has left the group and now independently publishes 'Diamond India' (in Rajasthan).
 - 11 There is a need to ask ourselves how much we have changed as people in our lives. And are the changes we see around us permanent? An instance from Chhatterpur village shows how a Dalit got the permission to sit at the 'havan kund' (religious ceremony), but was eventually told to move away.
 - 12 The crucial matter of concern is - which stories are being covered in media and how? In the reservation debate, most news channels showed visuals from AIIMS that were characterised by 'upper' caste students who did 'gheraos' and took up boot polish to say – "This is what we will be doing from now onwards." How many channels showed the millions of Dalits who have never had the opportunity to attend school let alone go for higher education?
 - 13 Who is covering the story and how? How many Dalit or adivasi journalists/editors can we identify? We have only the one off case like Sushma Barai – the Dalit woman journalist who was responsible for getting Natarajan arrested. But many who want to write about it do not get the space or opportunity.
 - 14 Whose opinion is shown on TV? What data is made easily available and accessible for us?
 - 15 The problem often lies in the fact that the linkages made between qualities, skills, etc, are projected as being 'biological' differences and not socially constructed as is really the case.
 - 16 Certain images are subtly put into our heads. For instance, the 'upper' or richer is always shown as the giver and the 'lower' or poorer is always shown as the taker.
 - 17 How do we portray stereotypes in our own productions? Are we sensitive to the representations of various caste and community groups?
 - 18 If we are not sensitive and careful, don't we also add to maintaining the status quo as does the mainstream media?

School education and representation of caste - Analysis of sentences from textbooks

1 Aaj jo jati vyavastha... (from Class X Civics textbook - new curriculum)

In the discussion presented by this group, the first point that was made was that historically, work divisions were done on the basis of 'jatis' (caste). Students reading the textbook should be made to understand that it should not be so – that these categories are socially constructed with the purpose of creating divisions. And that it is still being perpetuated – it is the same today, though it has now adopted some new forms as well. Even today basic necessities like water not accessible to certain groups. The message given through this sentence is that the caste structure exists. Earlier the divisions were based on 'differential skills' of different groups – certain tasks were and are still considered 'below dignity'. Very subtly the entire power structure has been made legitimate and this is what is taught to our children.

2 *Ek Harijan basti...*

The first impression that we get on reading this sentence is that the ‘Harijan basti’ – the Dalit hamlet is separate – it is different from us. When students are given instructions to spend some time in the Dalit hamlet, the word used is ‘guzarna’ (meaning ‘to bear’) – almost as if it is an ordeal that they will have to bear – rather than simply ‘rehena’ – meaning ‘to stay’. Moreover, the impression readers get is that since it is labelled ‘abhyas’ – an exercise – it must not be a normal thing to stay in a Dalit hamlet, where clearly the poorest and most marginalised people stay.

Clearly, the text is addressing middle or upper middle class students even though it is part of the NCERT curriculum which is meant for everyone. But this then brings the following questions to mind - who is setting the curriculum? What is their mandate? We find abundant reference to Gandhi (and to Harijans) in our textbooks but hardly any mention of Periyar, Phule and Ambedkar.

Some people said that the term ‘Harijan’ – children of god – can also be objectionable to some. Some people say that by terming them thus Gandhi had acknowledged the caste system and their position within it. If they are thus called ‘children of god’, then who are the others? Why is there a distinction among people? In schools, at the point of entry into the education fold the categories are already made - SC, ST, OBC, and General. It is almost impossible to shake off these identities later on.

3 *Anusuchit jati ke saath...*

This sentence seems to indicate that discrimination against Dalits is a thing of the past. This is not true because it exists even today. Whatever the changes they are superficial.

The use of the term ‘achhut’ (or ‘untouchable’) may also be problematic for some. Some also object to the use of the word ‘tuchh’. By giving the truth a name – by labelling - are we promoting it? On the other hand, isn’t keeping quiet also a form of violence? So why shouldn’t we give it a name? Isn’t it unjust to keep people belonging to these communities out of the public domain? There are ways of naming and visibilising without insulting someone.

Today’s reality, however, is also that by making false certificates people are increasing opportunities for themselves. A shocking example is that in Manekpur the ‘safai karamcharis’ (sweepers) are Brahmins because it is a permanent and paid government job. However, the actual cleaning is done by Dalits (who probably get 5% of the payment).

The text is also speaking in ‘third person’, which means it is addressing only a certain section of society. There is some reference to the problems in accessing services – not being able to take water from the well, not being able to go to school, etc – but there is reference only to the manifestations and description of the impact. But there is no analysis or looking inward into the deep-rooted causes. There is an over-simplification and over-generalisation of all the evils in society

One of the participants raised the question - what is the purpose of mentioning all of this in textbooks? There is a clear statement made that development will be affected by caste system. But somewhere there is a focus that Dalits are responsible for the problems and not letting 'development' happen. There is no analysis of the real story behind who is responsible, why and how the caste system functions and is getting strengthened. There is no mention about how those at the top of the hierarchy are getting left out. The focus is basically on national interest, not on the interest of Dalits. The entire group felt that there doesn't seem much importance in including all of this unnecessarily in school textbooks. All of us have studied from these textbooks. We have read about the glorification of Rani Padmavati and 'jauhar', i.e. glorifying the upper caste rituals.

There is an urgent need for education to cater to the needs of people from all classes, castes and community groups. There are always questions about who is teaching? Who is setting the agenda and the curriculum? Which class, caste and community do they belong to? Do they not all belong to the 'upper' echelons of the caste hierarchy? If marginalized groups are suddenly brought to the centre of these processes, will it suddenly empower them? Even among Dalits, the most marginalised are the women. There is no space for Dalit or women's literature in the school curriculum. When school teachers were asked which struggles and movements they had heard about, none of them had heard about the women's or Dalit movements. Their knowledge of struggles was that of – fight for pension, etc. This clearly indicates how literature and text decides mindsets and attitudes in society.

Through this session, the participants were exposed to the fact that the material used in mainstream educational institutions is often biased and perpetuates the status quo and existing social structures. Interventions in this field are as significant as is the process of alternative media creation.

Day IV – 23 November 2006

LANGUAGE

The focus of the day's session was in understanding language, the politics of language, and the impact that it can have in shaping values and attitudes. The resource person for the session was Apoorvanand, who teaches in the Hindi department in Delhi University. He would use the lecture method during this session. He suggested that everyone should introduce themselves by mentioning their name and the languages that they speak.

During the course of the introduction 23 languages were identified – Hindi, English, Bangla, Gujarati, Marathi, Bundeli, Bagdi, Garasiya, Marwari, Mewari, Bhojpuri, Santhali, Arabi, Urdu, Sanskrit, Dhundhari, Rathwi, Kumaoni, Nimari, Malwi, Hadoti, Maithili and Rajaspati. The resource person brought to the notice of the group that often we do not give enough importance to certain languages. For instance, when Angoori from Sahajani Shiksha Kendra introduced her self, she said – "I speak Hindi". Then as an afterthought she said, "Should I mention that I also speak Bundeli?" The resource person

said that there is often a distinction made between 'language' and 'dialect', and languages are given more importance than dialects. Dialects are often referred to as 'dehati bhasha' and there is a connotation of it being 'separate' and 'lower'. He asked the participants to ponder on whether they thought that distinction between language and dialect was real or a politically created division.

This was followed by a discussion on what do we mean by language? The group members brought up the following definitions of 'language' -

- 1 It is a medium of expression.
- 2 It implies listening, explaining and understanding.
- 3 It involves thinking. The discussion on this point was – do we first think and then speak, or do we think in language? One response was, “We think with our minds.” One other participant said, “We usually think in the language that we have been used to since our childhood.” The group then debated on this issue - do we think in language? And do we think in the language that is most familiar?
- 4 Language a source of identity.
- 5 It is also a medium for the creation of an image.
- 6 It is a source of motivation for some.
- 7 It is a means of bringing people together by binding them with a sense of belongingness. However, this also happens only if there is sensitivity in the language and the way that it is used.
- 8 Just as language can bring people together, it can also be a medium of discrimination.

The resource person explained through the example of the freedom struggle how there was an effort to promote a single identity – that of a Hindu nation – based on a divisive strategy against the common enemy, namely 'Muslims'. With political power in the hands of those promoting this ideology, Hindi automatically spread to the south and other regions where it is not commonly spoken. Simultaneously, the ideas of 'Bharat' and 'Pakistan' were born. It is not very clear at what point in time the identity of religion emerged as the most significant one, but if we read the Congress documents of that time we will see that the language used and the politics were closely related to each other. Language forums started taking sides with politicians. Gandhi promoted Hindustani, which is a combination of Urdu and Hindi. By the 1930's it was decided that the national language would be Hindi-Hindustani. The faith of Muslims in Hindus and in the Hindu leaders collapsed at this development. They said we want a separate Urdu identity. It is interesting to note that what is today called Urdu was originally called 'Hindi', 'Hindvi', or 'Indui'. Hence, it was all about power play.

Gradually it became acceptable that only that which is written in Devnagari script should be called Hindi. Subtly, it implied that Hindi is therefore the domain of 'dev' (Hindu god) and of 'nagar' (city – not village). Songs that are promoted also promote a certain ideology. For instance, 'vande mataram' is a song from Bankim Chandra Chatterji's "Anandamath". In this novel, Muslims are not shown in a good light, but the English are. 'Durga' – the goddess - was depicted in glorification as the one responsible for the destruction of the Muslims. Hence, certain images are depicted in a certain way in literature.

Tagore refused to accept this as the national song, and with the promotion of this song its ideology, gradually the Muslims began to feel threatened. And it is due to this language that the demand for Pakistan gained popularity. What is ironical is that within 24 years there was a demand for a free nation in the name of language – Bangla – not religion as it was in 1947, and the Bangladesh war ensued. But in Mujibur Reheman's time the politics and the identity of religion again took over.

The resource person pointed out to the fact that there are numerous instances of language being the 'common factor' that brings people together rather than divide them. He narrated a story about an Indian friend who fell in love with a Bangladeshi and what brought them together was their language – English; not their native languages, nor their religion. He further pointed out that there is a lot that is culturally common between Indians and Bangladeshis. Both touch the feet of their elders. Qazi Nazrul Islam, a Muslim, used to sing 'Shama sangeet' – in glory of Kali, a Hindu goddess. There were several opportunities for finding common ground.

The resource person also drew the attention of the group to the fact that one of the functions of language is communication – speaking, listening, and understanding each other. While listening it is also important to be able to transform. Interpretation of language plays an important role in communication. It is necessary that not only one point of view gets heard and that all 'parties' get a voice in any discourse. In fact, this raised the question about why are we working with different people – to change people's ideas, situation, improve standard of living, give them information, to mobilise them? Are we presuming that their current situation is not the best situation? Whatever change we bring we should try not to impose. In fact, effective communication is achieved by presenting different sets of ideas and the analysis skills to look at them critically. We are mere facilitators to help people; we cannot impose ideas and change normally takes a lot more time and more discussions. The use of language and of folk media is critical. Music – the tone, music, beats, words – is associated with people's lives so they like it much more than serious songs – e.g. - Nachari (of Mithila), Baul (of Bengal), etc.

Apoorvanand pointed out that even if the language is changed across cultures, the tone, music, and beats are very important. That is why in working with communities, sometimes religious and popular music is what works best. Folk music does not stay permanent in a particular form; it is dynamic. For instance, the emergence of Rabindra Sangeet in Bengal was in reaction to certain kinds of music and the effort was towards generating equality through music; but the purists of Bengal today do not allow any change in it and Rabindra Sangeet is considered the forte of a few people only.

It is often said that Gandhi was successful because he spoke the people's language. Although he used songs, words, images, etc, that some people thought were 'right-wing' there was so much acceptance among the communities. He used language very effectively. In the Gandhi Ashram publication 'Bhajanawali' there are numerous prayers. Reading numerous prayers exposes readers to numerous languages and therefore, multiple identities. It's all about availability and accessibility to 'choices'.

The resource person also made the group ponder on the dynamism of language. He said that we add our values, desires and viewpoint to every image. This is what language also does. Every generation adds new words, new perspectives, new thoughts, etc, to an

existing language.

The synthesis of the word used for Dalits over a period of time illustrates this point very clearly. Jyotiba Phule spoke of education for the 'ati-Shudra' and Premchand, Mahadevi Varma, etc, used the word 'chamar'. Use of such language may be insulting for the marginalised community. Gandhi changed the language and made a political statement by referring to the Dalits as Harijan – 'Hari' refers to 'god' but 'jan' refers to the fact that 'all are equal'. Ambedkar advocated that social justice is based on law. He and Gandhi used law – an English weapon – in order to fight the English. Ambedkar renamed the Harijans as 'Dalit'. Dalit is a political word that indicates the real situation – it has the connotation of oppression as well as the pride of a separate identity - unlike Harijan, which is still accepting the caste structure and is ignoring the reality. Thus, we see the movement in the use of language in Shudra → Harijan → Dalit, depending on the politics of language at different points of time.

Apoorvanand continued that by the repetition of language, or certain aspects of it, we can strengthen beliefs and values by internalising them. Moreover, language need not always have sound; it could communicate a lot through gestures, 'andaaz', style, and physical appearance. It is probably true that unless we internalise our values it does not translate into action and practice. And as we may use language to convey positive messages, sometimes language divides as much as it seals and perpetuates stereotypes. Control and ownership over resources also determines language and power, as is often the case with the politics between the vernacular and the mainstream languages.

He also illustrated how children and women sometimes use play and playful language so that it is not understood by others. Through this playful exercise they 'create their own language' that is away from and not understood by the power structures of the world. Sometimes silences also speak volumes, which may or may not be understood and accepted by society. Children, women, adivasis and other marginalised groups often keep quiet – it could be an indication that they do not want 'outsiders' to enter their world – and pollute it. If you enter you will exploit them. Silence means protest; silence also means high levels of comfort of living with oneself. Hence, silence or play language helps to create a different world and of different media – and hence, give a sense of 'security' and independence. Thus, language perpetuates power relations. The fact that power and language are closely related to each other is also reflected in that the abusive language is usually insulting for women. Another example of it is how gendered language can perpetuate patriarchal relations.

The resource person again emphasised on the importance of understanding language in varying cultural contexts. For instance, among the Great Andamanese, people use different words for 'my eye', 'your eye', 'his/her eye', while in most other languages there is only one word. In Hindi for example it is much simpler and there is only one word for 'eye'.

The resource person also spoke about language and literacy. In the discussion, he said that literacy is important, but functional literacy and education is more important. For instance, a person who drives an auto rickshaw may be illiterate but is probably educated in how the engine works, how to repair the vehicle, etc. Besides education and literacy,

pictures, gestures, symbols and emotions also play an important role.

Use of words qualifying femininity and masculinity in language are indicative of the subtle references to power and gender relations. For instance, in Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's poem she speaks of the valiant 'Jhansi ki rani', and uses the word 'mardani' (man-like) to describe her patriotism. Writers like Premchand and Agyaya used names to depict political relations. The story aptly titled 'Roz' describes the love that has dried up because life is so monotonous and there is so much drudgery.

Apoorvanand also pointed out to the fact that stories of fairies and ghosts have almost disappeared from our lives. He said that the positive thing about dreaming is that it helps you hope, and it paves the way for a life of creativity and imagination. Some folk tales that still exist illustrate how the creativity exists in language. An example is that of the oral history of Santhals. According to them, the earth was made by an earthworm; yet other tales say that a tortoise carries the shell on its back, which is the earth. In the words of the resource person, science needs imagination – whether it is a tribal or it is a 'scientist' who is constructing it. Within folk culture, there is a lot in the cultural expression that talks about history, identity and language.

The stories from the Arabian nights were told in such a way that every night there would be an incomplete tale. This leaves so much to the imagination of the reader. Good stories should have open-ended story lines that would leave a lot open to the imagination of the reader. What is happening today is that lot of these stories are being removed from the school curriculum and they are being made commodities that are put on television, in advertising and in the market. If we forget all this we are limiting our lives and opportunities. And even social change makers should keep in mind these aspects while producing material.

The resource person brought to everyone's notice how there is a power play among languages. He said that of the 23 languages that had been mentioned in this room Hindi has emerged as the most powerful because everyone is speaking in this language. Further, the fact that Angoori spoke of Bundeli as an afterthought shows how 'less powerful' languages face 'inhibition' in public forums where they may be considered 'indecent', and 'dehati' in comparison with a 'mainstream' language. The group members also contributed that indeed even in the field people from 'marginalised' communities do not speak openly in public spaces because they feel inhibited. Do limited physical region, limited numbers, lack of acceptability and lack of political strength affect the power of a language?

Even a look at the VIII Schedule will give us an idea that the number of languages recognised in the Constitution has increased, but it is languages like Santhali, Bodo and Nepali that have got acceptance – all because of political reasons. Thus, it seems that the power of languages changes over time – the best example being that of 'Hindi' being recognised as 'Urdu', and the Devanagari script being the identity for the 'Hindi' language. Before the 1940s there were a lot of Hindu writers in Urdu, but not after the 1940s. Similarly, as Bawa Karant (a Hindi 'pracharak') said - the division of states in India is largely based on the identity of language. After Partition, the English language took over its official status in order to prevent language based conflicts from emerging.

Ironically, in Tamil Nadu, the majority of the people learn Hindi but it is not a politically accepted language. The English model of education gained popularity and provided the common ground where voices spoke against discrimination on the basis of caste, class, etc. The teachers however all belonged to the Brahmin community and the fears of power relations remaining status quo were realised. These changes take place due to the social, historical and economic aspects in politics. Hindi is today considered the national language because of the views propagated by the polity. There is no Constitutional basis for this belief.

The other important aspect in the politics of language is the script. The question is – is it important for a language to have a script to be recognised? Is it possible for a single language to be written in different scripts? Is it possible to write numerous languages in a single script?

In the group discussion that followed, the group members pointed out to the following points as significant things that stayed in their memory.

- 1 A concern was raised about how to make language practical and effective. It is possible that slogan shouting sometimes makes the point more crisply, but it does not necessarily do what it is supposed to do. In actual activism we need to speak and think deeper; and look at analysis and reflection in a broader sense.
- 2 It is probably necessary to draw the attention of people to folk songs, theatre and culture as the medium through which language can be effectively used for communication.
- 3 Available literature helps to convey some messages beautifully. An example is that of Kabir's life story and his works. On his death, Hindus and Muslims both fought over which cultural rites should be conducted for his dead body - should he be buried or cremated? Finally when the people removed the shroud, they found no body, only flowers.
- 4 Public messages perpetuate power relations very subtly. An advertisement popularising adoption showed Lord Krishna's picture and the slogan said – "If you can't be Devaki, be Yashoda." This subtly implies two things – one, adopt a boy child; and two, adopt not for the joy of it but only when you are in a situation of 'inadequacy'.
- 5 Our history books often tell the story of 'civilising the uncivilised'. In other words, the message given out is that adivasis, children, Dalits, women and other marginalised groups need to be 'civilised'.
- 6 There was some debate on whether language is learnt or inherent. By the time a child is 3-5 years, she already has a vocabulary of 3000-5000 words. She also knows by now how to speak to different people and what is 'true' and what is 'false'. Exactly when, how and where does this maturity set in?
- 7 School and education systems greatly add to the values that children pick up through language politics. For instance, speaking in a certain language, predominance of a particular culture, etc, can be the factor determining the values that children pick up.
- 8 When children face discrimination what helps them is their 'cultural capital', and hence, people belonging to different caste, class, gender and religious groups have different experiences.

- 9 Based on our experiences and work, we can say that the less 'pure' a language is the more beautiful and richer it is.
- 10 Textbooks often give rise to a 'dead' language – they promote the 'pure' rather than the 'beautiful'.
- 11 People are also reinforced in certain ways that makes them internalise certain values. For example, when a woman wrote her leave application from office in Bundeli instead of in Hindi she was reprimanded.
- 12 It is the role of the teacher and facilitator to stop from creating these barriers and to introduce students to the nuances of different languages and cultures. An interesting illustration with regard to the word 'khulasa'. While the Urdu language understands it as 'brief' in Hindi it means 'detailed' – which have diametrically opposite meanings.
- 13 Grammar is the mere 'making meaning' out of the language construction that society makes.
- 14 We always seek areas that are new and difficult for us. We are born into communities, we create our own, and die in yet another. We are constantly engaged in translation and interpretation. This quality differentiates humans from animals. And all of us have amazing capacity for learning new languages.
- 15 Grassroots experience shows us how the realities of people are sometimes distant from our curricula. An example is from the literacy work carried out at the Sahajani Shiksha Kendra. As part of the curriculum, the first letters introduced through the literacy material is 'namak' (salt). But the women immediately responded by saying that their word for salt in Bundeli is 'non'.
- 16 Sometimes people have a tough time accepting their own language, words, things, and objects of their own language. For instance, in the feedback on Jani Patrika the response of government officials, vis-à-vis the language was very negative.
- 17 From the field there is always a concern – which local language to use? One should always see the consensus of the people that we work with.
- 18 In order to work towards making interventions in the field of education, there is a need to work both ways – mainstream our own voice, as well as get a voice in the mainstream. There could be a link forged between formal institutions and our work. It is not an or/else situation. There can be multiple windows.

After that the participants were divided into four groups and given four sets of articles to read. Group 1 was given Bhaktin, Group 2 – Chini Feriwallah and Hansi, Group 3 was given Thakuri Baba and Group 4 was given Gaaliyan and Prakatthan, Bhasha, Boli and Shoshan to read. These articles would be discussed the next day.

Day V - 24 November 2006

Presentations of alternative models of rural women and local media

In this session, there were two presentations of successful models of women producing material locally – one, 'Ujaas' from Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS, Gujarat) and the other from 'Khabar Lahariya' (Chitrakoot, UP). The purpose of these presentations was to give the participants an idea about the experience of women in designing and working on alternative models for producing materials locally. The attempt

was to give the group an idea about the challenges, successes and failures, and learnings from these models, so that it may provide guidelines to those who want to produce materials in the future.

'Khabar Lahariya' (KL) – by the KL team

The presentation was made by Meera of the KL team. She began the presentation with a background of Chitrakoot district and of KL. She said Chitrakoot has a population of about 8 ½ lakhs. It is a difficult and dangerous area because the villages are interior, terrain is difficult and the area is inhabited by dacoits. KL was initiated here in 2002. It is a newspaper that is written by women for the people, in Bundeli. The newspaper is owned and produced by Dalit and adivasi (Kol) women. The funding is channelised through Nirantar. It is printed in a big font because neo-literate and semi-literate women in rural areas are the main readers of KL.

Meera then spoke about the evolution of KL to its present form. Within two months of its initiation, KL moved from being a two-page to eight-page newspaper. It was initially a monthly publication but demand soon made it a fortnightly publication. Today, 3000 copies of KL are produced from Allahabad and a contribution of Rs.2 is taken from the people reading it. The newspaper has a readership in Chitrakoot, Banda, Kausambi and Allahabad. Recently, a Banda edition has also been initiated.

A readership survey conducted in 2004 revealed that the readership of KL is constituted by 30% women, 63% men and 44% Dalits. In terms of the various sections of the paper, Taza Khabar is preferred by 18% people, Desh Videsh by 25%, Panchayat by 24%, Kahani by 30% and Mahila by 24% people.

KL has contributed to strengthening the literacy skills of the women. People have been able to know about events near and around them, about happenings in the world, have influenced transfers of erring officials (an example is that of a bank manager), influenced governance structures, etc. KL is also a member of one 'Grameen Patrakar Association', i.e. a local union of journalists.

KL began with printing women's news and events. Gradually, the features moved to broader areas of analysis and politics. The KL team meets twice a month, during which they plan their field activities as well as the three-day workshop for writing KL. The newspaper is distributed by hand.

The other point of discussion was with regard to the response that the journalists get in the field. According to the KL team, no journalist from the mainstream papers ever goes to the villages. In fact, they often ask the KL team for news and stories. The KL team said that they have often investigated false stories that were printed in mainstream media and tried to question why issues that are more relevant to people are not written about, and why the focus is always on sensationalising news.

Planning for the next day's field visit

During this session, the group was divided into smaller five units and were told which villages they would visit the next day. Each group was given a background of the issue they were to investigate, given guidelines for questioning, directions about whom to speak to, and a reminder for being conscious and sensitive to the issues and the people.

Day VI - 25 November 2006

The five groups were to spend the morning investigating the stories that they had been assigned the previous day. Before they left, the groups were informed that when they returned, each of the groups was to collectively write a report based on the issue covered during the field visit, and make a presentation thereafter. Some of the guidelines and issues to keep in mind were as follows, i.e. for whom to write, in what form (case study, news features, etc), to have a word limit of 300 words, to give it a title, to ensure that the perspective is clear and that the language is simple.

Group 1 – 'Ration card mile kisko?'

Group 2 – 'Bacchan ke kour khaye koi aur'

Group 3 – 'Khel khel mein mel'

Group 4 – 'Kahan hogi sunwai'

Group 5 – 'Chunawi ladai mein bhataкта vikas'

Day VII - 26 November 2006

In the morning everyone finalised their write-ups based on the feedback that they had got, Then each of the groups made their final presentation to the larger group.

On the whole the participants agreed that in writing the pieces collectively, in sharing it with everyone and in rewriting based on the feedback, they felt that the quality of the article was much better than it would have been if it was an individual or one-time effort. To sum up, the facilitators helped the group members to remember the following points in material production.

- 1 Language should be kept simple. We can simplify the language but not the issue.
- 2 There should be some chronology.
- 3 The focus, objective and perspective of the article should be made clear – preferably at the beginning of the article.
- 4 The writing should not perpetuate stereotypes. Used of words to portray 'jati' and 'gender' images should be done carefully.
- 5 The article should be based on facts.
- 6 The questions 'when', 'why', 'where', 'who', 'how', 'what', 'for whom', etc, should be made clear in the beginning – especially in the case of a newspaper report.
- 7 The title should be related to the story.
- 8 The ending should be appropriate and not abrupt.
- 9 There should be appropriate links between the paragraphs.
- 10 Use of pictures, figures, tables and graphs should be done appropriately.

- 11 The context should preferably move from the specific to the general, and unnecessary generalisations should not be made.
- 12 Comparative writing can be very effective. Showing contrasts between facts and opinions can help to illustrate a point very effectively.
- 13 It is necessary to always identify the source of data that is being quoted.
- 14 Emphasis can also help to determine perspective.
- 15 The article is best written in small sentences.
- 16 Punctuation should be appropriately and adequately used.
- 17 Bringing in all points of view and arguments of all parties gives the writing and writer credibility.
- 18 The title and the first paragraph should raise the curiosity of the reader.
- 19 Word limit is important keeping in mind the readership. In the context of neo-literates the word limit should never exceed 250.
- 20 The style of writing should be effective and appropriate for the issue as well as the readership.
- 21 It is always best to jot down the points in a bulleted form and then begin writing the piece.

The final session involved the planning of the project that the participants are expected to do during the phase between the two courses of the training. This planning was done organisation-wise. The criteria on the basis of which the project is to be planned are as follows – (See Annexure for detailed presentations on the projects)

- Objective of the project
- Which is the target group?
- What will be the process?
- What are the expectations from Nirantar?
- What is the expected outcome, output?

Vikas Sansthan

The participants from this organisation said that their organisation is planning to start a periodical through which they will ‘highlight the problems of the poor’ and ‘help people resolve’ these problems. They decided that their target group would include Dalit neo-literates, children, women and adolescents. The purpose of the periodical would be for guidance on issues related to education, health and human rights. They would have different pages for different target groups.

Sahajani Shiksha Kendra

Their plan was to use the newly learnt knowledge, concepts and skills in order to make the Jani Patrika a richer and more widely circulating newspaper.

Sahaj Shishu Milaap

This group said that they already produce a periodical. Now they want to additionally include current affairs in the content of the periodical. The readers would be adolescent girls and boys. The organisation would invite opinions and articles from the readers.

Muskaan

The participants from this organisation said that in the periodical that they are already producing, they plan to divide the sections as per the readership. They also plan to modify the language as per readership.

Doosra Dashak

They plan to use this opportunity for a project for follow up of their literacy camps and literacy activities.

They would use materials prepared by themselves as well as by the children to make the project. They did mention, however, their real interest and expectation of help from Nirantar would be in preparing alternative curriculum for their work on literacy.

Mahila Janadhikar Samiti

Participants from this organisation in Rajasthan said that they would continue the ongoing process that had been started by their colleagues who had participated in the materials production course the previous year.

Sewa Mandir

The representative from this organisation said that she plans to begin the process of material production with the local groups that she works with and support them to produce materials for dissemination.

Grameen Development Society

GDS plans to do a project to study what material is available, what is the content, and what is the nature of documentation, and to analyse the existing HIV/AIDS material. This kind of material is normally in an imperative tone. The representative from GDS said that she would like to undertake a project to analyse these materials and to begin the process of rewriting or recreating newer, more sensitive materials.

Disha

Their project plan is to produce a quarterly periodical. And the focus of this periodical would be the issue of violence against women.

Lokmitra

Their plan is to produce booklets for rural readers.

Khabar Lahariya

Banda edition of Khabar Lahariya in the local language used in Banda district. A list of words used would be developed and a shabd kosh of language developed on the basis of this.

Vanangana

They want to use the project opportunity to work on documenting stories, autobiographies, biographies, and case studies arising from their daily work.

Mahila Chetna Manch

The participant from this organisation said that she would undertake a project of producing material in the local adivasi language. She would also take the help of resources and people like Eklavya in Bhopal in the creation of appropriate and effective materials for neo-literates.

Mahila Samakhya Bihar

This group plans to use their project opportunity to produce materials that they hope would serve as a tool for mobilising communities. When they presented, the feedback was that the expectation of mobilising and strengthening a sangathan from a project like this was being too ambitious and unrealistic.

The facilitator then spelt out the subsequent course of action for all participants. She said that the next action plan for all the partners would be – sharing the project design with their senior colleagues, spending time on the project, finalising the project by 15 December 2006, sending update by 15 January 2007, and finalising the project by 20 February 2007. The organisers decided to start an e-group through which all of them can keep in touch.