

Punarchith

Annual Report: April 2013 – March 2014

Where are we headed? What impact will we have? How will we overcome multiple challenges? How can we sustain some of the positive interactions? These are only some of the questions that we face as we turn into the fourth year of our work. The past year has been mixed. Some programs have been successful, a few discontinued. Amidst our anxiety, there have been positive strokes. As we observe and try to understand the lives of the youth and the society around us, we continue to be baffled and think of ways in which our alternative learning program can address several issues. Many of the local youth do not seem to be interested in agriculture or ecological issues or in alternative learning. The movement outward or towards the cities seems to have intensified.

The spread and hold of popular culture— visible in the dressing styles of youth and in their aspirations— becomes more evident. Yet, there are some small but perceptible positive impacts. Post our first 'Integrated Learning Program' some of the youth have reclaimed their land and taken to agriculture, we have received requests from other groups to assist with training, and some of the adults seem to trust us.

Village elders visit us and appreciate our work. And, knowledgeable resource persons lend their expertise to be part of this endeavor. So, we continue our work in initiating this alternative learning program for rural youth and to 're-think' (Punarchith) the many received ideas and knowledge that we ourselves have been schooled and socialized into.

ACTIVITIES

HOME GARDEN PROGRAMME IN TWO HAMLETS IN THE PUNANJUR BELT



Sunita Rao and Manorama Joshi of Vanastree visited the hamlet and held a demonstration session with some of the women there. Based on this sharing session, some of the women grew large quantities of gourds from the seeds that we had given them. Women from the Veeraiyannapura village also requested training and we conducted one session for them and also followed up with this in the village. However, they were expecting immediate monetary and material support from us and they did not continue the training.

The Home Garden Program, initiated with Sunita Rao/Vanastree's inputs, was continued in two hamlets, Doddmooddahalli and Punanjur. More women joined the group in Doddmooddahalli and they had a successful growing season. The most popular seeds were brinjals, ladies finger, and beans. We were pleased to see that the women from the group had stopped using pesticides and were also able to exchange seeds among themselves. In addition, some of them had made efforts to utilize kitchen and bath water to have good kitchen gardens. The group in Punanjur was led by Indrani, one of the learners from our 'Integrated Learning Course'. She not only had her own kitchen garden but she also shared seeds with others.

DEMONSTRATION PLOT AT PUNARCHITH'S OFFICE:

The small plot (about quarter of an acre in total) was fully cleared of plastic and other debris and utilized to grow a good vegetable garden. With a good monsoon that started in August, we were able to cultivate a range of vegetables and by end of December 2013 we had nearly seventy odd varieties of vegetables, flowers and fruits. This time we also introduced four of the local yams varieties but only two of them grew well. A good crop of black sesame also resulted in providing substantial pollen for our honey boxes that yielded nearly three kgs of honey. Most of the seeds were stored for future use.

TRAINING SUPPORT TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS

ORIENTATION PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH:

Based on requests we conducted orientation programs for youth selected by the Association for People with Disabilities (APD) and the Terre de Homme (Tdh)'s Youth Network. The workshops for APD focused on enabling disabled youth from Chamarajanagar district to understand their needs and also prepare them to join the APD course in Bangalore. One module of five days was held between 9th to 13th, May 2013 in Gundlupet and forty-two youth attended the program. We were moved by the enthusiasm and interest shown by the youth and realized that we also needed to factor in issues of disabilities into our program. A three-day module was conducted at Bailur between June 11th and 13th, 2013 for another set of youth and thirty youth attended the program. The overall feedback from these youth was positive and we made friends with many of them. Some of them did enroll to go to Bangalore and be trained at APD.



At Gundlupet



At Hanur

Our interaction with youth (about 120) from the Terre de Homme network was mixed. The sessions were held in Davangere (August 23rd and 24th 2013) in a large hall and we found it difficult to manage such a large group. While they did participate in many of the activities, we found that the boys had particularly strong Hindutva and patriarchal attitudes. This also indicated to us the need to engage with youth who have been exposed to fundamentalist orientations and for whom critical and alternative ideas are forms of threats.

YUVA CHINTANA: COURSE FOR YOUTH

in Chamarajnagar town (in collaboration with Spoorthi). Based on a request by members of Spoorthi, a voluntary organisation in Chamarajnagar town, we designed and implemented a short orientation program. Conducted over five Sundays, the module covered the topics of youth and self-hood; history of Chamarajnagar; understanding public issues; communications; and introduced basic theatre activities as a mode of self-actualization. As the exams approached, the students found it difficult to attend the classes and we decided to discontinue the course.

In addition to these trainings, we were also approached by a group of Soliga youth from the Hanur belt. We held discussions with them over the period of January to March and plans are to further engage with them in the coming year.

SATURDAY PROGRAMME FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN

Since school children were dropping in casually, we decided to have a formal program on Saturday mornings for them. It started with a group of five boys coming in and then later about 14-16 of them came in regularly. They read books, played with some of the teaching learning materials, made paper mache masks and clay items and also started practicing for a play, 'A Ration Shop in the Jungle', adapted from a story and developed by our team member, Rajappa. When we integrated girls into the program and for the drama practice, the boys objected to giving attention to the girls. Most of the boys discontinued and the play practice was not completed. This experience reinforced our observations about the strong anti-girl attitudes among the Lambani community and the need for us to address this at some level.



RESEARCH

Research on Lease Agriculture and its Impact. Since we had observed the extent to which lease agriculture had spread in the Punanjur belt, we decided to conduct a study about this and the Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network, Hyderabad, offered us financial support. We conducted an in depth study of Banawadi hamlet (land ownership and use) and the agricultural trends in the area. Our study indicated the growing land loss that the Soligas are experiencing and the intensification of ecological degradation in the area. We had a sharing session with the findings of the study with the residents of Banawadi.

P.Veerabhadranaika, R. Rajappa, and A.R.Vasavi conducted the field study. Abhisheka, an artist, assisted the team in developing charts and posters for the session in which the findings were shared with members of Banawadi hamlet. The final case study was submitted to the RRA network in Hyderabad and the original case study in Kannada will be retained to share with other groups in the district.

COUNTER CONSERVATION?

The research on lease agriculture and the present status of Soligas in the rehabilitated hamlets indicated to us the failure of mainstream forest conservation programs. Although the Soligas have been displaced since 1974 from the BR Temple sanctuary and there is now talk of further cordoning the area to implement the national Tiger Project, the forest continues to be degraded and the lives of the Soligas remain dismal. Rehabilitating them on the fringes of the forest and expecting them to become agriculturists also seems a futile project. The promotion of chemical-based agriculture, the social distancing from the forest, and the overall regimes of illegalities (poaching, illicit liquor brewing, corrupt administration etc) in the area consolidate to further degrade the forest and its original inhabitants.

- P. Veerbhadranaika continued to work on his manuscript on Adivasis and education and to get it ready for publication. He also developed a detailed report in Kannada on the home garden program. During the year, he also made presentations at the following forums: 1. Sharing of home gardening experiences with the Mysore Home Gardeners Network at Mysore; (2) Discussion on teaching-learning methods with the V-Lead Group, Mysore (3) Presentation on Adivasis in Chamarajnagar district; meeting held at Deenabhandu (4) Participation in a meeting on inequalities held at Mysore (5) Presentation on lease agriculture at the meeting on local knowledge conducted by the Karnataka Folklore University and held in Belgaum (6) Participation and presentation on the state of Ashramshalas for a meeting called by ActionAid.
- A.R. Vasavi continued to work on her manuscript on 'Four Emblematic Figures and the Making of a 'New India' as part of her fellowship from the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. She also completed some key essays which have been published. These include: 'Debt and Its Social Entrapments', "Government Brahman: Caste, Education and the Reproduction of Inequalities", and "School Differentiation: Pluralism or Separatism?". She also lectured at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and National University for Education and Planning (New Delhi); Centre for Multidisciplinary Research (Dharwad); and Christ University (Bangalore).
- Sunita Rao kept up with her agro ecological work at Vanastree (www.vanastree.org) in Sirsi. She coordinated several camps for school and college students. In December 2013 she attended a conference called 'Cultivating Futures' in Heidelberg University and presented a paper. From January to April, 2014 Sunita taught a food garden course in Kuvempu University to graduate students and set up a curriculum for them. Visits to Punarchith and inputs for the food garden continued. She also published a couple of articles for children in Deccan Herald.
- R. Rajappa, trained in performance arts at Sanehalli, joined PUNARCHITH as a team member in June 2013. In addition to directing plays and the singing sessions at PUNARCHITH's programs, he has been providing support to various external agencies and groups for their performance and cultural programs. He is also working on getting a master's degree in sociology from the Karnataka Open University, Mysore.
- INFOSYS Award: A.R. Vasavi was awarded the Infosys Award for Social Sciences for the year 2013 from the Infosys Science Foundation, Bengaluru. She was one among seven laureates from various disciplines. Apart from a citation and a gold medal, a sum of Rs. fifty five lakhs was part of the award. The sum has been donated to PUNARCHITH and part of this amount was used to purchase the land at Putanpura village. CNN-IBN also made a short film on PUNARCHITH which was aired in February. Vasavi, along with the other six awardees, received the award from Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, on February 8th 2014 at a ceremony held in Bengaluru.



Harvesting ginger



Pesticides from one field



Sharing the findings in Banawadi



Cabbage cultivation in a leased field

Diagrammatic representation of the landscape



FOLLOW-UP ON LEARNERS FROM THE FIRST CERTIFICATE COURSE

In an effort to provide continued support to the eight youth who had enrolled in the certificate course, we initiated periodic discussions and review with them. Devraj continued to work on his land and was successful in getting about eleven quintals of ragi (finger millet) from his 1.2 acres of dry land. He used the money to release another two acres of land that his late parents had mortgaged. He also continued to work on a part-time basis at PUNARCHITH and engaged in preparations to take the exams for the Tenth standard (which he successfully completed). Guruswamy continued with his fishing activities but was unable to undertake cultivation as his parents had leased out their land. Drawing on his training in apiary maintenance, Guruswamy developed not only his own box (given to him during the training) but is now also looking after six other bee boxes that other residents from his hamlet have invested in. Mahesh was under pressure from his parents to contribute to the household economy and his uncle got him a job in a resort in the district. He worked as a bearer and general helper for a few months and has now returned to the village indicating that he would like to undertake farming. Mahendra left to join a factory in Mysore district and is able to send home a small sum to support his family. Indrani has now emerged as a local leader and catalyst in the Punanjur village and is now the driving

force behind the home garden activities there. Shobha is also keen on continuing to develop a home garden but has limited land and facilities. Mallamma and Rajamma were keen on returning to college and to pursue nursing careers but their families did not support them. Rajamma went to Mysore to join a plastic factory but her parents recalled her as they were not comfortable with the living arrangements there. Mallamma was chosen to act as a voluntary teacher for an organization and she conducts basic learning classes for young children in Banawadi hamlet.

Devraj on his land



OTHER ACTIVITIES

☐ Land for Punarchith's campus:

After nearly four years of searching, we finally located what seems like an ideal piece of plot for our future campus. The site consists of 6.2 acres of dry land on a small hillock near the village of Putanpura, and is about 14 kms away from Chamarajnagar town and has the BR Hills range for a backdrop. Although we had a hydrologist and a water diviner check for possible water sources, there is no guarantee of accessing water. We will have to take the risk and see how best to develop a sustainable campus. Dr. Prakash Bhat of SCOPE, Dharwad, visited the land site and discussed possibilities with us. We have applied to the government for permission to purchase the land under the Trust's name and the bureaucracy seems to be taking its time over this.

☐ Search for new office and resource centre space:

Since we purchased the land at Puttanpura, we have now started to look for a new rented office cum resource centre. We are keen on being close to Putanpura village but are unable to locate something that can be accessed easily by youth from the area.

☐ Preparation of teaching-learning materials for the new 'Integrated learning' Course.

Since we have decided to launch a new cycle of the course, we have started preparations for the course. Identifying themes, topics, resource persons and reading materials, developing relevant pedagogies, and also putting the word out about the course to different rural youth organizations has been time consuming. Although there are materials for agriculture, ecology, and civic issues in Kannada, there is inadequate literature in social science issues. We have started collecting and compiling writings from various journals, magazines and newspaper articles. In addition, the materials developed by PUNARCHITH for the course may come in handy for teaching programs run by other groups and organizations.

□ Initiative for Improvement of Ashramshalas in Karnataka:

A request from the members of the forum for Karnataka tribals and representatives from Action Aid, Karnataka, requested us to join them in developing a platform for improving education among Adivasis. Badri and Vasavi held discussions with them in Mysore and also presented short notes on the previous work on educational issues among Adivasis. Copies of our earlier reports on learning and the state of Ashramshalas in Chamarajnagar and the report on 'The Education Question from the Perspectives of Adivasis' was also shared with them.

□ External Review of Punarchith:

Since we completed three years (in the field), we decided to have an external review of our work. Balachandran, a former IT professional, who now runs an organic food outlet in Mysore and is a keen observer of organizations, consented to do the review. He spent a day with us in the field and then submitted a report. He was very appreciative of the 'rooted and organic' character of the organization and advised us to develop better rural-urban linkages for future work. A copy of the review report is available for those who may be interested.

□ Lecture and Discussion Meeting on 'Community Learning Movement':

On December 22nd, 2013, we organized a meeting in Bangalore on 'Community Learning Movement'. The key speaker was Shri Dileep Kamat, a well-known unionist and social thinker. Shri Kamat spoke about the complex times in which we live and the challenges in addressing issues of inequality and injustice. Going beyond either project-based work or top-down developmentalism, Kamat pointed out that the community learning movement had the potential to enable disadvantaged people address multiple structural issues. The meeting was well-attended and we also wondered how we could take this discussion further, especially in our own work.

□ Monthly Discussion session for Students from Mysore Government Arts and Science Colleges:

Based on a request, seven students from the Government Arts and Science College, Mysore, decided to visit us once a month and to engage in discussions. We held the first meeting in November 2013 and continued the sessions until February 2014. Some of the issues that were discussed were consumerism, contemporary films, understanding society etc. Suhasini Koulagi, one of the students, completed a translation of a section of C.W. Mills' essay on sociology.

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