

***The Troubled Atmosphere:
Violence and Various Manifestations***



A Workshop Report

Mrinal Gore Interactive Centre for Social Justice and Peace in South Asia

In collaboration with

Dr. Rammanohar Lohiya Unnati Mandal, Nagpur

Bhartiya Gramin Adivasi Vikas Sanstha, Nagpur

Ruikar Institute of Labour and Socio-Cultural Studies, Nagpur

Pragati Sanstha, Nagpur

Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi, Gadchiroli

Prakruti, Nagpur

Vidarbha Molkarin Sanghatan, Nagpur

Nagpur Zila Sarvodaya Mandal, Nagpur

Sarvodaya Ashram, Nagpur

Organised a Workshop on

“The Troubled Atmosphere:
Violence and Various Manifestations”

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Introduction and Context

Mrinal Tai was one of the veteran social activists of the 20th century. She worked on specific issues and strived for the upliftment of the deprived classes. Throughout her life she always had the dignity of human being at the forefront. Being a staunch feminist, she took great efforts to not only build self-respect and independence in women but also ensure their meaningful participation in public life. Her work was not merely limited to women. Fondly known as the paniwalibai of Mumbai, she shared a remarkable bond with people. Therefore in a fitting tribute to her memory and to carry forward her work the Mrinal Gore Interactive Centre was founded. Her vision was to focus not only on daily issues but to go on to look at the larger human landscape.

There has been an increasing need to look at the day to day problems through the South Asian lens. With a common colonial past and third world experiences, each nation is trying to create its own identity on the world stage. However, the thought process in South Asia has so far been American or Euro-centric; however it is the Asian perspective that is imperative while dealing with developmental issues. Some of the intrinsic difficulties of this region include fractured modernity, searching for new meanings and the onslaught of globalization. Hence it is essential that South Asian countries find their own perspective and further form a collective perspective based on the cultural specificities and daily problems that are unique to this region. It is vital that neighbouring countries share their approach and thought process regarding various hurdles they face.



With the aim of creating a platform for the interaction of various representatives from this region, the **‘Mrinal Gore Interactive Centre for Social Justice and Peace in South Asia’ (MGIC)** was established. The philosophy of the Centre is to connect with people, groups, and communities to illuminate socio-economic problems and actual human experiences

The Centre was successfully launched with a Conference on the theme **“Violence: A Human and Political Predicament”** with a South Asian perspective in December 2014 along with Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS).

The Centre has decided to work on the theme of **“South Asian Masculinity”** and within that decided to hold a series of workshops in India and South Asia. The first workshop in this series was on **‘Crimes in the name of Honour’** held in June in Pune exploring the issues of violence, patriarchy and masculinity, globalisation and fractured modernity.

The second workshop was held in November/December in Jaipur on **‘Emerging Identities, Increasing Controls and Violence Against Women: Examining Perspectives from Western and North Western India.’** The Centre firmly believes that the human predicament is of utmost importance and therefore there is no ghettoization of women’s issues. The focus is to develop new ideas, and think anew through significant dialogue between like-minded people working on a number of issues on the ground. The workshops and activities of the Centre are not merely meant for academic purposes, nor is it a get together; it is in fact a space for sharing and learning from each other’s experiences.

The next workshop in the series was held in Nagpur on the 12th and 13th February on **‘The Troubled Atmosphere: Violence and Various Manifestations’**. Mrinal Gore Interactive Centre organized this workshop along with various organizations working on the concerned issues based in Nagpur & Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.

Through this workshop the Centre deliberated on the following subjects:

1. Unorganized and Dalit Workforce in Nagpur

Nagpur is one of Maharashtra’s major cities. Here, a large percentage of the people are involved in different kinds of occupations that fall under the unorganized sector. As per a survey conducted in 1981, the highest number of child labourers come from the Adiwasi, Dalit and Muslim communities. This is a clear indicator of the fact that children belonging to these communities are involved in manual labour and other unskilled work since a very young age.

The unorganized workforce of Nagpur largely lives in slums. In most cases the husband and wife step out of their houses in the early hours and toil the entire day. They are mainly involved in construction workers, vegetable/grocery sellers, street vendors, gardeners, milkman, newspaper man, domestic help etc. Amongst the Dalits in Nagpur, only those who followed the words of Dr. Ambedkar and converted to Buddhism have been able to progress. The others still belong to the unorganized sector.

2. Agrarian Crises and its Impact on Vidarbha

There is talk of atmospheric and climate changes across the globe. Farming experts and scientists are researching the change in climate and the traditional crop cycle. However, these studies are done without the participation of the farmers. These

farmers are experienced and possess traditional expertise on planting of crops, access and availability of water, seasonal changes and are aware of basic facts like why sugar canes can't grow in Marathwada? In the old system, farmers would create their own seeds for the coming year. However, now they have to rely on seed companies for this purpose. The state and corporations cater to the interests of the seed companies rather than that of the farmers.

Due to the change in the village atmosphere the support system the farmers and their families used to enjoy earlier has broken down. On the one hand while the breakdown of the caste system is good, but since it has not been replaced by any other social institution the farmers feel isolated and alone. There are various systems which have been set up by the government to help the farmers, however, by the time the support reaches them it is too late. Even the system of taking loans from the bank is not farmer friendly.

Owing to natural and man-made factors, the farmers are the worst sufferers. Whenever retail rates go up, we complain about inflation, but the farmers are unable to even recover the money they invested, let alone make profits. What makes matters worse is that there is a growing trend of imitating the rich which leads to the poor farmer going to the extent of selling his land or taking huge amounts of loans to buy seeds from the seed companies or for weddings and other events.



Participants at the registration desk

Due to the patriarchal nature of the society that we live in, the men consider it beneath their pride and ego to share their problems with their wives. In almost all cases the men go through emotional distress all by themselves. Many resort to liquor and other forms of substance abuse. Due to the aforementioned circumstances have led to a number of farmer suicides. The wives of these diseased farmers are not aware of the tremendous debt that they were in. Furthermore, due to lack of education and inadequate knowledge of farming practices, the women are clueless about how to face the situation. Many of them

lose their property to cunning relatives or in the process of repayment of loans rendering them landless. This leads to migration of the farmer widow and his children to other regions.

3. Developmental Imbalances: Fear and Repression

At the outset the Centre would like to state that it does not support any violent and anti-parliamentary activities. The Centre at this workshop would like to draw your attention to the developmental imbalances and the skewed process of development which has been adopted by the government in most secluded or forest areas of the country.

This has been the case since colonial times wherein certain parts of the country were deliberately left underdeveloped. It is a matter of concern that the post independent governments have also followed the same path. Due to the failure of the government in solving their problems, there was a resistance by the communities living in these secluded forest areas.

Initially the resistance was supported by the villagers as well. However, when this resistance took a violent turn (for example attack on the police men as representatives of government, not realizing that they are common people as well), the villagers distanced themselves from this group. In the bargain, they got caught in the fear and resistance shown by both the state and the resisting groups.

In this scenario, we would like to reiterate the fact that women are always at the receiving end of maximum exploitation.

4. Issues arising from Non-Inclusive Development of City Space

Village, town, city metro, this has come about to be the expected order of development of any region. It is essential that we question this idea. There are many cities that have several villages or village like settings within the city, one of the examples being Delhi. The major shortcomings of such cities are shortsighted development. The developed, marginally developed and under developed parts co-exist at close geographical proximities but are socially hostile to each other. These regions have lost the association amongst them that existed earlier. The only connection that is present is the labour force that ventures into developed parts for employment. This creates a direct interaction between the 'haves' and 'have-nots.' Here they come face to face with the stark difference between their own lifestyle and that of the upper class. The realization of the comforts and benefits of a rich lifestyle has caused an increasing ambition for upward mobility amongst the deprived class

In spite of living in close proximity, the rich are oblivious to the difficulties faced by the poor. To make things worse, globalization has widened the economic gap. The rich are becoming richer causing the underprivileged to become more

dissatisfied and demoralized. The desire to earn more results in people going astray and resorting to malpractices and *goondaism*.

In today's social system, happiness is defined with consumerism. There is a creation of lot of black money, even the white professions lead to creation of more black money, which in turn increases the muscle power and aggression of the 'haves.' The political patronage given to the violent aggression of the rich makes them even more powerful. This leads to the creation of several hegemonic centers within the city. The citizens have lost faith in public institutions that enforce law and order.

In such situations women are the worst affected. There are incidents of rape, rape like situations and essentially an environment of disdain. Group crimes go unpunished everywhere. There is a loss of feeling of neighbourhood and camaraderie within communities. While on the one hand access to city space gives people liberty, which is necessary, but this freedom needs the right kind of nurturing.

Inaugural Session

Facilitator: Surekha Dalvi

Speakers: Vilas Bhongade, Dr. Sreenivas Khandewale, Leelatai Chitale

Vilas Bhongade, social activist from Nagpur working with unorganised sector, welcomed all and spelt out the plan for the two day workshop. He reminisced about Mrinal Tai's spirit, her undying concern for the oppressed and her belief in seeking justice through social and political struggle. He recounted how memories of her innumerable campaigns, even today inspire those involved in movements. **Mrinal Gore Interactive Centre for Peace in South Asia** is indeed initiated to keep her spirit alive.

Dr. Sreenivas Khandewale, an economist, scholar of agro economics and Director of Ruikar Institute started off by stating the common concern of the day, the atmosphere of violence and growing intolerance in our country and said that he was glad a workshop like this was happening in Nagpur. He pointed out that an



Inaugural Session: Dr. Sreenivas Khandewale addresses the audience as Surekha Dalvi, Leelatai Chitale, Jayant Dharmadhikari & Vilas Bhongade listen on.

environment of intolerance is deliberately being created and there is a need to work towards a more tolerant society.

One needs to understand the concept and intricacies of tolerance and intolerance. History tells us stories of various conflicts; now we should think about how to avoid such conflicts. He further asserted that difference of opinion has always been present and will continue to exist but it is important that we allow the coexistence of different opinions rather than give it undue mileage. His thoughts were a clear reminder of the ugly 'Us and Them' nature of most of the arguments that exist today. He gave the example of Tajuddin Baba whose Dargah is in Nagpur, was a Muslim saint and yet knew more about the Hindu religion. Furthermore he added that attitudes like: "Only what I say is correct and what you say is wrong" is the root cause of intolerance.

He made another pertinent point that if financial growth causes devastation and unrest in the society, then we don't need that kind of growth. He concluded by asking a rather interesting question:- "Why didn't tolerance grow along with financial growth?"

Surekha Dalvi, activist and a Core Committee member of the Centre began by saying that human beings display dual characters- *prakruti* (nature) and *vikruti* (anomaly). Initially humans followed the law of nature (*prakruti*). The next phase was 'sanskriti' - the advent of culture and civilization. Exploiting other cultures for one's own benefit is *vikruti* (anomaly). Talking about the current scenario, she pressed on the fact that if the ruling party starts using the power bestowed upon them to suppress opinions that deviate from theirs, then it is indeed a matter of concern. This sets a dangerous precedent, especially in a multicultural, pluralistic democracy like ours. Surekha Dalvi emphasized that intolerance is the weed, which if not removed, will destroy the healthy growth of the crop.

She stressed that wealth; might and caste are the main sources of power. "Women suffer violence not merely in the household but also in politics. She cited the examples of a woman who was paraded in a village for having won an election and in another incident a woman *Sarpancha* was



Surekha Dalvi, Dr. Sreenivas Khandewale, Leeltai Chitale, Jayant Dharmdhikari

denied the right to hoist a flag because she was woman. This kind of humiliation continues till date. We have also seen similar incidents in the Sahni-Shinganapur

and Sabirimalai temples. Women's issues are not to be seen in isolation. They are part of the mosaic of countless other issues such as oppression of unorganized workers, Dalit, Advasi and other dispossessed social groups"

She also spoke about the issues faced by people living in areas rich in water and mineral resources and pointed out the apathy of dominant classes who choose to remain silent on such matters of exploitation.

Surekha Dalvi concluded by stating "Mrinaltai's politics involved compassion, human values, women centric polity and keeping the common man's problem at the centre. She was a crusader upholding every human's right to live with dignity. There should be enough communication and debate on these issues. The aim of this workshop is to address the problems at grass root levels and have a dialogue with concerned citizens".

Leelatai Chitale, the next speaker is a veteran Gandhian and was part of the freedom struggle and actively fought against the Emergency. Her opening words were "I am feeling suffocated. The intolerance perpetuated by the Modi regime is throttling our freedoms." She expressed concern about issues like freedom, and preserving the values prescribed by our Constitution. "In the current scenario, citizens have lost trust in each other. Moreover, people are afraid of the might shown by the political power. She asserted that securing majority mandate does not mean that the citizens problems remain unattended".

She recalled memories of interacting with survivors of Naokhali communal riots who were brought to Nagpur; even today she is haunted by the only question they asked her: "What was our fault?" Quoting Gandhi, she said that religion is man-made. She felt that if an individual disrespects a religion, then someone else can disrespect their religion as well.

Further she stated that the older generations that worked towards social empowerment were unable to abolish caste system and it is the responsibility of the current generation of activists and reformers to put an end to this vicious practice.

Session 1: Unorganised sector and adiwasi/dalit work force in Nagpur

Facilitator: Nisha Shiurkar

Speakers: Ranga Rachure, Kanta Madame, Chhaya Thok, Rupa Kulkarni, Prabhu Rajgadkar, Nisha Shende

Nisha Shiurkar, a lawyer, activist and Core Committee member of the Centre, introduced the speakers of the session. She spoke about the two crucial meetings conducted by the Modi government right after they assumed power. The first was with the Gandhians and the second with labour leaders. In the meeting with the labour leaders, they tried to change/abolish several labourer-friendly laws which

were introduced after 200 years of struggle. As an act of retaliation, all labour unions had held a one day bandh, which was successful.

She stated that post liberalization the work force in organized sector reduced substantially and large number of workers was further pushed into the unorganized sector. She expressed concern about the survival of the labour movement, which is closely linked to the survival of labourers.

Ranga Rachure, a socialist, a key organic intellectual and scholar of agriculture and rural sociology and a khadi activist. After schooling he had to earn for pursuing college education. He worked as a farm labourer and educated himself. He said that the period before 1972 was different. “In 1972 the Employment Guarantee Scheme came into existence after the famine. Women outnumbered men in seeking work under EGS. The scheme ensured that there was equal pay for equal work be it a man or a woman. However, on privately owned land, these laws were not so egalitarian. Some section of the society (private sector) cried foul claiming that the labour rates were too high due to EGS and eventually the scheme was scrapped due to the vested interests of a few”, he said.



He recounted that under EGS, the digging work which required less effort was done by the men, whereas the strenuous work of carrying this soil across 300 meters was done by women. Several roads and canals were built under the EGS. “EGS was the first scheme that gave women a sense of honour”, said Rachure.

Ranga Rachure criticized the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) and stated that under MNREGA most of the work was done by machines thus employing fewer farmers. “The extent of mechanization is such that there are JCBs even in 2 acre landholdings. MNREGA also has several other drawbacks. There were cases of false names in the record (muster) and other such scams.”

He further stated that displacement affects women more than anyone else. “The responsibility of setting up of the new household is their burden to bear. In rural India, households run mainly on women’s income because men are mostly prone to alcoholism. Water shortage adds to their misery. The women are exploited not just economically but also on an emotional level”. He expressed his concern over NGO intervention aimed at depoliticizing the miserization of women by interpreting their stress as an emotional issue. “Social work is not the answer to this problem, it is a political issue” opined Ranga.

In the end he held that it is our responsibility to create the kind of government we want.

Kanta is a domestic worker and as an activist with the Vidharbha Molkarin Sanghatan, she has worked in 400-500 slums in Nagpur. Through her experiences she has seen how women go through immense struggle to educate their children. “They are born and bound to serve the family, husband, children, and parents. Men go for jobs like painting and earn Rs 200-300 which they waste on alcohol”. She went on to say that Nagpur is a women’s city because most men here are haunted by alcoholism.

She expressed discontent over the fact that the government is only interested in beautifying the city by spending money on gardens parks etc, when they should be concentrating on developing the slum areas. While pointing out the inconsistency in the policy on the issue of liquor she said “on the one hand the government encourages having campaigns against alcoholism, and on another they make alcohol readily available”.

Chhaya Thok, the next speaker, is a construction worker and an activist whose organization had undertaken a study on daily wage earners. She shared their plight: “There are many slums in Nagpur; majority of the slum dwellers are unorganized workers. Many of them don’t find work everyday; every morning they set out with great hope of finding work, but many of them return in dismay. In a month they get work only on 20-22 days”. She mentioned that the organization she works with, tries to educate domestic workers about their rights and laws pertaining to their well-being.

Dr. Rupa Kulkarni, a professor at Nagpur University, veteran social activist and the President of Vidharbha Molkarin Sanghatan said that issues surrounding child labour, Dalits, Advasi, girl child, Muslim, unorganized sector, street vendors, road repair, construction workers, maids, rickshawwalas are not in the least bit apolitical. “The contribution of the unorganized sector is such that our society would come to a standstill without their work. Moreover, the percentage of the unorganized workforce is only rising”.

Quoting B. R Ambedkar, she said that our society comprises of only two sections, the one that toils and the privileged.

Rupa Kulkarni concluded by stressing that it is not possible



Nisha Shende, Rupa Kulkarni, Nisha Shiurkar

to disassociate caste from one's identity. "It becomes an integral part of an individual's identity. Women suffer more because of her caste. For example, female garbage collectors are not employed as maids. The misery of the women in unorganized sector is unparalleled" she said.

Prabhu Rajgadkar a poet, author and an adiwasi rights activist spoke about the three aspects that have affected the unorganized sector the most: privatization, liberalization and globalization. He stated that the mighty combination of these three processes has destroyed all agitations and driven countless people into unemployment. "The strength of labour organizations/movement started declining in the early 80s", expressed Prabhu.

Prabhu Rajgadkar shared: 86% of the population of our country works in the unorganized sector; average annual income of a farmer is Rs. 3480. "To make matters worse, if you are unorganized and illiterate you will be paid less. There is no organized struggle of the farmers. Moreover, the current trend is to get labourers from other states. This acts as a deterrent to the possibility of labourers organizing themselves to fight for their rights.

Nisha Shende, a professor at Amravati University and an activist involved in organizing Advasis from Melghat in Amravati began by citing the example of Rohith Vemula, the student from University of Hyderabad who committed suicide due to the discrimination and prejudice meted out to him in his college. "He was a Dalit scholar and his story is a chilling reminder of the state of Dalits in our society," said Ms Shende.



While mentioning the division of labour as followed by the caste system, she quoted Ambedkar saying, "It is not the division labour, but the division of labourers." The labour movement and the policy makers, political class did not pay enough attention to this nuance.

She commented that the Melghat area which is perpetually in the news for malnutrition of infants is in a horrific situation where livelihood opportunities are fast vanishing and food security is in peril.

While talking about unemployment, she said that the unemployment among women is not accounted for. "Women who have studied till 12th don't like working as domestic servants. Instead they take up jobs in hospitals and dispensaries,

where they have to perform jobs like cleaning excreta, biomedical waste and the compensation they receive is abysmally low. Again, there is no medium for these women to express their grievances because of the unorganized nature of their work. What's even more appalling is the fact that laws like Vishakha guidelines also cannot be implemented in an unorganized sector", she commented.

She was critical of the Self Help Group movement propagated by banks and government. "They were started with the promise of empowering women. Several SHGs have been set up. The members of these SHGs are encouraged to take loans and to make papads and pickles which are not always in demand and this puts them in loss. These SHGs are created only to create political mileage and further exploit the marginalized"

While concluding she expressed concern over appropriation of unemployed, backward class youth from mega cities and town for Hindutva agenda. She said, "Due to unemployment, many labourers have migrated to cities. Here they find menial jobs and are lured into petty politics and are used by Right Wing parties to push the Hindutva agenda."

Session 2: Agrarian Crises and its Impact on Vidarbha

Facilitator: Surekha Dalvi

Speakers: Jaideep Hardikar, Usha Kalam, Ranga Rachure, Sudham Pawar, Suvarna Damale, Vasant Phutane

Surekha Dalvi introduced the speakers for the session and gave a general overview of the agrarian crisis. Highlighting how critical the situation is in Maharashtra, she said that the state had the maximum number of farmer suicides. "Today the cultivation of sustenance crops is far less than that of cash crops. There are is tremendous need to do research on scarce water harvesting (kordavahu sheti). However none of it is happening" Surekha stated.

Further she said that there is no end to the miseries of the widows of farmers who commit suicide. "To make matters worse the 7/12 or land ownership documents do not contain the woman's name. Similarly the agriculture land also contains the man's name. For these reasons the woman is not recognized as a farmer. This is unfortunate because history tells us that agriculture was in fact discovered by women. It takes countless years for rocks to disintegrate into soil and finally form into arable/cultivable land. How does this productive land then become unproductive and what is the role played by the government? People who are inherently farmers do not want to continue in the same profession any more. They don't want their children to take up agriculture. It's important to get to the root of all these problems".

Ms Dalvi presented an analysis of the agrarian crises and set the tone for discussions.

Jaideep Hardikar, a Nagpur based journalist currently working with The Telegraph, describes himself as an observer and chronicler of the agrarian crisis of the entire country and not merely the Vidharbha region. He emphasized that the agrarian crisis is a national problem and not restricted to any region and that it has reached its terminal stage. In the beginning he quoted Dr. Ambedkar's call of abandoning villages, "go to cities", Dr. Ambedkar had appealed to his fellow Dalits. Later in the seventies during agrarian crisis, thousands of labourers shifted base and went to the cities. After liberalization, the land of small farmers' been seized by developers and investors.

Talking about areas battling the agrarian crisis he described various issues that



people face in these regions- Bundhelkhand faces the problem of hunger, while the Vidharbha faces water shortage and in Western Maharashtra people are leaving their land and migrating to cities. Most of the slum dwellers are landless farmers.

“After liberalization the problem of farmers has only multiplied and every suicide is an outcome of social, political and economic issues. They don't just want social justice, they also want economic justice. For years together activists have only spoken about social justice and neglected the importance of economic justice”.

He said that the agrarian crisis is in its terminal phase. In Vidharbha region only 8% of the farmers have assured irrigation. Since 2001 to 2010 the agricultural growth in this region was negative. In spite of the fact that we are an agrarian economy the service and industrial sector is doing much better.

He gave an example of the Rathod family who had sent their children to Pune for education. But the children failed to understand what was taught in the class and didn't find acceptance among friends or in the city. They came back to the village. The parents who had pinned high hopes on the children were devastated. They had taken huge loan for children's education. The story ended with both the parents committing suicide due to tremendous indebtedness.

Jaideep Hardikar was critical of the microfinance sector. “There has been a rise in the number of women committing suicides because they are unable to repay loans

taken from nationalized banks as a part of misguided microfinance ventures. Interestingly the banking sector writes off 4 lakh crore corporate loans. The same crisis of indebtedness exists both in the corporate sector and the agrarian sector. However, you hear of suicides only in one case.

“In fact the situation is so bad that in 2015-106 alone, 11 states have declared famine which amounts 2 lakh villages fighting famine. It’s only been 2 months into 2016 and the people of these villagers are clueless about how to survive the remaining months. Marathwada and Telangana region have major water shortage. The women are left wondering where to get water from”.

In conclusion, he pointed out to the apathy of the urban middle class and commented on the future of agriculture in India. “The urban folk are only eager to complain about the increasing prices of the commodities. However the disconnect between the farmers and the producers is what needs to be addressed at the earliest. He concluded by saying that the agrarian sector needs social, financial and political support”.

Usha Kalam’s is the daughter of a farmer who committed suicide around 5 years ago. Since she was working, she could pay back the loans and educate her siblings. She also narrated her father’s poem which was also his suicide note. She questioned the reason why people are driven to end their lives. Why there is still no respite. She added that she hopes farmers think about the consequences that the family has to face once they are gone and wishes that the Government responds to the pleas of millions who are fighting for basic livelihood requirements.

Ranga Rachure commented on the many vagaries of the agricultural sector. The agriculture sector that employs 65% of the population is considered as part of the unorganized sector and is not given the value it deserves. The average landholding of the 65% of Indian farmers is 2.5 acres. They are called small farmers. In the United States however, the average landholding of a farmer is 5000 acres.

Although today’s youth is not keen to take up agriculture, it still holds significance. Landholding is considered as a matter of pride. There was a time when we hadn’t attained food security. We have achieved it; our farmers produce surplus food grains. But it’s unfortunate that the agricultural sector is not secure. The production cost



Suvarna Damle speaking about the Agrarian Crisis

has increased but at the selling price has gone down. It is the primary duty of the government to give security to the agricultural society.

Sudham Pawar, a farmer by profession described the plight of the farmers and said, “What you sow doesn’t grow, and when it grows it doesn’t get sold.” He went on to say that the agrarian crisis must become a political issue. Corporate, actors, educationists have their representatives in the Parliament; however there is no one to represent the farmers in the Parliament.

Adding to the misery of the families in the agrarian sector is the fact that no one is willing to give their daughter to a farmer in marriage fearing the consequences.

Suvarna Damale is an activist working with an organization called Prakruti. Prakruti conducted a survey on challenges faced by the survivors of the farmers who committed suicide.

She said the state of suicide survivors-the life of the wife and children- is very challenging. The wife has to pay the debt, run the household and hence needs more credit. She is uncertain of the ownership of the land, whether it belonged to her diseased husband or his brothers/ other relatives. If you don’t have the document which proves you are farmer, you are not eligible for compensation. When a farmer’s widow goes to fetch the documents to the Gram Panchayat and Talathi, she is met with taunts like “she’s after the compensation money. It’s not even a week since her husband’s death and there she is”. Finally these women are reduced to farm labourers. Even the women who managed to get the title of the land were unable to meet the demands of the agricultural profession. Stressing on the need to educate women financially, she said that widows find it most difficult to access the compensation or deal with the many demands of agriculture. She needs to know banking, insurance and understand the marketing side of agriculture.

Vasant Phutane, is an organic farmer and has developed innovative methods for farming. He said that the agrarian sector was harmed due to the *Khauja* (short for privatization, liberalization, globalization). In many areas habitats of various species, on which livelihood of Adivasis depend were destroyed. People fled to cities only to be exploited more. The real concern however is the urban population which never joined hands with the farmers movement on whom they are dependent on for food security.

Session 3: Developmental Imbalances: Fear and Repression

Facilitator: Lata Bhise

Speakers: Ashok Thul, Samiksha Ganveer, Praveen Mote, Zeba Imam, Anvar Rajan

Lata Bhise, a lawyer and senior activist working on women and Dalit rights spoke about the agitation that took place in 1970 against the unequal development of Marathwada and Vidharbh regions as compared to the rest of Maharashtra. There was a strong movement by the Left and Socialist parties against this injustice meted out to the people of these two regions.

The development of Marathwada and Vidharbha is indeed a political issue and at the heart of it are the down trodden communities of these regions. In our efforts to develop these regions we shouldn't forget these people.

Ashok Thul, a veteran Dalit activist-ideologue and a labour leader is the General Secretary of Zilla Parishad Karmachari Mahasanghatan. He spoke about Dr. Ambedkar and how he had captured various inequalities in his writings. He went on to say that Dr. Ambedkar, the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution of India, came out with one of the best frameworks; however the ones responsible for implementing it failed miserably.

Ashok went on to describe the current situation in India and the problem of impoverishment. As per a recent World Bank report, globally there are 120 crore of extremely poor people out of which 1/3rd live in India. Lack of effective healthcare is clear when you look at the 1.4 billion children in India who don't see their 5th birthday. The Asha worker who aids the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) is considered part time where as she works full time. Their salary is merely Rs. 1200. A demand has been made by activists to raise her salary to Rs. 10,000. The finance commission replied by saying it will be considered it in the 7th pay Commission.

Samiksha Ganveer, is an activist who works in the area of displacement in Gosikhurd project affected area. The compensatory money was given to men. A small portion of this sum was spent on setting up the household and agriculture. But the major share of the money was spent on lavish weddings and alcohol leading to financial crisis. Samiksha reflected that the money should have been given in both the husband and wife's name. Moreover, the compensatory money is given considering that the family comprising of husband, wife and their children; the daughters-in-law of the family are completely overlooked. Meanwhile these daughters-in-law are pressurized by their family to get their share of the compensation from her maiden house.

She spoke about the role played by SHGs in driving many women into indebtedness. Women take loans of up to Rs. 1 lakh, and that most of these women were lured into taking these loans. The women didn't need these loans in the first place and struggled to repay them. Especially since many of these SHGs have no source of income (no entrepreneurial activity), it becomes difficult for the women to repay the loans.

Praveen Mote is an environmentalist and social activist from Chandrapur, where adiwasis live in forests. When the forest is declared as a National Park, the inhabitants are declared as encroachers and displaced with nowhere to go. The ones who had land got compensation. However, majority of them were landless and are now living in close proximity to the mines exposing them to dangerous pollutants. Forest rights of Adiwasis are only limited to paper and laws, never implemented. Mining projects and national parks are enough proof of this phenomenon.

One of the survivors present at the workshop said that the compensation they got for the displacement they suffered was neither fair nor sufficient. Some people are yet to receive the entire amount. Those with land were given compensation and the ones who were landless were given odd jobs. The government always sides with the mine owners and don't look into the rehabilitation and welfare of the displaced.

Zeba Imam is an Assistant Professor at Tata Institute of Social Sciences. In order to describe the stark disparity in development she cited two examples. She spoke about the tremendous development that has taken place in Gurgaon. There are skyscrapers everywhere and the area has gone through a complete transformation. She visited one gated community, where the



Zeba Imam, Anvar Rajan, Lata Bhise, Samiksha Ganveer

buildings had two lifts, one for the residents and the other for the workers. She urged the audience to ponder over what class/caste these 'workers' might be belonging to. This was an apt example of how caste is still thriving even in urban spaces. Caste discrimination is only reinvented in cities.

She recalled another incident when a group of students visited a village in Eastern UP for a project. On their arrival the villagers ran away out of fright because they thought these people were Government officials. The very fact that villagers are afraid of government officials is appalling. This is not an isolated incident. She concluded by saying, anywhere in the country those who resist state's idea of development are always suppressed.

Anvar Rajan a thinker, writer and senior social activist stated that development comes at a cost, and very often a handful of citizens have to bear the brunt. People all over the world are relocating, the only difference is that some move out of their own free will, and some are forced into it. Many of those who are

displaced don't possess the required documents, hence they cannot be compensated.

People from under-developed states from the North tend to leave their homes and move to relatively better developed states like Maharashtra. However, when a person migrates to a better place, they consider themselves to be of secondary stature. The feeling of being an unauthorized citizen takes over and this is the case not merely for migrants within India but is common all over the world.

Even in cities the slum settlements are formed on the basis of caste and religion. The urban setting also fails to erase these differences that exist in villages.

Taking an example of village Gram Sabhas, Anvar Rajan asserted the importance of similar structures in cities to ensure citizen participation in governance.

Nisha Shiurkar is advocate, social activist, organizing secretary of Samajwadi Janparishad and a Core Committee member of the Centre.

Nisha stressed that there are several development lapses that we have to fight against and indeed this is a political struggle. She cited an example of the activists and villagers fighting mining giant Vedanta in Orissa. They went to the Supreme Court with their cause. The SC order stated that the final decision will be taken by the Gram Panchayats in the Niyamgiri area. And 100% gram sabhas voted against Vedanta. In fact journalists, writers, filmmakers and other concerned citizens also became a part of this struggle. This victory should be communicated far and wide and should inspire people of various movements.



Lokmat: 13th February, 2016

Day 2: 13th February

Session 4: Issues arising from Non-Inclusive Development of City Space

Facilitator: Nasreen Contractor

Speakers: Rubina Patel, Suresh Bhusari, Sujata Bhongade, Anvar Rajan, Prafull Gudge

Nasreen Contractor, social activist, academic and Core Committee of the Centre introduced the theme of the session. She spoke about the fact that urbanization in India was taking place along with an increase in slum and shanty settlements within the city space along with the construction of towers, flyovers, metros, large residential and commercial complexes, multiplexes and malls. In fact several speakers in the earlier sessions had already pointed out to the huge increase in slum settlements in Nagpur City in the last 5 years. Cities are a glaring example of inequality that has become intrinsic to our growth model. It also points to the kind of political economy that operates - it would not be incorrect to say that the growth model rests on the subsidized labour of the poor who live and continue to live in appalling conditions. In conclusion she drew attention to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments which is meant to strengthen local-self government in villages, districts, towns and cities. These also give impetus to citizens participation and devolution of decision making to strengthen decentralization in governance. With the hype given to “Smart Cities” we are no longer giving attention to these mechanisms. She also pointed to the experience of slum dweller organisations who find it extremely difficult to get any infrastructure improvements for their community sanctioned. They have to persist for months -even years and go up to the MLA and MP level to even get a pipe line or road or drain construction sanctioned.



Sujata Bhongade, Nasreen Contractor, Rubina Patel

Rubina Patel, an activist and a scholar of women's issues particularly- Muslim women's issues, founder of Ruby Social Welfare Society, emphasized on the reality that there is an increased number of slums in cities because urban spaces need labourers. However, the harsh fact of the matter is that the city folk need labour force but do not want to acknowledge the labourers themselves. They normally want the labourers to be invisible. Talking on the issue of smart cities, she raised the question “Who should be smart, the city or its people?” Overcrowding, stress,

feeling of alienation coupled with blind faith; are some of the problems that should be addressed before transforming the cities to “smart” cities.

The skilled artisans and craftsman cannot be sustained by village economy and they are forced to enter the daily wage sector which is a pity. It is a sad reality that these skilled individuals are forced to enter unorganized sector out of lack of choice.

She spoke about disparities in development that she has seen during her work with slum dwellers. For example, there is a Dargha, on which handsome amount of money has been allocated by the state, for its beautification. This dargha happens to be in the vicinity of a huge basti, which requires up-liftment. However, no funds are allocated for the improving the situation in the slums. Such incidents create discontent amongst the slum dwellers that have been waiting for some form of reform.



Suresh Bhusari, is a social activist and a journalist with Sakaal group. He shed light on the condition of masons, ironsmiths etc. who earlier provided tools and other implements required for agriculture but were rendered jobless since the farmers started buying from the industrial sector. This caused them to migrate to cities and live in slums. 35% of Nagpur population lives in slums. Now that it has been chosen as one of the cities to be developed into a smart city, the citizens will have to bear the corresponding CESS. The whole smart city concept stresses more on financial development ignoring social development.

A city like Nagpur does not need metros, however now it will get one. Considering the population of the city, there was no need for this extravagant amenity. Politicians use such projects for acquiring more and more real estate. This situation has come to be because we didn't create enough pressure groups to oppose this skewed idea of development.

Sujata Bhongade, a social activist and member of Molkari Sanghatan pointed out that there were fewer slums in Nagpur before 1966. The impoverishment in villages drove families to Nagpur in search of livelihood. Projects like Metro, MIHANS (Multi-nodal International Cargo Hub and Airport at Nagpur) and SEZs have neglected the common people. They have acquired acres of land for these projects rendering people landless and devoid of livelihood. Many of these project affected never get any compensation as they are landless. To make matters worse, the project affected people who are displaced fail to find employment when they move to cities. She further asked what is the citizens' share in these plans of

development?. The least the government can do is provide jobs to the dispossessed. Indeed the Ache Din promised by the government is not meant for the poor people.

Praful Gudge, a Corporator at Nagpur Municipal Corporation started off by saying various institutes such Nagpur Sports Association, Nagpur Cricket Association and cultural a literary association/ institutes are in the hands of the privileged class. The migrant to the city owes allegiance to the village and to the land. They don't associate themselves with the city, because city alienates them.

Development comes with a fixed plan. The government forces its idea of development on citizens. The current model of development is such that there is no creation of livelihood, employment and industrial development. Praful criticized the MINHANS by saying that not many job opportunities were created under it. The liberalization has only created markets and lesser jobs.

Anvar Rajan spoke of the village system which is lauded by many. However, even villages saw many disparities on the basis of caste and religion. Ambedkar appealed to the Dalits, "leave villages, go to cities." He was a visionary who knew well that there will be discrimination in the villages perpetually.

If you notice, in the name of development the cities these days boast of wide roads, shopping malls, multiplexes etc. But who really benefits from these? It is important to realize that these luxuries are created at the cost of many. Big projects are sanctioned for the financial benefits of many public figures and politicians. The current framework is such that it will ensure your mere survival but will not allow you to live happily.



Anvar Rajan

He also spoke on the issue of communalism and how it is difficult for Muslims to find houses in Pune. Similarly, in another incident in Kanheri village, Kolhapur district- an age old Mosque had to be demolished for road widening. The Muslim community readily agreed as the Gram Panchayat had agreed to give an alternative piece of land. However after completion of the road, when the community went to the Panchayat to seek permission to build a new Mosque, the Panchayat managed to get a resolution passed in the Gram Sabha barring the construction of the mosque.

Concluding session

Nisha Shiurkar recounted how Leelatai - at the onset of the workshop - said that she's feeling suffocated; it is important to realize that it is not because of the age that one gets suffocated but the atmosphere. In this atmosphere you feel isolated. Speaking about the women who are abandoned by their husbands, who come to her for legal recourse, she has to deal with their individual problems. At another level

it is a problem of the society at large. At each level there are boundaries. If you suggest the troubled woman to leave her husband, she feels obliged to stick around with her husband due to societal norms. This can be linked to KHAUJA. Basically, privatization, liberalization, and globalization have given rise to many disparities like impoverishment and perpetuating crimes against women.

The turbulent times are not merely a creation of a new political party at the centre. Their seeds were sown years ago. Activists have been fighting a long battle since many years. What protection do activists have? There is a movement for abolition of capital punishment but nothing is done about it. And we try to enforce our codes on others. For example Rohith was asked why not just say Jai Bhim, why speak up for Yakub Memon?



Speaking about the celebration of Valentine's Day, she said that whether or not to celebrate such a day is an individual's choice and depends on the state of your 'jeb/pakit'. But some forces are now deciding whether or not you should celebrate the Valentine's. The government merely looks on.

She also strongly criticized the 'Love jihad' movement coined by the right wing parties accusing Muslim men of luring Hindu girls in order to convert them to Islam. Speaking of intolerance, she recounted the horrific incident of the Tanzanian woman who was physically abused in broad day light for no fault of hers.

While concluding, she referred to the plight of Muslims from Kanheri village who were barred from building a new mosque in the place of an old one which was demolished for road widening.

Nisha opined that Kanheri villagers wouldn't have dared to bar Muslims had the Babri Masjid not been demolished.

Surekha Dalvi said that it isn't always possible for activists to influence a large section of the society. Their identities are linked to their gender, religion, caste. The spirit of constitution is not reflected in our society. The *Sanatan Sanskriti* was based on the phrase live and let live. It was communicative, tolerant, inclusive, and long-lasting. That's what a civilization should be like. A society should ensure social justice. Our culture should give space to another person to say what they want. There should be a sense of what is good and what is bad. Since the decline of the leftist's movements, the question of how to take the struggle forward remains unanswered.

In the end Rupa Kulkarni spoke about Mrinal tai. She reminisced her first meeting with Mrinal Tai during her visit to Nagpur for a programme. Later the two had met and had a long heart to heart talk. They bonded instantly.

Rupatai thanked Vilas and Keshav Gore Smarak Trust for successfully organizing the conference.

Vilas concluded the programme by thanking one and all.

