

ADHARSHILA LEARNING CENTRE

Run by

VEER KHAJIYA NAIK MANAV VIKAS PRATISHTHAN

Dear friends

Adharshila has completed ten years. We are proud to say that during these years Adharshila has produced path breaking work in education methodology and pedagogy. It has raised, debated and dwelt deeply in serious questions regarding various aspects of education ranging from it's content, form, social relevance etc.

The tragic part is that it is not written out in a manner so as to be taken to a larger audience. It is entirely due to our pre occupation with day to day engagements in setting up Adharshila in the initial years and later in running it with very little people to help. It is also due to lack of help of qualified people.

This year's report describes briefly, the challenges that we started with and how we met them. It also gives a brief outline of this years highlights.

Thanks to your support and belief in us and our work, Adharshila is one of the leading examples of alternative education in the country.

It will be a great help if you share this report with other friends interested in children, education and those who want to join hands for a good cause. We will send the report to your friends if you can just mail their id to adharshila.learningcentre@gmail.com

Your suggestions will be very useful for us.

Lots of love to all of you

From

All of us

At Adharshila

ADHARSHILA LEARNING CENTRE

Annual Report 2007 -08

RUN BY

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MADHYA PRADESH



The Caste

Children

170 children at the opening and about 150 on the farewell.

87 residents and 70 day scholars

Girls – 40

Adivasis – 145

Those who looked after them....

Badri Lal Solanki – Mess, Agriculture and Miscellaneous tasks

Devika Solanki – Craft, agriculture

Shobharam Kanouje, - Middle classes, Administration, Accounts

Shanta Kirade – Sports, library

Yatin Gupta – Middle classes also coordinated the primary section

Shewanta – Primary Section

Student Teachers

Senior girls and boys who will give the 10th exam from the open school next year,

worked really hard to make the primary school a success -

Majali, Suresh, Seetaram, Suresh , Prakash,

Anita, Sunita, Kavita, Gyarsilal, Dinesh

And

The Amazon, Nile and Octopus group children helped by taking classes –

Dharmalata, Manisha, Jamuna, Vijay, Shersingh, Anil, Kashiram, Pushpendra, Chetaram,

Revali, Sarang, Imla, Sunita,

Volunteers

Veena Lakra – M.Ed. – TISS, Mumbai, Mahalaxmi - Pune, Sameer – USA,

Shailaja – an organic farmer from Andhra Pradesh.

Trainee Teachers

Dayaram and – Dist. Burhanpur, Meetharam – Vill. Surani

Direction

Jayashree and Amit

The End of the Beginning

Ten is the age when children have already begun to move out. Venturing independently. Not always wanting to be with parents. Though they need help. Exploring – work and relationships. Parents realize this and feel sad and proud at the same time. Sad at the impending loss of cuddling intimacy and proud to see the child's independent forays into new ventures.

Adharshila too has come of age or it is high time that it does. We have to force it out of our hands. We have taken the first step in this direction many times but never completed it. We have resolved to do it. In this direction the first thing to do is to make the primary section completely independent – material, syllabus, training, teaching aids etc. So the next few months will see at least one of us doing only this.

Over a period of one or two years we should be moving on to other related things – more schools, youth programmes, don't know, its an open world.

Thinking back....

In the past ten years we were immersed in battling many ideas being propagated by alternative education experts and institutions. The battle was not just theoretical but was being fought while the Center was running with about 100 children staying on the campus. Though we cannot claim to have come up with a 'how to do manual' but this experience has enriched our thoughts and led us into deep by lanes of educational philosophy, psychology, methodology and to the very purpose of education. Many other new educational ventures have gained from the Adharshila Experience and we too have learnt from others.

Adharshila was an experimental in more than one ways.

- 3 **Educational**
- 3 **Institutional**
- 3 **Financial**
- 3 **Socio - political**

The Educational Challenge –

The challenge was to set up an institution which could provide quality education in the mainstream sense and at the same time instill progressive and democratic ideas in the minds of students. We had set out to re explore the meaning of education for the children of oppressed and marginalized communities. Could there be any alternatives to the present system.

Second is to find an alternative to the present 10 + 2 system where there are fixed and very limited choices for children. To see if there can be a system where after acquiring proficiency in basic language, math and logical/analytical the children can decide their learning path

based on their interests and talents leading right up to employment in sectors of their choice.

Third to use their talent and interests for the upliftment of the poor while providing them a job in the economic sense.

The main problem that we are facing in this regard is that the mainstream thought and system is so deeply set in the minds of the people that they don't see any alternative. To put their child in a place which challenges the mainstream thinking is a very risky proposition. Very few are willing to take the risk.

The Institutional Challenge –

Adharshila is run by the Veer Khajiya Naik Manav Vikas Pratishthan. It is registered under the Societies Reg. Act. So officially its an NGO. Coming from the background of an adivasi sangathan, where we lived the ideas of declassing one self, materially and mentally, living with the people, like the people etc, etc. NGO was a bad word. But still we came to realize the importance of institution building. Institution's base in rural areas, which were truly people's institutions, where ideas relating to the new world from the people's perspectives. This was the challenge - **can there be people's institutions, which are funded (even partly) and managed by the community. Where the community has a say in the decision making of the institution.**

The Challenge of Financial self sufficiency – we wanted to explore the possibility of running institutions without depending on institutional grants, at least for running expenses. For this our strategy comprised of –

- 3 Right from the beginning we had decided that we should not be dependent on grants for the running costs. The local community should provide this. Not to provide free service but the fee to be decided by the people.
- 3 For infrastructural costs we decided to tap individual donations rather than funding agencies. We believed that in the long run investing in making friends and supporters is a better deal than writing proposals. Social movements and societal interventions must rely on peoples support.
- 3 Supplementing this income through productive work.

How far have we been successful in this ?

The last two years accounts tell us that the expenditure of salaries and mess (major running costs) were covered by the fee/grain collected from student's parents. In other years it has been supplemented by individual donations. The fact that this area is into irrigated agriculture and linked to the market helped in this. Also education is a service which people are demanding. It is true that due to this limitation only the middle and higher income group amongst the adivasis has been attracted towards Adharshila. It also true that actually the fee

is not high – it was decided to keep it at one day's minimum wage, which is affordable in this area. But spending on education is not a very big priority for all income groups, especially when people don't see sure advantages of education in terms of jobs or useful knowledge/values gained.

We have been able to generate a group of friends who have assured us that Adharshila will not stop because of a lack of funds. This is very big assurance which no funding agency will give. Most of the money raised by through them has been used for infrastructural purposes. The first buildings were built entirely by the labor and material provided by the local community mobilized by a local peoples organizations – the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan. This also increases the sense of accountability towards the community and also forces us to take into account the local sentiment while taking any major policy decision regarding running the centre or any new programme. Though later we had to resort to taking some institutional grants for buildings as we realized that we cannot always keep asking for donations every year. A good educational institute will require a lot of good facilities and maintenance which keep ever increasing amount of money.

Productive work ... the organic farm is the centre of activity almost 6 – 8 months in an year which gives us (a family of 100 members) veggies and pulses to see through at least 3 -4 months. We are desperate to increase the yield. This requires full time attention and commitment not just to experimenting in organic farming but to get results.

The children do craftwork, some of which is sold. Greeting cards, we have been doing for the past five years. This funds the educational tours. There are problems in this as soon as we have the pressure of fulfilling orders the fun of the activity goes. Money becomes the driving force. We have to think of things which sell at a higher price and require a more leisurely effort meaning that it is done in free time, whenever one feels like.

Suggestions for the future –

Increase the base of donors in the local area amongst the educated adivasis, friends in Indore.

The Socio – Political Challenge –

The main question here is to see what role can education play in the struggle for social – political change, being spear headed by Jan Sangathans. We have a rich legacy of great thinkers who have dwelled on the subject starting from Phule, Ambedkar, Gandhi, to the Socialists and the experience of the communist countries and also the education models propagated by religious nationalists.

The discussion and debate goes on and will go on. A lot of experiments and sincere dialogue between them is needed to be able to strengthen these ideas. There are lots of

very good written material and worked out theories but very little work to make these ideas workable.

We will be inviting some friends next year to evaluate our experience and chart a course of action for the coming years.

Some highlights from the last year.....

Shiksha Samwaad

A three day dialogue on the 'Role of Education in the Struggle for Social and Political Change' was organized commemorate the completion of 10 years of Adharshila. About 140 people representing at least 25 NGOs and people's organizations, from 4 states, participated in the discussions for 3 days and nights. Shri Dutta Sanvle, Prof. Anil Sadgopal helped in facilitating the discussions. The AMS helped in raising resources for the dialogue. Many people said that they really got charged up due to the Samwaad. There was a strong demand to continue this dialogue with various groups all over the country. We still have to take out a proper report of the dialogue.

First in Madhya Pradesh in The National Children's Science Congress

A research project titled – From Malnutrition to Bio-diversity- a Learning Journey – done by Middle and Senior level students was adjudged the best in Madhya Pradesh. It was selected to represent MP at the National level Science Congress in Baramati and also for the National Science Congress of scientists held at Vishakhapatnam. (For a brief not of the project see Appendix I)

First batch passed 12th exam

The first batch of children who passed out of Adharshila after 8th passed the 12th exam all above 60%. Most of the children who studied in Adharshila up to the 5th or 8th std. and joined Govt. schools are still studying and are amongst the best there. This is a good indicator because otherwise the dropout rate from 1st to 12th is more than 95%. 8 students sat for the 10th exam through the open school.

Summer Placement

Student teachers were given a chance to upgrade their knowledge and skill in whichever field they chose. Two students were sent to Satana to Baghelkhand Adivasi Mukti Morcha. Two went to Arch Vahini, Rajpipla, Gujarat to learn and work in a rural hospital run by them. One student has gone to the organic farm of Smita and Dharendra Soni in Gujarat. Two boys are interested in electronics have gone to Sampark to learn about solar appliances.

Towards self sufficiency of the mess

The expense was covered from the fee and the grain given by the student's parents and we were able to produce vegetables and pulses for about 3 – 4 months.

About 600 trees were planted this year, for fuel wood as planned last year. About 85% have survived. These last summer months are very crucial. Lets see.

We know that many of you will be raising your eyebrows – what about global warming ? though we have a solar cooker and a sarai cooker for daal and have slightly better *choolahs* but we are aware that this is not a good enough excuse. Well this is the cheapest solution as of now. We are looking at biogas running on human waste as an option.

We had planned to get one ton of vegetables and pulses from the organic farm plot. We were able to get 250 Kg *urad* daal and 400 Kg. vegetables. A shortfall of 350 Kg. Our land and our skills are getting better but not fast. Plus like always there are no people who know the craft. So its always hit and trial.

All this and the contribution of the parents took care of the mess expense.

Organic Farm

This year Jayashree's main focus was on organic farming. Along with 8 children, and Badri bhai, she went to see the farm of Mr. Sharma in Maharashtra, who has recently received the President's Award for high yield through organic farming techniques. The team came back inspired and immediately set to work on the farm. We learnt to see levels and make contours. Sharma produces about 3 ton vegetables on an acre, in the full year – which is a lot, to say the least. We will be happy if we get a ton. We are trying to convince parents also to try out these techniques. To pass on our resolve to parents and villagers we made it the main theme of our Independence Day celebrations. – **Azadi of a different kind** (a detail note is appended at the end)

Towards an independent primary school

The **student teachers** managed the primary school on their own. They were helped by a trainee teacher and a coordinator. The classes, *shramdaan*, assembly, sports – everything was managed by them. We helped them to plan their schedules, activities and monitoring. We are taking up the **Student Teacher Programme** for the third year in a more systematic and formal manner. This programme is mainly for children who have failed in the middle school and are willing to take the 10th exam through open school.

Teacher Trainings

Two teachers from Burhanpur and one from Surani village were trained for primary level classes. They stayed in Adharshila for one month. They are teaching in schools run by AMS activists. We have finalized the material for first three years of schooling. We invited students to take this training from other organizations also including some SRUTI fellows. They showed interest but were not able to find people for the jobs or could not send. We are keen

to help other organizations who are interested in taking up programmes with children and youth.

Courses for Training Teachers and Failures

The first is a short term course after which a person can start teaching the primary class and make children's groups in his village. This is just a starter course and the student is required to come back for a week, every two months to learn new things. In this two month course, students are taught various activities like games, songs, theatre, crafts and other activities which they can do with children outside the regular school. This will help them to develop children's groups in their areas. Besides this they are also trained to teach the primary classes so that they can help children with their studies also. Their reading, writing and math skills and general knowledge is also upgraded. They can even start primary schools in their areas if the community is willing.

The second course is a two – three year course for children who have failed in various classes and left school. In this course we help them in the preparation of 10th exam from the Open School. They are able to give the 10th exam after 2 -3 years of admission depending on their ability and interest. During these years of stay with us they undergo teacher training and learn about other important facets of rural life – organic farming, primary health and malnutrition. They are also exposed to singing, theatre, visits to other organizations working in rural areas. The student can choose her or his special area of interest during his stay and learn about these topics more extensively. Weekly discussions are held with the students regarding contemporary social issues.

After successful completion of 10th and teacher training the student will be placed in a village school by Adharshila.

Swashasan Meetings - Democracy

This year too Swashasan Meetings were a hit. They provide a forum where children can give vent to their complaints which are mainly regarding the mess and mutual fights. They have also

talked about rude behavior from teachers when it has gone beyond the threshold of tolerance. These meetings were conducted by Student Teacher Group. Teachers do not sit in these meetings unless they are called by the students to be told about children's demands.

The other meetings are the Student Teacher meetings on Sundays. Here they chalk out the week's work and responsibilities. These decisions are based on the suggestions given by children in the Swashasan meeting. This year some older children started having problems with the student teachers. Groupism, campaigning, threatening – real politics came in. It was decided that decisions related to all the students will be made in the larger meetings themselves. Student Teachers were becoming managers and getting alienated from the rest

of the student community. So leaders were made from amongst senior students. They were also included in the weekly Student teacher meetings. This sharing of responsibility pacified them and this will also help in preparing to take on bigger roles in the coming years.

Village Visits

Baal Melas in 15 villages / schools. This is one way where children get to interact with other children in surrounding villages. A team of 7 -10 children under the leadership of the Student Teachers goes to the village and talks to the Head Master of the Govt. School. After fixing the dates etc. they go and do the Baal Mela with the children. They also talk to the Sarpanch and whatever other contacts they have in the villages, to ensure children's participation. Usually 80 – 150 children attend the Baal Mela. There are group games, songs, story telling. Origami and drawing is done. Science experiments are also shown. Photographs of freedom fighters are displayed and stories told about them.

Kabaddi Competition of Village Youth

A Kabaddi competition for adivasi youth was organized with cash prizes worth Rs. 3000/-. Eight teams took part. The whole village elders, women and children turned out to see the matches. The idea was to get in touch with the young generation. People liked the idea. Maybe next year we can try to increase the number of teams. A similar programme for young girls may also be taken up.

Health Visits - a group of interested children goes with Dr. Varma to learn about the health problems of the village learning through observing his interaction with the villagers.

Surveys and Study Projects – the children also go to the villages to do various surveys and also to gather information about their study projects.

Guests

A Traveler

Narendra Patil, going on his bike from Leh to Bangalore, dropped in. He's an old friend from the Jhabua days. The children were more interested in his heavy Royal Enfield bike rather than his talk. He stayed with us for 4 days. Most of the time we were discussing our lives in the past 18 years. We met after 18 years – so ! He also showed children how to juggle with three balls.

And Volunteers

Veena Lakra, doing her Masters in Elementary Education, from TISS, Mumbai stayed for one month for her internship. She helped in the primary section

Mahalaxmi an MBA from Symbiosis, Pune and Sameer an Electrical Engineer from the USA reached the same day. While Laxmi is a teaching enthusiast, Sameer seems to be looking for answers to deeper questions related to education and life in general.

They helped in teacher training, curriculum development and teaching English and Math.

Sameer is learning to cook and works on the organic farm. Laxmi is learning weaving and also works on the farm.

Shailaja an organic farmer working in Andhra Pradesh, stayed with us and helped in the tree planting drive and taught the children principles of organic farming.

Many others came to visit and stay for one or two days.

Adharshila Tours and Travels

This is one thing which children really look forward to. This year we went to Indore with the older group. On the way we stopped to see *Mandu*, *Maan* Dam and the excavation site where remains of dinosaurs fossils have been found. We could not reach the site due to the same old problem – the jeep – but were able to see the fossils in a museum. Some fossils were of the time when the lower landmass of the Indian Peninsula was not there and the sea was somewhere near Indore. Just imagine.

Some ideas for the next year

Complete the curriculum work for first five years.

Programme for failures

Organising youth and children's groups through sports and cultural activities.

Review of the last ten year's Adharshila's work.

Establish *Shiksha Samwaad* with other organizations.

Helping people's organisation define and set up their educational programmes

Educational activity with children in surrounding villages.

Campaign with elected bodies and villagers to improve govt. schools.

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Appendix I

FROM FOOD INSECURITY (MALNUTRITION) TO BIODIVERSITY -- A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERIES

(Under the Sub Title – Bio Diversity in Man made and Land Ecosystems)

Team : Suresh Dudve – Team Leader

Majali J.J.

Seetaram Dudve

Deewansingh Brahmane

Suresh Barole

The team was supported by almost 60 students of Adharshila Learning Centre, in the field surveys. In a sense the whole Centre was immersed in Bio Diversity.

Guide : Jayashree

Institution : Adharshila Learning Centre

Area of Study : Four villages namely – Sakad, Chatli, Kunjari and Merkhedi – of Newali Block, or Barwani district in western Madhya Pradesh. The district is a predominantly adivasi district (78%). It is situated in the Satpuda range bordering Maharashtra.

Importance and Relevance of the Topic

India is striving to stand amongst the leaders in the world community, but malnutrition is mocking us in the face. The fact that 40 – 45 % of the country's children are malnourished is raising serious questions on the claims to development. Our strides in space are of no meaning if our children are malnourished, women are anemic. Something is gravely wrong somewhere.

Most children who have taken part in this project have suffered malnutrition in their childhood or seen their kith and kin die due to malnutrition. Majali's eyesight is seriously impaired due to chronic Vitamin A deficiency during childhood. Malnutrition is very close to the hearts of the children.

Various surveys have shown that 58% - 60 % children of Madhya Pradesh are malnourished, much higher than the National average. Most of these are children of farmers and laborers.

The Journey of Discovery.

The study is based on the following sources –

Interviews of about 50 – 60 old people. Interviews of old people from outside the four villages were also recorded.

Household surveys in the four villages.

Books and journals were also used to understand the issues in depth.

We took advice from doctors, professors, organic farmers.

Some friends helped us search the internet. Due to electricity problems we could not do this ourselves.

Last year while learning about malnutrition and other health problems we surveyed the children of surrounding villages, taking their weights. We were shocked to see the extent of malnutrition. We saw children of 3 - 4 years who could not stand up. There were many children with Grade IV malnutrition. Many children from this group died after our survey. We reported this in papers and also to local officials.

On the 15th August we took a pledge to remove malnutrition and free the farms from market dependency. We used the opportunity of the Children's Science Congress to go into the reasons of such wide spread malnutrition in our area, in depth.

We began by interviewing the old people of the villages to find out what they thought about the whole issue. About 50 old people were interviewed. Almost all of them were of the opinion that the quality of food had gone down in terms of quantity, quality and variety. They were the generation brought up on milk, ghee and curd. Even the poor in the village got a share of all this and at least pure butter milk was in abundance for everybody.

They also talked about the increased dependence on cash which was forcing everybody into cash crops and making farming totally dependent on the market. Farming which was once supposed to be an enterprise where - in people enjoyed independence, was now totally at the mercy of moneylenders and market prices.

They were convinced that due to the use of chemical fertilizers and hybrid seeds, which were promoted by Govt. agencies in the beginning, had led to loss of fertility of the soil. It was difficult for our young minds to digest what these old people were telling us. We were almost convinced that the adivasis of our area were going ahead on the development road – ***what about all the motorcycles, tractors, threshers, tube wells, pumps and irrigated fields, and quintals of cotton and soybean that we were selling by tractors, that we have been seeing since childhood ?***

We undertook about 15 – 16 household surveys to validate these claims. A lot of food availability surveys were conducted. After these surveys we realized that behind the seeming prosperity there was severe food insecurity.

We found that -

There were about **120** types of food items which people ate of which now only **36** types were available. Most of the fruits, leafy vegetables, gums, honey, meat etc. available in the past have never been seen by the present generation. All these provided rare minerals, proteins, fats.

In most households only 7.14 kg pulses/person/year was available as against the required 22 – 27 kg/ person/ year(ICDS) .

Availability of milk and milk products had gone down drastically. Out of the 73% people who had got milk in there childhood only 17.39% are getting it now.

Where did all this vanish and why ?

We talked to people about this. About 40 years ago the govt. started promoting chemical fertilizers and hybrid seeds. The forests also started depleting about this time due to the pressure of urbanization and population. Since then it has been a down slide. As dependency on the market increased people were forced to go in for cash crops. Cash crops meant loans at interests as high as 150%, dependency on the market, monoculture and depletion of the soil fertility. Before they realized people were in debt but started enjoying playing with cash. To repay loans more cash crops. This becomes a vicious cycle.

Also the mainstreaming pressure (including our education system) forced the people to reject their traditional knowledge. They were made to lose faith in their knowledge systems and believe in the ideas being promoted by the market and Govt. agencies in tandem.

The main lesson that we learnt at the end of the exercise were that –

- 3 Due to the depletion of farm and forest biodiversity about 54% of our food items have gone.
Of the 65 items that we got now only 9 remain, i.e. an 87% decrease.
Now 75% of our food items come from the farm.
- 3 These food crops are fast losing out to cash crops as market dependency is increasing in all aspects of our lives from clothes to health.
- 3 Coarse grain and millets like *bhadi* which provided food security in droughts or scanty rainfall years are almost on the verge of vanishing.
- 3 The quality of the soil has depleted, leading to loss of nutritional content of food.
- 3 Cash crops now occupy the most fertile lands, leaving second grade land for food crops. Wheat is replacing traditional grains where irrigation's is there.
- 3 The diversity in crops ensured that some crops will grow well in spite of changes in monsoons. Now with single crops occupying full fields the bad effects of erratic monsoons is more pronounced.

Conclusions

The loss of bio diversity has led to severe food insecurity. The quality, quantity and variety of food has decreased.

Adivasis and other small and marginal farmers are at the mercy of the market and dole provided by Govt. agencies.

If nothing is done then the future is bleak for farmers.

What is to be done ?

- 3 A strong campaign to save the farms from the clutches of the market and make the farmer independent, by promoting natural and organic farming techniques.
- 3 Fight malnutrition by making people aware about proper diet and importance of growing diverse food crops.
- 3 Awareness building programme in schools.
- 3 Incorporating related topics in the school curriculum.
- 3 Regenerate and save existing forest areas.
- 3 Re establish the self esteem of the farmer and adivasis. Revive useful traditional farming practices.

What we are doing ?

- 3 Natural farming on our campus.
- 3 School awareness programme.
- 3 Motivating families who have malnourished children to give special food preparations and grow vegetables. Children learnt to make *sattoo* and even gave it to many families.
- 3 Spreading the word through Baal – Melas.
- 3 Continue our research on this and related topics.
- 3 Motivate children and adults to adopt natural farming practices

Appendix II

Spreading the message of Organic Farming through Independence Day celebrations with a difference

Aazadi of a different kind....@adharshila.learningcentresakad_in_badwanidistrict_mp.ind

Flag hoisting on a barren piece of land on 15th August..

Part I

In the Kaveri group everybody is laughing at Mangala's drawing of the flag.

Why are you laughing?

A woman is unfurling the flag in Divya's drawing! They exclaimed and started laughing again.

So what? Why do you think a woman cannot do the flag hoisting?

This set the teacher thinking and it was decided that this year the flag hoisting would be done by a woman.

So it was that Sumli Bai, an activist of the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan hoisted the flag this year and told the children about the various freedom fighters and adivasi leaders who laid their lives fighting for justice for their people.

Part II

Hey, where are we? Why are we in this field rather than being near the school building ?

And what's this ? No flowers or decoration around the flag ? Five six types of leaves are placed at the base. Something in a bucket nearby is stinking.

It has started to drizzle and no shelter around. Mukesh Bhai is talking about the problems of farmers and the crises of agriculture in general. The children are getting restless and Mukesh Bhai cuts short his speech. The children run for shelter. Many elders also follow suite.

But a small band remains in the rain. The teachers and elder students of Adharshila are there. So are some villagers and parents of children staying with us in Adharshila. They are digging the field and putting hemp plants in the shallow pits and covering it with soil. The hemp was grown on the field and cut just before flowering. Cow urine and pesticide created from various leaves are sprayed on the plot where the hemp is buried.

It is a small ceremony. Every body is drenched in the rain. Someone breaks a coconut and says – today we are starting a new experiment in organic farming to save farmers from the clutches of money lenders and companies and also to provide food security to the poor.

Children are shouting slogans –

Desi beej rakhna hai kisan ko bachana hai.

Jaivik Kheti karna hai, Gulami se bachana hai

We have to protect traditional seeds, and save the farmer.

We have to do organic farming and free ourselves from bondage).

The rain is there to bless us. If you believe in omens it's a good start.

It is a beautiful sight. The flag furling with all its glory amidst a dark sky and green fields all around. People drenched in the rain. Digging the field and shouting slogans. There is a romance about the whole scene.

A small but significant event. If we pursue what we have started then this 15th August will become a historic date.

Part III

After the children's performances and sweets we got to serious talk with the parents - all farmers. The mood had been set by the ceremony. There were long sermons on the ills of using chemical fertilizers and pesticides by all the parents inspite of the fact that all of them use these chemicals and are heavily into market propaganda.

Jayashree explained the main themes of organic farming. Most of the farmers were able to grasp this because they have seen chemical free farming themselves. Some of them still practice it in parts. She also told them some examples of Maharashtra where some farmers have taken yields to the tune of 3 ton in one acre. Or about 20 quintals jowar and toovar in one acre. Most people didn't believe this. We said that we don't believe this but want to try it on our land.

Six other farmers and parents of children studying here volunteered to try this experiment on ½ of ¼ acre land. A small start.