

# Beginning of Watershed Programme

Swati & Michael, Juna Mozda, September 1995

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Juna Mozda

Dear Friends,

Hello! Here are some more news from Mozda. We've had some feedback from friends and some feel that we write very long letters. Since we've written five long ones, we are writing a shorter one this time. At the same time we have tried to explore some broader issues in a bit more detail.

We have written earlier that we are in a dilemma about how much time we should spend on work at local level and work on issues concerning all of us at a much wider level. The significance for getting involved in such "outside" work is increasing as rapid and "dirty" industrialisation takes place.

In the next ten years, corporate sector is planning to invest huge amounts in Bharuch district and Gujarat state. In the process, they are getting wildlife sanctuaries denotified, destroying mangroves, taking away precious and scarce sweet water resources and simultaneously polluting soil, air, water and other living organisms including human beings.

One of the shocking things is that when not organized, the farmers are often readily selling-off their land to the industry and at other places they feel that they do not have the right to say no to industry. In a few years a huge chemical industrial estate will be established, only 65 km from Mozda. In it a plant is being imported from Norway to manufacture organochlorines. The plant was shut down in Norway as it was too polluting and unhealthy for the Norwegians.

At the moment we are trying to collect a bit of information about the industries nearby us.

Sincerely,



## Bundmaking

In Mozda, one of the main things we've done is encouraging bund-making. We've written about this earlier. This year there was a lot of rain in a very short period and this destroyed almost all crops except paddy. So people did not grow enough food for all year round. Therefore we decided to make bunds as a food-for-work programme. We had meetings with the farmers here and in general there was a positive response.

The way we worked was : we ask the farmers where they would like to make a bund, then try to understand the reasons for choosing the site, tried some persuasion if the site was not appropriate. Then we estimate the volume of work, distance of stones from the bunds and estimate the number of person-days of work needed to finish the bund. That many labourers would be 'sanctioned' to the farmer. The farmer would pay one

rupee per person-day of work done on his farm. Then we would mark the bund lines and tell him the measurements giving them a measured bamboo stick or so.

Thus about 25,000 cubic feet (about 800 cubic meters) of stone work was done with about 1270 person-days of work. Initially we planned to do 2400 person-days but due to lack of guaranteed funds we did not go up to that. Also, when we tried to persuade farmers to make new bunds on contours, it turned out to be a futile effort. And we felt all bunds should not be made in a traditional way only. Only one out of 23 farmers asked for a contour bund. At the end we distributed 3900 kg of wheat and 140 kg of chick-peas. To obtain wheat, our friends and well-wishers in Baroda worked hard to see to it that we got fairly good quality wheat at a very reasonable price.

Bund-making was not always very smooth. One afternoon a farmer came to us with a complaint that his neighbour had managed to get a bund demarcated that violated the actual boundary of his farm.

Next day at 6:30 in the morning I went there and 3-4 farmers came. In the beginning the discussion was carried on genially and cooperatively but slowly it got heated and then there was shouting and name-calling. I had to intervene a bit harshly and stop the fight and we decided not to make that bund till the issue was resolved. Another bund was demarcated instead and work begun on it. Also working all day in the hot summer sun (about 40 to 45°C) and often not enough food to eat at home made people slow in working. They still managed well and worked quite hard. We saw a lot of experience and quality in arranging the stones and in general making a good quality bund.

There were one or two incidents of some impropriety but they were very minor. People also tested us and our capacities many a times. There are many things still that we do not understand about them and they also do not understand why we do many things as we do them.

We feel that though they have a good understanding of the need of making bunds and choosing the site etc., they can not think much beyond their own farms and think of a complete watershed as a whole. Or perhaps they can not overcome the practical limitation of disagreement amongst neighbouring farmers about proper methods of diverting, distributing and channeling water. If we can create a situation, structure and feeling when this can be done, that would be real achievement. It will not be easy. We still have not been able to work on the above mentioned farm boundary disagreement as both of them are quite adamant.

If we are to carry on this work next year, we are now more prepared to do better planning, people's education, training etc. Still, we need to go with the

farmers on a trip to places where good work has been done through contour bunds and its effects are apparent to see and understand. We would welcome suggestions about this.

We would also need additional funds for this work if it is to be carried on and expanded. We have a feeling that if properly managed and implemented, this programme has a great potential to generate mass employment, improving the soil and conserving the nutrients. If you would like to send some donations or send us some addresses of people/agencies who can provide funds, we would be happy to have them. This year people from three neighbouring villages inquired whether we would extend this programme to their villages also. We worked only in village Mozda this year as we felt that in the beginning we should start with a small experiment. We would also need a lot more manpower to extend this work.

There are few things we need to overcome: bund making created a situation where people behaved as if we were 'giving' and they were 'taking'. This we feel is mainly because of the way in which government employees behave when they employ the people here. But this also created some tensions between our friends/neighbours and us. We also object to the position of 'giving' as perceived by the people. To counter these, we think we can take some people from here who will take part in fund-raising and we hope that they realize that we are simply facilitators and are not 'giving'. It seems that by our behaviour we can change this impression.

As we have been here in the village for four years now we feel we have learnt a lot about the difficulties—hardships of life here hence the way of life as well, we have also overcome some romanticism that we had in the beginning. We also have started realising the limitations of such a kind of village work. We see that the people for whom we advocate are not really always with us. Their direction is more or less same as those of the popular trend. At least the younger

generation. So we are odd people out in this world as well as the outside world. As one of our old friends said 'people like us have always been in minority - through the history'. Nevertheless learning about the minute details of nature, difficulties of living in forest, drudgeries involved in farming in this area and the human nature's striving for solutions and going forward in spite of the difficulties make life very interesting and beautiful.

## In Israel . . .

Invitation to travel to Israel came from the International Fellowship of Reconciliation to attend a training programme for nonviolence educators. The programme was hosted by an experimental village of Arabs and Jews living together. There on a hill with a beautiful view we learnt about various training techniques from all over the world. Later on I travelled in Israel among some friends and new contacts.

I travelled for about two weeks as a tourist to Jerusalem, the dead sea, the Red sea etc. Jerusalem creates so many impressions that it would be too difficult to write them down. But it was very interesting to see and feel the Asian character of the ancient and old markets and intensity of the orthodox Jews. On the other hand I felt very sad seeing the tension of the Arabs and their continuous awareness of being stopped by the police or the army for no reason.

Dead sea was a very interesting experience. It was the first time that I did not have to do anything to float in water!! Also the dry climate and rugged mountains surrounding were very much like home.

In the Red sea I saw the most beautiful fish I have ever seen in my life. Also the sea water was very clear and refreshing.

Apart from touring I could visit two kibbutzim and a few other places to learn about the life of Jews and Bedouin. Visiting and spending some time in a kibbutz was a long-standing dream come true. This was also the first time that I learnt of certain darker sides of kibbut-

zim. I never knew that kibbutzim played a major role in colonizing and capturing land from the Arabs. However it was sad to learn that growing individualism, self-centredness and obsession to make more money (and not sharing it with others) is bringing a lot of changes to the kibbutz life-style and the time does not seem too far away to many kibbutzniks when there will be no more kibbutzim!

I was very privileged to meet a varied group of kibbutzniks and discuss with them various aspects of kibbutz life-style. It was very interesting that though most of young people want to move out of the kibbutzim, there are some who still want to become new members.

I also learnt about the effects of new economics on the structure and survival of kibbutzim. There is a significant conflict between two schools of thought about economic viability of kibbutzim. I also learnt that from one point of view almost none of the Indian villages would be economically viable. But the fact that we somehow survive should tell something to these modern economists.

I was privileged to go to a research centre and meet some very friendly and active people as well as some Bedouin from the region of Negev/Nakab. I also had the pleasure of witnessing two important celebrations: one a Bar or Bet mitzvah and another a Bedouin feast to celebrate first birthday of a child.

I also learnt that there is a dispute about the concept of blooming of the desert Negev/Nakab. According to the Bedouin, the land or hills of Nakab/Negev are very fertile and they and the Nabateans had very simple and effective techniques to farm this "desert". Ever since Israel returned Sinai to Egypt, the Israeli army moved into the Nakab/Negev and the Bedouin had to move out and now they can not even build their houses on land they had been living on for generations. And since most of the knowledge of how to farm this arid land 'viably' has been lost, now there is considerable high-tech research going on to make the desert bloom again. In all this modern research, sustainability is obvi-

ously not a concern, but high profits is.

Whatever may be said, the Israelites are putting in a tremendous amount of work into making this arid zone more hospitable.

I also saw and experienced the undaunting spirit of the Israelites that has built this nation against so many

odds and I felt very privileged to visit Israel. I had the opportunity to learn how various things were built from scratch in Israel. It might be useful for us in Mozda as we often have to do that on a tiny scale as well.

Here we present last year's accounts of the work we've done.

<b>INCOME</b>		<u>Year 1994-'95</u> <b>EXPENSES</b>	
28,000.00	From donor agencies and personal donations	16,000.00	Wheat
		1,500.00	Chick-peas
		1,000.00	Overheads
		4,000.00	Travelling
		3,000.00	Communication
		500.00	Children's activities
		2,000.00	Medicines etc.
28,000.00	Total	28,000.00	Total

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