

The Story of Cows

Swati & Michael, Juna Mozda, September 1999

Mozda
September 1999

Dear Friends,
Hello.

Every time we sit to write this letter/report, the whole year passes in front of our eyes. Some important things that we were not aware at that time are realised now, we can see our limitations and of this work, realise mistakes. The process of writing this letter amidst the natural beauty of Mozda is often touching and increases our understanding.

As time passes, we are learning to divide our time between PSS and Mozda. Also, when we are not here, people have started doing things on their own initiative. All this work would not have been possible without the support of a large number of people and we are grateful to all of them.

Last year could have been called a 'year of crises'. Unexpected things happened, serious illnesses came, we were confronted with things we had never thought of and events which shook us. We have learnt a great deal from all these, made mistakes and moved on. The love and support we have received in such times has been heartwarming.

We are also grateful to those friends who have supported us financially. They have reinforced our belief that wherever sincere work is being done, funds are not a problem.

With warm regards to everyone,



Soil and Water Conservation

Like every year, we managed to do this activity in Mozda and Pansar villages. The volunteers have taken over almost all activities of estimating and designing the bunds along with the farmers.

We have helped construct mud bunds on half of the land in Pansar village for two years. However, even after compacting, we saw that these bunds were not of significant help in preventing soil runoff. Therefore during the second year we had made a condition that construction of mud bunds would be supported only if trees were planted along the bunds. Planting trees was not satisfactorily done in these years and so we did not support any mud bunds this year and will not do so in the next 2-3 years till the planted trees are a bit bigger. This year, we were a bit late and saplings of teak and bamboo were not available readily.

All this meant only those farmers who had stones on their fields could make

bunds, so the total number of farmers who made bunds reduced substantially this year. We've managed organising plantation of 3,500 trees of local variety. Some of these were planted next to their homes and others were planted along the border of their farms.

In numbers—A total of 1605 cubic metres of stone work was done by 96 farmers in two villages. Total length of bunds was 3257 metres and this provided protection to around 185 acres of land generating about 1200 person-days of labour. The cash contribution of farmers in this activity was Rs. 4739/- and 7289 kg. of wheat was distributed.

This year there were requests from two other villages for making bunds, however, the requests came very late and there was no time to complete everything, so we did not do any of it. Perhaps this year we will.

Well-digging

Last year we had written about digging a well in Mozda. The well was dug, but construction could not be completed before monsoon began. This year con-

struction was done and seventeen families participated in it. They brought sand and large stones from the riverbed, crushed and arranged the stones, worked with the masons etc. The masons were also selected by the farmers themselves. When the masons found that this well was not supported by government funds but was largely being built by the farmers' efforts, they also charged less than normal. We supported the well by contributing cash towards transportation, buying cement and other related material. We also organised acquiring the right material and consulting engineers for appropriate construction of the well. The families who dug the well also put in a cash contribution of Rs. 3,000 (about 10% of total cash expense). These families were supported by 1,061 kg of wheat against their labour.

This well will be used by these seventeen families for drinking water as well as for supplementary crops of wheat, vegetables, mung beans etc. in winter and summer.

Women's Cooperative



We had organised the people's tribunal on pollution issues just when pigeon peas should have been bought. Because of this and some other reasons listed below a limited amount of dal was made this year.

1. It is difficult to market dal, living in such an interior area
2. To manage production as well as marketing demands a lot of energy and time. The local people are helping but are not yet ready to take full responsibility
3. The women do not like to make dal of urban quality! They find it too tedious and so keep on delaying it
4. The local-indigenous variety of pigeon peas have almost 20 % rotten peas. So paying for hand-processing, transport to urban areas etc. makes this dal a bit expensive. This year only 400 kg of peas were processed to make dal. However, the project is self-sufficient and does not need

external financial support except for initial investment of buying peas.



Vedchhi Pradesh Seva Samiti (VPSS) at Valod in Surat district has been active amongst the tribal women of that area for some time now. We wanted to organise a trip there so that the members of the cooperative here could meet the women, interact with them and learn from them (or each other). Thus a trip to Ukai, Unai and Vedchhi was organised. VPSS had organised a gathering of their women co-op members at Ambach village. Women from Mozda participated in a meeting of savings groups, milk co-operatives. There were individual interactions as well as with the organisers. We also had the opportunity to see other constructive activities organised by the institution as well as the area. Women also visited the Lijjat Papad co-op, which is run and organised by women only, doing business in crores, exporting papad. Seeing so many different programmes, activities organised by women breathed more confidence in the women Mozda.

While returning from the trip, the women who are normally very quiet were chattering away and the general opinion turned out to be that though it was good to see a city during first trip (last year), they would anytime prefer rural, agriculture based areas to the city. Other things mentioned were:

- * We learnt a lot of useful things for life
- * We managed to finish the trip without any fear or disturbance
- * They also discussed what activities they could do when they go back home.

Women also spontaneously created a song while returning and sang it all the way home. There were many meetings amongst them later on and they completed dal-making with a new enthusiasm. The women participated in the monthly meetings with a renewed vigour.

Savings and Cow project

Women of the co-op have been saving for the past three years. Women discussed that these savings should be used to purchase something which would in turn generate more income. After prolonged discussions about various options and pros and cons, it was decided to purchase cows. After a lot of talk and questioning we found that buying a cow on their own would be impossible for them. So we organised the finances so that they would make a down payment of a thousand rupees, another 1500 would be arranged as a loan and 3000 would be a subsidy. The loan would be repaid from sale of milk and would be used as a revolving fund. After talking to other farmers' experiences in the area, it was decided to buy cows of Gir breed.

Apart from an increase in income from sale of milk and consequent benefits accruing to the families we also have other thoughts in mind—

1. Life here could become more self-sufficient and farming more 'efficient'. Having cows will probably help in reducing seasonal migration as well. The Gir breed may also help in improving local variety of cows/ bullocks, with improved use of animal draft power.
2. Through proper care of cows, use of cow-urine and dung augmenting their traditional natural farming techniques may help increase their food production, reduce dependence on the forest a little and help improve nourishment levels in the daily life.
3. It is difficult for women to go for jobs as well as do household activities. But taking care of cows can be done while carrying out household activities. Also, having the cow in the woman's name, she has a greater right over the income.
4. There are many buffaloes in the area. But getting cows means people, especially children, will get cow's milk (which is of better quality). Also, there will be less need to purchase bullocks and so on.

This experiment of animal husbandry has been possible due to help of

Nivalda dairy (a local dairy) and the enthusiasm of women. The dairy staff has been very helpful in purchase of cows, training of care of cows etc. The subsidy and loan part was organised with the help of a trust in Bombay. Using the savings and collecting Rs. 1000/- from each member was also a special occasion. It was a touching experience to see how these women gathered their share for the purchase of cow. We realised, people, especially women who generate income from manual labour have much greater value to every rupee earned.

The day when cows arrived at the women's homes, there was a special glow on their faces. They were full of happiness and satisfaction.

Paryavaran Suraksha Samiti

Gujarat is on a path of intensive industrial development and is proud of it. On the down side of it, the environs surrounding industrial areas are being destroyed and may soon be at the point of no return. We have written about some of the issues we are involved in, in the last letter.

In January, we organised a People's tribunal on various issues affecting the people living around industrial estates. Various presentations were made on pollution in Vapi, Ankleshwar and Nandesari industrial estates, as well as on issues like Right To Information, Chrome pollution, Mining and Power Generation pollution and so on. The experts present made investigative trips to all the areas affected and gave their considered opinion. The report of the tribunal will be out soon.

We are not writing about each presentation in detail because the detailed PSS report on the People's Tribunal (titled 'Digging Our Own Grave') has reached almost all of you. If any of you have not received it, please let us know, we will send you a copy.

In August, we organised an activists' workshop in Ahmedabad on inad-

equacy of waste treatment technologies and alternatives to these. A well-known scientist from Greenpeace acted as the main resource person. Students, activists, social workers, intellectuals took part in this programme.

Other Activities

- * On 6th December we hosted a meeting of 7-8 like-minded groups of Bharuch-Narmada districts in Mozda
- * A student of Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Bombay) came to stay and work with us for a month as a part of her field experience
- * Due to our travelling, we are not able to give enough time to the kitchen garden, but the nature does its work. The trees planted 3 years ago have taken root. In monsoon we get around ten vegetables, maize etc. and papayas occassionally
- * A team with Gandhian background came from France to film about work of PSS and Mozda. Also a few journalists and researchers have visited us
- * Our health activity has suffered due to our irregular stay here. However, patients do come when we are here
- * Children are regular 'guests' in monsoon, for 'reading' books, playing games etc.
- * Mozda area has been a sanctuary for sometime. However, as we have written in earlier letters that people did not know about it for a long time and also laws for protected areas were not really implemented so far. Now they are beginning to be implemented. This has created a lot of doubt about the future in the people's mind here. We are looking for ways that conservation of nature and people's rights and life-styles can be maintained together
- * We have been trying to organise solar lighting at our home in Mozda for some time now. This year we have begun. As we have written earlier, the mains electricity from the Gujarat Electricity Board is very

irregular and there was no electricity for a whole month. A well wisher has supported this effort by giving some solar panels(the main investment) and now we are acquiring other components of the system. Because of our lifestyle, we would be happy if we would use solar electricity instead of mains

- * This year we had to face the first death related to a snake bite in our hamlet. Last year a boy in the next hamlet died of snake bite in summer. But this girl, fourteen years of age, our neighbour at the old house and a very lively child, had gone to gather fodder for the animals, was bitten by a snake on her way back home. We were not in Mozda. The parents and neighbours tried various local medicines but did not go to a doctor. The child survived for 15 hours after the bite and was crying to be saved. . .

A bad health service infrastructure and unreliability of doctors are the main reason why people themselves did not go to the doctor.

One feels extremely helpless in such situations.

- * Women activists of Gujarat Sarvodaya Mandal gathered around Respected Vimalatai for three days in April. In the camp, Respected Vimalatai explained to us the deeper meaning of spirituality in our day-to-day life and in social change, importance of 'chitta-shuddhi' (purity of consciousness) in self-development in her soft and learned manner. She communicated deeper truths and immense affection through her whole being. A mysterious and distant subject such as spirituality was made quite simple for us to grasp with depth and sincerity. I would call these three days of the camp as the highlight of this year as we got very valuable insights.

