

A Process Documentation of the Art Workshops conducted in MP and Chhattisgarh
during 2009 – 2010

The very concept of conducting 8 Art Workshops in MP/Chattisgarh has been a milestone in the educational realm in the areas where NEG-FIRE has its Partner NGOs active. At the backdrop of these workshops and the experiences involved, this paper is a documentation of the processes involved in the workshops. The workshops were conducted in Jhabua district of MP with Bhil tribe, Mandla and Kawardha district of MP and Chattisgarh with baiga tribe in a total of 6 villages. A total of 850 children, 65 teachers and 233 community members participated in these workshops.

The paper includes a discussion on the following:

- The Module of the Workshop, the manner in which the programmes were conducted.
- Major successes of the workshops
- Limitations
- Findings on Baigha and Bhil communities' attitudes towards art
- Resource teams: The Persons identified as resource person and short notes on them
- Concluding notes on children/ teachers/community members' experiences

1. The Workshop Module and the Methodology

The primary objective of the workshop was to allow the participants to become familiar with oneself through different mediums in an atmosphere of freedom and love. It aimed at orienting one towards a deeper outlook of oneself, nature and other persons and appreciate the beauty buried in each of these components. Very often the practices of everyday life and cultural practices alienates one from oneself, one's roots and also from nature and the environment around us. In the villages, due to lack of resources and a variety of other reasons, children tend to suffer within the existing schooling system. The government schools in the

villages tend to sometimes become the hub of inaction and routine studies, thus disallowing any creative pursuits. In the name of education the children are often driven away from all that is natural to them; their spontaneity, their innovation, play and fun and their attachment to nature. In this background, the very idea of conducting these workshops resulted from a need for introducing multiple possibilities into the school curriculum, so that learning is freed from its mundane-ness, and becomes a creative and interesting process. The art workshops have been conducted in the light of this context.

Module of the residential Workshop

DAY I

Time- 8.30 am

The workshop was opened informally by exchanging names with each and every participant. There was no formality or routine involved. The entire workshop was a process of creating a space which is deeply rooted in interpersonal relationships, love, encouragement, a sense of wonder, and exchange of energy. Therefore, there was no teacher student relationship. (The resource person introduced himself as 'Blaise Bhai').

After this general introduction an introduction to the entire programme was given in brief. The participants were told that the workshop is a process of getting in touch with the creative spirit in each of us. Everyone is an artist and anything that we do from our heart is art; therefore all of us are artists in some way or the other. However, here we are going to deal with different materials and so it is a process of self exploration through different mediums, getting in touch with the sensations and thus sailing into the inner self. There will be no judgment given on the work done or the end results. Everything that you do is good because it evolves from the beautiful inner self of yours. Therefore, the workshop should not be seen as a competition. There will be no time-table, no compulsions, and no common lectures. There will be brief demonstrations when new mediums are introduced. However, the resource person will be constantly facilitating and helping everybody through this process of personal exploration.

The workshop also encouraged personal interactions with each participant. Through these interactions people's fears and hesitations were removed.

With this introduction, the participants were made to stand in a circle, holding each others' hands and observing a few minutes of silence to feel and experience the presence of each other. With eyes shut, participants were asked to gently press the hand of the person standing next to them as a gesture of passing energy, which was to be carried forward in a circular manner. This is an exercise that helps create a web of positive energy and motivation.

After these preliminary interactions the raw materials for the first exercise were distributed. For the first exercise, Sketch book, 2B and 6B pencils, eraser and pencil sharpener were given to each participant.

Exercise 1. To draw from one's own imagination. No copy work, no copying from someone else's drawing. No scale/ geometrical instruments were permitted for this exercise. The idea was to draw freely without the use of instruments to give true expression to and explore one's creative side. This allows each person to become aware of the potentialities within and explore the numerous visuals and forms deeply buried at the sub-conscious level. It is, therefore, a process of self-discovery. The participants were permitted to make anything and this exercise was an entry point into the creative realm within.

Exercise 2. In the sketch book different columns of the same size were drawn. Then participants were asked to draw free-hand boxes of the size of a small eraser. The exercise involved filling each of the boxes with different kinds of lines: one box will have straight vertical lines-all drawn in the same thickness and same distance. Another box will have horizontal lines, another one diagonal lines, cross lines, hatch lines, wavy lines, circles, triangles, spiral, and the list goes on. Eventually the geometrical and the organic can merge and the possibilities become unlimited. Each box becomes a pattern. One can then look into nature and the lines existing in different spaces, for instance, the patterns on a leaf, on the bark of a tree, the formation of grass, the formation of branches etc. The possibilities are beyond narration.

Exercise 3: In this exercise, similar boxes are created again in several rows. This exercise is to create tonal variations/different shades. It is aimed at having a better understanding of light and shade. The first box will be filled with the lightest shade and the next box will have darker tone and as it progresses the tonal darkness increases and the last box will have the darkest tone. In each box the entire space has to maintain its own distinct intensity. The reversal of the same exercise is also done. In a row there can be several shades. The shades are created by the variation in the force you give on the pencil.

Exercise 4: In this exercise, each person is given a newspaper. They were asked to spread it and start drawing lines of various dimensions on the sheet. They can be straight lines, circular lines, or whatever. It is an exercise to free yourself from the fear of drawing. It also makes your hand flexible. Eventually one gets into a silence and goes deep within oneself. Eventually, there will be some forms evolving on the paper and one can follow up the forms and keep drawing.

In between these exercises, one common action song was taught to the group. After a brief tea-break, the exercises continued till lunch time.

Lunch Break at 1.00 pm (1 hr)

Exercise 5: Post lunch break, participants who wanted to continue drawing with pencils were allowed to do so, while a new exercise using clay was introduced to others in the group. Clay was diluted in water and one was asked to paint with this monochrome using one's finger. A demonstration was given. One can also use a paintbrush to paint.

Exercise 6: The clay exercise was extended to include one more color (blue/black). For the rest of the day the participants were free to explore any of these mediums.

The session was ended with one more action song.

After 5.30 pm the group engaged in songs and games. Local games were encouraged.

After dinner the entire group sat together for some relaxed funtime involving singing and dance.

DAY II

(Wherever the group agreed, we had a barefoot nature walk, to absorb nature while listening to the birds, watching trees and the compositions of nature)

Breakfast

8.30 am

The day began with observing a little silence sitting in a circle and holding hands.

Exercise 7: Crayons are distributed and the participants are asked to make drawings using crayon pencils. A demonstration in terms of how to use the crayons is given.

This exercise is followed by an action song.

Exercise 8: Creating visuals with leaves on paper. The purpose is to allow persons to observe various colours in leaves, the dimensions and forms of leaves. They are given a demonstration and then left free to collect leaves of different shapes, colors and sizes. The leaves are then pasted on paper to give it any shape one wants.

Lunch

Exercise 9: Liquid paint colours are introduced. Demonstration of how to make colours using three primary colours mixed with white is given. The participants are given brushes and white sheets to explore the world of colors. They are encouraged to paint anything they want. The entire evening is spent doing this exercise, so that they become familiar with this medium.

DAY III

The same as yesterday.

Exercise 10: The participants are allowed to explore any of the mediums they have already been introduced to. Those who wanted to explore colours in more depth were allowed to do so.

Tea break, followed by an action song.

Lunch

Exercise 11: Clay Modeling- They are given demonstration on preparing clay and creating three dimensional forms out of them. This exercise is followed the entire afternoon. However, anyone who wants to go back to the earlier materials are free to do so.

DAY IV

Exercise 12: Plaster of Paris is introduced. The participants are given galvanized wire and jute coir. They explore these materials evolving different forms out of them.

Demonstration on how to use the plaster and make three dimensional forms with the help of the armature created with the wire is given.

Tea break followed by an action song.

Exercise 13: Collage making is introduced. The participants are given paper cuttings to be put on big sheets for making collages. Plantain fibre and other locally found materials are also used.

Lunch break

Further work on plaster works continues.

Exercise 14: The participants are given cardboard boxes to be painted in groups. The idea is to paint the whole box using colours, cloth pieces from tailoring shops, etc. Here the cloth pieces function as substitutes to colors. This is a group activity and the participants are free to create their own groups.

Action Song

DAY V

Exercise 15: The participants are divided into groups and areas are allotted to them in the locality where the workshop is being conducted. Each group has to create a large scale

installation. The work has to be in relation with the location. It can also involve as many people living in the surroundings of that work as possible. This work will continue till the end of the workshop.

Exercise 16: A Demonstration on stencil making

Lunch

Continuation of the remaining works

Exercise 17: Mask making (either with balloon and papers/ plaster and bandage cloth on face)

DAY VI

Continuation of the group project

Exercise 18: A walk to the surroundings/jungle in cases where it is accessible by foot. The purpose of this exercise is to go to the jungle and collect as many interesting things as possible. They can be dry barks, branches, wooden logs, skulls, skeleton, dry leaves, dry flowers, etc. They are brought back to the venue and they can start creating forms using coir, mud, colours and so on out of the materials.

Lunch break

Exercise 18 continues post lunch. Once these materials are brought to the venue they become common resource that can be used by anyone in the group.

A final touch is given to the unfinished works by the participants.

DAY VII

Exercise 19: Painting on the wall

Continuation of the Group installation at the site.

Lunch

Exercise 20: Cement casting in sand...demonstration cum activities.

DAY VIII

Day of Picnic (Half Day)

Morning hours are spent in the completion of the pending works.

Wall painting, cardboard painting, plaster of Paris works, or even the group work.

Second half is spent on picnic.

DAY IX

The entire day is spent on finishing the works and preparing the final display.

DAY X

The Day of Display. Early morning everyone is engaged in displaying their works. Display itself as a work of art.

The display is open for public view.

Lunch and photo session.

Farewell.

The above Module was used for the Residential Workshop limited to a group of 25-30 people. However, none of the workshops have a fixed module. Though the patterns are quite similar and the mediums used are the same or similar, the order is not fixed. The procedure is set according to the response and enthusiasm of the participants.

Out of the 8 workshops conducted in MP/CG, except four workshops, the rest were conducted for large groups of children and community members. In those workshops the resource person conducted the workshops in one place for two-three days and moved on to another place. The participants in such workshops usually belong to the same village and so the programme is not residential. The module of the 2/3 days' workshop is as follows:

DAY I

The initial introduction is the same.

Exercise 1: The sketch book, pencils, eraser, and sharpener are distributed and they are encouraged to make any drawings.

Exercise 2. Drawings by clay slip and finger .

Exercise 3: Collage with leaves

Lunch

Exercise 4: Clay modeling

Action songs

Exercise 5: Painting

DAY II

Exercise 6: Painting continues.

Lunch

Action songs

Exercise 7: Groups works – on card board boxes, with cloth pieces also.

Display of the Works

(If there is a third day)

DAY III

Exercise 8: Galvanised wire and jute coir and wastematerials.

Sometimes plaster of paris is also provided.

A game is taught.

2. Major successes of the workshops:

The workshops generally focused on the free spirit of the participants to be explored within free spaces. The content of the module and the mediums used worked well with majority of the participants. Some of the successes of the workshop are:

- The participants' freedom of expression
- The absence of a fixed routine and rigid programme style.
- The inter-personal relationship between the participants and the facilitator .
- Participants are able to work and interact freely.
- Since it involves one's own exploration everyone takes a lot of interest in it.
- The mediums used are low-cost and there is stress on using materials that are locally available.
- The emphasis on involving anyone who walks into the venue.
- The emphasis on calling the facilitator Bhai/Bhaiyya. It made the participants very comfortable.
- The decision of the facilitator to stay with the participants/ to eat with them and to become one with them. It made a huge difference in the interaction and also in developing the inner freedom.
- There is an emphasis on the reuse of waste/discarded materials and converting them to interesting/creative products.
- Since there was no compulsion on the methods, no topics, no comparisons, they could evolve the visuals in their own manner .
- The loose structure; the workshop could embrace a lot more people as participants than just the number allotted for the workshop.

- Conducting the workshop in the villages, so that the villagers could actively participate.

Limitations:

There were things that could have been differently done in the workshops thereby altering the results:

- In some places the people were not organized prior to commencement of the programme, due to which there was a wastage of time and energy.
- In some places there were very few persons from the organization to assist the facilitator and consequently there was a wastage of time and energy.

Findings on the Bhil and Baiga communities' attitude towards art:

The workshops did not impose any particular style, nor did it insist on teaching any style or technique. No themes were suggested, and the only idea was to draw, paint or create anything they like. The objective of the module was to allow the participants to come out with their own unique style. In both the Bhil and the Baigha communities, the style remained quite similar and were spontaneous expressions of feelings connected to their immediate life situations. In general both these communities seem to lack any definite expression of art either in the form of paintings or visuals, sculptures etc. The only thing that is artistically striking is the beautiful structure and design of Baigha houses. They are more neatly done than that of the Bhils. The entire house itself is a work of art.

During the workshops, the subjects chosen by the participants were mostly centered upon the elements of nature like trees, flowers, birds, animals and even human beings. The colors used were mostly primary colors. They never used color for the background. They do not seem to have a concept of background/ foreground. At the most, dots were used to give a sense of space around any structure or drawing. Their sense of composition is quite unique and very indigenous. Therefore, the influence of photos and posters is unseen in their expressions. The forms are quite sculptural. It is difficult to talk about the difference in style of the Baigas and

Bhils. The overall style that is prevalent among the tribals of MP/CG, including the Gonds is quite similar.

There is a simplicity in their expressions and styles, often lacking structure; the animals could be upside down, there may be birds larger than the trees and so on. Therefore, their paintings seem to be spontaneous expressions of the artists.

Another point to be noted is the influence of the process Hinduisation that was visible in some of the works, particularly those of the boys. Many Hindu deities were part of their work on clay modeling. The elders, on the contrary, rarely expressed an inclination towards religious based subjects.

Art has been an integral part of the rural life. There is a sense of beauty, aesthetics and rhythm in the lives of tribals. In the absence of art and artistic explorations of their emotions, life could have been quite different. Though the language of the facilitator was sometimes not completely comprehensible to some of the participants, yet they were completely involved in the process.

Here, some of the expressions by children should be pointed out. Children were mostly minimalist in their presentations. There was no sense of a conventional composition. They would just depict one or two items, like a tree, a flower, a fish, an ox, a bird, or a house. Sometimes there will be many elements on the same sheet but they need not be interconnected. Human figures with a house, a man with oxen; these were some of the common features. Landscape with a range of mountains and the Sun were also seen repeatedly. The page was not crowded. They did not feel the need to fill the page. There were a lot of abstract elements as well. Semi-geometrical forms with organic elements were common features. Some children displayed an unusual potential in depicting their feelings through an intense use of colors. Due to the absence of an external intervention, their expressions were pure and authentic reflections of their inner world.

Resource teams: The Persons identified and short notes on them

The Team of the Teachers:

1. Guni Ram (NGO: Gram Sewak) - Daldali: He has been part of all the workshops in Chatisgarh. He is a team member of the Organisation called Gramsevak. He is one among the adults who has really developed a taste for really involving in the whole process. Once he starts painting he can go on for the whole day. He says it is a very relaxing process and he enjoys doing it.

2. Ugresh Kumar Yadav (NGO: GS)– Peeperkutta: He has an enthusiasm to do paintings and drawings in a depth dimension. His visuals expressions are at a very subconscious level. The elements that he uses belong to a dream world. He is quite convinced of the significance of artistic explorations in life.

3. Ghanashyam Yadav (NGO: SYM) –Dhurkutta: He is a rare sight when he paints. He forgets food and even the presence of others standing close to him. He gets totally engrossed in the work. His visuals are generally animals and human portraits. The animals are quite abstract, but with intense colors.

4. Ganpath (NGO: SYM) – Dhurkutta: He is a very enthusiastic person with a lot of potentialities. He has a special inclination towards nature and its elements. I have taken note of the way he makes flowers.

5. Vaidya (A School Teacher in Peeprkutta): He has been to our workshops only once. He was unable to spend the entire 10 days with us though he did not want to go back. He was so enthusiastic about every exercise that he got involved in the works very intensely. He felt the need to develop these skills in order to be efficient in his teaching profession. I found a special energy in him all the time.

6. Rajendar from Mavai: He also has shown special interest and intense energy in involving with his works.

7. Bahadur Damor (NGO: Mission Thandla Road): A quite person but with a special talent for art. He goes into precision with intensity. I found him very much involved with the children also. The children belonging to his class seemed to be very expressive and technically better.

8. Marshal the Junior (NGO: Mission Thandla): He also is a very quite person. I liked the way he was involved in the workshop for teachers. He showed a gradual progress in the manner in which he picked up the skill. He was able to enter into a deeper level of experiencing himself through various mediums.

9. Joseph Buria (Miatti, Thandla): He is a very potential person. I have noticed the way he used to create. He seems to be a confused person. Perhaps more exploration of himself through this medium may bring more clarity into his life.

Extra: Subhash (NGO: Mission Thandla): He has been part of three Workshops. There is immense potentiality in him and it can be tapped and channelized.

The Team of the Students:

1. Bharat Kumar (Miatti, Thandla): Probably one of the most talented among all the children in the workshops. He has an unusual maturity and perception. He has multiple talents with a convincing leadership quality.

2. Guddu Kumar (Miatti): He seemed to be quite eccentric with a good sense of forms and colors. He seemed to be quite interested in the process and its relation to himself.

3. Rajesh Kumar (Miatti): A very gentle boy. He was a guiding spirit in his group works and moreover he was able to grow deeper in the process. There is tremendous openness to learn more.

4. Puppy Kumari (Timrupaada, Thandla): One of the older girls. Initially she was a very shy person. The art workshops have brought a lot of inner freedom to her. I was quite impressed by the progress she made in her expressions as well as interactions.

5. Suneethi Kumari (Bilgaon, Mavai): She is very shy and quite. However, she was very intense in her works. She went on painting in a non-stop manner. Her forms were intense with a lot of thick colors. She really enjoyed the process of being involved with different mediums.

6. Ramcharan (Bilggaon, Mavai): He has not yet completed his 10th. A quiet and shy person. When he came to Loop for the teachers' Workshop he showed great interest in art. He was so enthusiastic about it that he worked hard from early morning till he went to bed. I always found him either working on his own or copying others works in order to develop techniques and ideas.

7. Pashum (Loop Ashram, Chilpi): He has leadership qualities while he also showed potentialities in art.

8. Bindu (Loop School, from Salewara): Very few girls in Loop had the willingness to stay in the workshop. Most of the girls were extremely withdrawn and shy. Bindu is the girl who showed interest and openness towards this process. She made a lot of good paintings.

9. Amarvati (Dhurkutta): She had been to the Workshop for children held in Chilpi. She is a very outgoing person with multiple talents. Even when workshop was conducted in her village she was actively present and did a few good works.

10. Sonmati (Dhurkutta, Girls' Ashram): A potential person with a very good sense of color and composition. She can do well if she is regular with practices.

Extra: Pinki (Timripaada, Thandla): She is a grown up girl. Though a first timer she showed a lot interest and made a few works of good quality.

Kamlesh (Timripaada, Thandla): Quite an active boy with a sense of composition different from other children.

Tihiya Kumar (Timripaada): A quite fellow with unusual passion for painting. He painted non-stop in all the three days of the workshop for community. Very good paintings with strong colours and compositions. He can evolve as a very talented person if he gets the opportunity.

The Team of the Community members:

1. Bhuri (Wife of Bahadur, Timrupada): Though she did not have much time to be part of the Workshop, she made really a good composition by creating a few works of quality. She has good sense of colours and compositions. She was quite passionate about it that even at night she made some paintings and plaster works.

2. Sita (The wife of the mason, Timrupada): She came only for one sitting and made some of the best paintings of the workshops. I was quite delighted by the way she was involved with the works.

3. Mariya (Miatti, Thandla): She is very potential. She was very shy to start with exploring the possibilities. However, once she began, her talents were unfolding.

4. Bhagatsingh (Koylari, Daldali) Bhagatsingh: is a young man working in the Boxite mine which is spreading in the Daldali area drawing a lot of tribal men and women as laborers. On the first day of the three days workshop he came back from labor straight to the school where the workshop was going on. He came and sat for a while just releasing his tiredness. I kept colors, brushes and paper beside him, allowing him to paint whenever he felt the need to. He painted with such delight that he remained for two hours until it became dark. The next two days he came straight from the mines to the school and painted silently for two hours and went home. He must have had a spiritual experience over there, an experience of being freed from tiredness and gaining inner peace and joy. I did not find any other reason why he stayed for so long.

5. Rajju Singh Dhurwe (Loop, Chilpi): I encountered him on the road where the villagers had gathered to collect the cheque of NREGA. He seemed to be a potential artist with a good sense of the process.

6: Munshi (Koylari)/ Karelal (Bilgaon, Mavai): He came only for one sitting. He made a few good paintings. I noticed a special engagement in his works and an unusual comment on lines and brush strokes.

6. Dhurkutta (The Art Teacher): I will have to get his name. He is a person with ideas and certain level of commitment.

7. Gauthur Dhurve (Loop, Chilpi) / Dasru Dhurve(Loop): When he painted he was quite drunk. However, he is a man an artistic sense. He being Baigha, is not much exposed, An opening space like this can bring a lot more quality to his life.

Extra: Kesari Bai (Hadhi/Peeparkutta, wife of Ugresh): She is a guest teacher in Hadhi. She has very artistic sense. She also showed great interest in exploring.

Galiyaro Bai (Koylari): Anganwadi teacher in Koylari.

Kathu (Timrupaada, Thandla): Once she got the sense of the hidden artist in her she came for all the three days and painted more and more. And in every work she made considerable progress. She really felt happy about the process.

Karelal (Ghoghara, Mavai): He walked into the venue and remained for the next 4 hours just painting. He said it was the first experience in his life. He made three paintings and enjoyed the work very much.

Concluding notes on children/ teachers/community members' experiences:

The Workshops brought out various attitudes of people who participated or were witness to the entire process.

- Whenever it was conducted in the villages it became a means of bringing people together. No one enquired what profit it would bring, except in one village. After the workshop they never asked that question again.
- The participants felt that this was one platform where everyone was equal and so the whole village, men, women and children alike could come together and work together.
- Children enjoyed the most and it brought forth the confidence in them.
- Teachers were motivated to incorporate creativity in their classroom teaching methods. In every center there was a demand for another workshop which indicates that people were interested and drawn towards exploring the creative dimension in them.
- The participation of girls and women was a big achievement. It is worth pointing out that the grown up girls were more free and less hesitant.

Conclusion

The 8 Art Workshops conducted on behalf of NEG-FIRE was an important event of my life and perhaps in the lives of everyone who participated in them. Considerable strengths were discovered through this process that need to be nurtured and strengthened. These workshops were only the entry points and putting a full stop to this process would bring no results. Therefore, it is important that we develop these programmes into more sustainable activities. Looking forward to more life-giving efforts from NEG-FIRE,

With much love and care,

BLAISE JOSEPH (Blaise Bhai), *A Resource person who is one among the many resource persons who are the participants.*