

TRAINING FOR STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY LEADERS

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Report of the VAMP Institute Karnataka, an initiative to strengthen leadership among collectives of sex workers leadership from collectives who recently joined the National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW). Organised by SANGRAM Sanstha and VAMP Collective



SANGRAM Sanstha

Context

The VAMP Institute is a capacity building institute for sex work leadership organised by VAMP (Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad) and SANGRAM. With headquarters in Sangli, Maharashtra, these organisations have a depth of experience in working on grassroots issues and experience of collectivising for rights, conducting research and implementing strategies for change. Both SANGRAM (an NGO) and VAMP (a collective of sex workers) are members of Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) and the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP). The VAMP Institute partners with APNSW which is a sex worker-initiated and led organisation with over 50 member organisations in 17 countries. The core beliefs underpinning the Institute are: acceptance of sex work as work; opposition to all forms of criminalisation and other legal oppression of sex work and supporting self-organisation and self-determination of sex workers.

Aims and Objectives

The VAMP Institute aims to build the skills of female, male and transgender people in sex work, who have been part of community-led initiatives and engaged with advocacy efforts for policy change at the local, state and national level. In this endeavour, it partners with other organizations to use existing training curriculum around sexuality, sex work, feminism and human rights. These include NGOs working to build social movements on women's rights, right to health, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights. To further this aim, the VAMP Institute:

- Discusses the social construction of gender, sexuality, sex work.
- Nurtures understandings of emerging rights movements in India and lessons learned.
- Engages with laws, policies, practices and struggles of sex workers.
- Strengthens skills in community-based monitoring mechanisms of health services and social entitlements.
- Identifies opportunities for intervening in policy discussions at the local, national, regional and international levels.
- Develops an understanding of the human rights of vulnerable populations, such as emergence of international/regional protocols and agreements concerning sexuality, gender and rights.

Day 1. Session 1. Introduction

A total of 29 sex workers from collectives based Bangalore, Chitradurga, Davagere, Gokak, Kolar and Bellary ranging in age from 25 to 43 gathered amidst the verdant surroundings of the Fireflies campus on the outskirts of Bangalore.

The day began with introduction of participants by sitting face to face and interacting in pairs for five minutes. They were then requested to introduce each other with respect to their work and family background. They spoke with immense pride about their children, and they also spoke of the courage it took to speak in front of a room full of people, they shared their struggles to battle social prejudice towards sex workers. The exercise of asking them to fill in the gaps in their introductions revealed that they did not feel their introductions were complete without information about their work: the names of their CBOs and details of their experiences.

On asking why they felt their introductions were incomplete some replied that the time allotted to introductions was insufficient, others felt that that they didn't speak a common language.

Meena spoke about the importance of language and the attachment of women to their intimate relationships and their children. She put forth the notion that the process of listening is closely linked to what we want to hear. For example, questions like number of children, their experience and their struggle are fore-fronted, and very little is asked about the personality of the woman herself. When questions are framed within this template alone, women tend to restrict their answers to these parameters.

Meena also spoke about how to deliver an effective self-introduction, and the importance of keeping a divide of personal life from professional. For a network to be stronger, it is important to know one another as fellow activists. Another view was that while it is true that sharing about personal lives was one way of connecting, by avoiding these topics, healthy boundaries were drawn and confidentiality was respected. In both approaches however, what was important was mutual respect and the desire to protect each other.

Session 2 Maya's Story facilitated by Meena Seshu

Meena relates the story of Maya, a young girl who is madly in love with Prakash. At the time he is sick and staying in another place. Maya sets out to go and meet her lover but in order to reach him she needs to cross a river. She approaches a boatman named Ram who demands Rs 100 from Maya for the boat ride, but she has no money. Ram then asks her to sleep with him, in lieu of the money. She agrees to this condition and reaches Prakash. After meeting her lover, Prakash asks her how she reached there, upon which she narrates the whole story. Prakash gets furious, beats her up and throws her out of the house. She goes to her brother Anil and narrates the whole story. Anil responds by saying he cannot do anything. Then she goes wandering on the streets and meets Krishna. Maya narrates her story to Krishna also, and he reacts by going and beating up Prakash.

After listening to this story, participants were asked to rate the characters in the story in ascending order of the character's wickedness. The participants were then divided into five groups to arrive at a single rating for each of the characters. The participants, who all identified with Maya, argued vigorously amongst themselves to then arrive at conclusions that helped them rate the characters.

Over tea and snacks, the discussions continued, and vehement differences broke out.

Some reactions: "I would never give free sex to any customer"; "Ram could have looked at Maya like a sister and taken her across".

Debriefing

The discussions touched their personal experiences and realities of their own lives. Some participants could see themselves in Maya's shoes. Some had been abandoned by their husbands and families, and they could identify with Maya. However, not all sympathised with her or endorsed her choices.

All five groups had all different ratings for the characters of the story, and these differences in perception made for an interesting discussion, with the following reasoning:

Maya

- Maya had choices other than having sex with Ram, she could have exercised those options instead.
- She only made a transaction, like any other person would do when they go to buy something.
- She made a transaction to go see her lover, which therefore justified her deeds.
- Her actions were a necessity as she had to see her lover when he was ill.
- She did it for her lover and reciprocating of love would only be possible with him understanding her choices.
- A counter to the question of her loyalty was about her honesty, which was symbolic of her love for Prakash.

Prakash

- Since he questioned her character only after finding about Maya's deed, he was justified to be angry with her.
- He was right and had done nothing wrong by throwing Maya out of the house.

Ram

- He deserved a lower score as he only had a transaction, which enables him to be a good person as he did not take advantage of Maya.
- He also was helpful in taking her across the river, so he was not a wicked person.
- He was not a good person as he should have helped her without asking for sex.

Interestingly, as the discussion progressed and multiple points of view were shared, the ratings they had assigned to each of the main protagonists also changed. Stereotypes about the family, with brothers always being assigned the role of the protector were also discussed, since most participants gave the brother Anil a low rating since he refused to do anything for Maya.

Krishna on the other hand was considered ideal because he took a stand for Maya without any selfish motive. Meena then introduced the notion of self-interest, in order to think about the possibility that both Ram and Maya were acting out of self-interest, whether the motive was love or any other factor. To put Krishna's character in perspective, Meena also gave an example: if a sex worker is taken to a shelter home by a well-wisher on seeing her situation, then is it good or bad? All replied in one voice that it was wrong to take away the sex worker's right to work and make a living.

Analysing the story and responses to it, Meena spoke about how Maya was considered the bad one as she agreed to sleep with the boatman to cross the river in order to meet her lover. She had choice and control over the story. So, should she be given the highest "bad" score? Most participants were hesitant to agree with this conclusion. Instead, they felt, Ram was the bad one. Aarthi interjected with another perspective, asking whether a vegetable vendor would give away items for free. This led to a discussion about understanding services like boatmanship and sex work both being work.

Meena also commented on Krishna, and how he could be seen to represent society who considers sex itself bad. The learnings from the session were:

- Do not judge people
- Understand the context in which people make choices
- Individuals are unique and make a range of decisions

Day 2 Session 3. Recap

The day began with a recap of the previous day's sessions and learning from the activity. Renuka spoke about her experience of getting introduced to people from other districts. She also commented upon the multiple perspectives of Maya's story, adding that she had learnt that everything that people do, they do as human beings and we must never blame others, but try to gain an understanding and accept their actions.

Laxmi said that Maya's story was very relatable with their personal lives, and that they had discussed her situation late into the night.

Laxmi from Kolar said that she was moved by Maya's story, which speaks about how people have their own ways of living life and their own choices are made depending on every situation. The most relatable aspect, she added, was her struggle to deal with being judged by other women.

Hamma, another participant added, "I didn't understand the story immediately. But got it later when they all drew conclusions from their lives then I was able to understand by relating it to my life, working in the CBO."

Another participant narrated her experience of being married at the age of 11 years. Her husband died, and she ended up in this line of work. Upon hearing Maya's story, she was deeply moved, and she began to sob.

Another participant, Shobha, shared a moment from the previous day when her partner had phoned her, and she had discussed the story. As she narrated it to her partner, even her partner found it inspiring and was proud about her attending this workshop.

Session 4. Power Play

Step 1

The participants were divided into groups of four, asked to write their names on pieces of paper and then asked to throw them into a small area encircled by chairs. Once the space was

demarcated, the trainer further reduced the empty space. All of the participants take a shot at trying to gauge the target and only four out of 27 manage to get their balls of paper into the designated space.

Debriefing

The four who succeeded were requested to stand up and share with the group how they managed to throw the paper balls into the boundary of chairs. Interestingly, one of them thought that only the four of them had failed the task, triggering a round of laughter. On asking the rest why they were unable to throw the balls into the boundary, the participants replied that by standing behind they couldn't even see the target. Meena then likened the empty space within the boundary to the concept of success. The people in the front had the advantage of being able to reach the objective because of having a clear vision of the goal. On the other hand, participants standing behind spoke about how they had failed the exercise due to various reasons. Some spoke about how the reduction of the space made it difficult, because standing in the last line they couldn't see the target. Some also added that if they had failed today, they could succeed tomorrow if they had some positive inputs.

Laxmi was able to relate this game to her CBO struggle of how some people take the initiative to achieve their goals, while others face immense challenges.

Step 2

Meena then proceeded to conduct the second round of Power Play, in which the boundary space for the balls was brought to the centre and all were asked to stand around it in a circle. Participants then took a shot and this time all managed to place the ball in the circle.

They were then asked to identify the difference in the two scenarios. The participants clearly said that this time they could see the goal and also, the circle was bigger and closer to them. They felt that it was easier to throw the ball into the circle the second time.

Ranjita, who had successfully placed the ball the previous time felt happier this time when all of them were able to place their balls and meet the objective of the exercise. To this Meena, responded that it is important to bring people from the margins to view the goal and then collectively work to achieve the objective. Equal opportunity for the people who were far away from the goal helped to achieve the goal.

Hamma observed that the two scenarios typified the lack of equal opportunity. Meena then likened it to the class/caste system of institutionalised inequality: the first row was reserved for officials and people in power, the second row was reserved for the aristocrats and Brahmins, the third and fourth rows were the businessmen and Kshatriyas. The rows in front could represent the upper classes, educated classes who prevent the people behind them from even seeing the goal. Sex workers, minorities and trans-gender individuals don't even enter this class system of the society, as they are way behind even the lowest classes. The point to note however is that if there were to be given the same opportunity, they could all achieve their goals.

One participant interjected that it is not always men who torture women, even women don't sympathise with another women, for examples mothers-in-law who torture their daughters-in-law. Debunking the common notion that "women are women's worst enemies", Meena asks: "What is torture dependent on? Who has the power to torture?" It must be understood that power belongs to those who have the authority.

Extending the analysis of power to the CBO arena, relevant questions about power can be asked: Who leads the CBO, i.e. who occupies the front row? People with most experience are always in the front and they have the authority whereas the others are all pushed behind in this class system. If there is empathy, and an understanding of class and power play, these division can be broken. With these thoughts buzzing in their heads, participants headed for tea.

Session 5. The Women's Movement in India: The Journey, Some Milestones by Madhu Bhushan

A long-time feminist activist, Madhu shared the history of women's movement: how it all began. Using the analogy of a river, Madhu says that the movement still keeps flowing on. Each stream of separate struggle flows to join the bigger river of women's movement. Talking about women's oppression, the starting point of the struggle for women's rights, it is not something "out there" but happens inside every household. Domestic violence was taken lightly, and a husband beating his wife was considered no big deal until the women's movement articulated it as a systemic problem. Earlier, if a woman was tortured and if she approached the police the inspector would refuse to take her complaint. One participant added that earlier in her village, the head of the village had instructed everyone to maintain a distance from such matters, as it the husband's right to do whatever he wishes to do with his wife. While this attitude still prevails, awareness of women's rights has somewhat increased.

Madhu took the discussion forward by focusing on a question raised in the previous session: "Women are women's worst enemies and they are the reason for their torture". In order to dismantle a widely held belief that women are indeed their own worst enemies, we need to remove these screens in order to see the structure of the system called "Patriarchy", or the rule by males, she said. Domestic violence on women will not stop until women are able to understand this structure of patriarchy, and then shake it up to bring change.

Patriarchy is the reason why police do not register cases if a woman goes running to a police station to lodge a complaint, because society believes that a man can treat his wife in any way he pleases because she belongs to him. Madhu proceeded to explain the complex notion of patriarchy in all spheres: religious, economic, social and political.

The discussion went on to understand gender stereotypes and the various ways in which they bind us: A man has strength, must earn and must show power whereas a woman must behave herself,

be well-dressed, must stay within the four walls of her house, must not talk much. When confined within the home, a woman is driven by rules of patriarchy through which she tries to establish her authority within her household. Sometimes this results in victims of patriarchy themselves victimising other women, for example a mother-in-law torturing her daughter-in-law. Indeed, women oppressing other women is a manifestation of patriarchy itself.

The discussion then moved to the different tools women's groups have used over the years in order to question and bring about change. Through the medium of posters of the women's movement collected and archived by feminist publisher Zubaan, Madhu shared stories of how women have challenged the existing patriarchal system.

One participant spoke about a neighbour in an unhappy marriage who had a relationship with another man, and openly defied social norms. Another talked about her own experience of torture for 18 years and her journey to joining this group, a move which gave her a lot of strength. She now feels emboldened to take up issues of other women. She shared an incident when she had the courage to stop violence on another woman who was a sex worker. The neighbours beat her up in public and the whole village got together to cast her aside and boycott her. But she took her to the police station and continued to support her to lodge a complaint. Other participants also shared experiences of facing domestic violence and getting no help from the police or bystanders.

Madhu pointed out that ordinary women can become emboldened to reach out and support other women because of the strength they derive from belonging to a CBO. Questioning what is not right and trying to intervene, was a manifestation of collective strength, which could be successfully deployed in situations where institutions such as the police do not take individual women, or even groups of marginalised women such as sex workers, seriously.

Two important tools for a movement are: collective strength and power of information. For instance, sometimes, even if 40 sex workers go to lodge a complaint of violence, the police may not believe them. The police are more likely to listen when an outsider with proper information

intervenes. We need to be armed with more knowledge and come together like streams to form the bigger river. Information about the movement must move out of the community to get more people get involved and diverse inputs will make the movement stronger.

Madhu wrapped up the segment by pointing to the need to understand and learn about feminist movements in order to work towards social, political and economic reforms. By hitting the streets and asking for the right questions, by getting to know about each other's stories we can all learn and give shape to the movement.

A brief history of the feminist movement in India

With the help of a presentation, Madhu began with the history of social reform in India, from laws enacted by the British against child marriage and 'sati', to reform movements led by Jotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule who worked for the upliftment of women through education.

She then drew attention to the autonomous women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s that campaigned against violence against women and patriarchy in every sphere. Posters used in campaigns against dowry, rape and domestic violence were shown to share a flavour of those tumultuous times. She spoke of the 'Open Letter' to the Chief Justice of India in the 'Mathura case' of custodial rape, that acted as a trigger for a country-wide movement against rape, which ultimately led to reform in the law. 'Mathura', a young Adivasi girl was denied justice since the court held that because she was "habituated to sex", she could not have been raped. Connecting this historic campaign with the workshop, Madhu pointed out how the same prejudice is applied to sex workers, who have sex for money hence it is assumed that they can never be raped.

Madhu then went on to discuss the campaigns for laws to deal with dowry, domestic violence and other crimes against women e.g. amendments to the Dowry Prohibition act, domestic violence Section 498A, Section 304 B Dowry death and Section 306 abetment to suicide because of dowry. Family Courts to solve domestic disputes were set up along with Fast track courts to redress violence against women. A civil law against domestic violence was the outcome of the realisation

that women experiencing domestic violence seek relief and protection and not only punishment for perpetrators. Marital rape and rape by the army came up in the discussion via a poster showing women in Manipur who disrobed to protest against rape by the security forces.

Posters showing oppression of women by all religions engendered a lively discussion. A poster reading 'Behind every brave woman is a whole community tells her wrong' resonated with the participants who had themselves been subjected to societal stigma.

Madhu wrapped up the session with a poster which read "*Mein sarhad par bani deewar nahi, mein toh us deewar par bani darar hu*" which urges the breaking down of boundaries and borders. She concluded by saying that paths are created by walking, and these movements by sex workers are creating paths for marginalised women to walk along.

Strength in numbers

After lunch, the participants were engaged in an exercise designed to understand collectivisation, and the strength of a group rather than an individual. Unpacking the meaning of victory and loss and individual benefit and collective benefit were takeaways from the exercise.

Session 6 Body Politics: Feminist Struggles by Laxmi Murthy

Feminist activist and journalist Laxmi Murthy led a session on understanding the politics of women's health and the campaigns around specific issues. The participants were asked to discuss in pairs any two health issues that they might have encountered as a woman, mother, sex worker or daughter. Several health issues came up: HIV and STI, body itches, repeated pregnancies, profuse bleeding, irregular menstruation, abortion, ART drugs, breast cancer, mouth cancer, fungal infections by an infected person and also on HIV infection. Meena intervened to explain about modes of transmission of HIV, STIs and other communicable diseases, about which there was some confusion.

Going back to the history of the engagement of women's groups in health issues, Laxmi retraced the campaigns of the 1980s. Understanding one's body, self-awareness and rights over sexuality

and reproduction were cornerstones of women's health campaigns. Efforts were made to address shame and stigma attached to the female body and to understand its functioning. Many women were unfamiliar with their bodies, especially the genitals. Participants too giggled at the thought of looking at themselves "down there" while some matter of factly said they took photos of their genitals to show doctors for a diagnosis if they were experiencing some symptoms! As "homework", participants were asked to take selfies of their vaginas to get familiar with their own bodies and also deal with shame and embarrassment.

Laxmi shared that fundamental questions regarding control over the body were raised early on in the women's movement. Whose body, whose rights? Does marriage automatically hand over control to the husband? According to several religious scriptures, women belong first to the father, then the husband and finally the son.

Participants immediately related with questions of control over the body and the connected issue of reproductive rights. Discussions around safe contraception and birth control took place in the context of a government-sponsored population control program targeted at poor and marginalised women who were easy targets. Laxmi also gave insights on the difference between birth control and population control which are entirely different from each other but easily confused. Birth control is the right of choice of getting pregnant and having a child while on the other hand, population control is a government policy to reduce population, without critiquing a model of consumerist consumption that depletes resources more than a higher population of poor and marginalised people. From safe contraception, the right to abortion and the vexed campaign against sex-selective abortion of female foetuses, the women's movement has grappled with complex issues, some of them relating to law, such as the law against pre-natal sex determination.

A question was then posed to participants to ponder over during the tea break: should pre-natal sex determination be allowed or not?

Some participants saw it in the context of allowing choice to women to decide what happens to their bodies and their pregnancies. Others thought it was not good for society as a whole. Some felt that the testing was acceptable since prospective parents might be curious but aborting a foetus only because it is female is wrong.

The discussion also veered towards the right of women to abort and whether this was ethically and morally acceptable – does the foetus have a life, or is it an extension of the mother?

Laxmi provided the larger context of the declining sex ratio in countries like China and India due to sex-selective abortion and the role of law in stopping this trend.

Participants were invited to discuss the complex and seemingly contradictory notion that women's right to abortion must be protected, but sex-determination followed by sex-selective abortion must be stopped. In the context of control over one's reproduction and body itself, the questions of choice and consent were discussed. Laxmi asked the participants how many of them used condom with their husbands/intimate partners. Surprisingly only three women raised their hands, and on further probing, the others responded: "it's my own husband" "husbands do not allow us to use condoms".

HIV/AIDS as a topic was one with which participants were already familiar, hence Laxmi decided to focus on other topics that impinged on women's health status. The issue of women's nutrition and the secondary status within the family in terms of health-seeking behaviour were also discussed. The government was not providing basic health care or food but was taking away the right to nutritious food and cheaper sources of animal protein like beef by banning it for religious-political reasons.

Mental health too was an arena where women were subjected to more hazardous treatment such as electroshock, while the social aspects of mental health were not adequately addressed. The

right to leisure and relaxation was also discussed as a right that even women's movements did not prioritise.

The discussion then moved to trends in healthcare that had direct impact on sex workers' health:

1. Privatisation of the health care, leading to an expensive "product" that must be purchased rather than a right of all citizens.
2. Corporatisation of healthcare leading to over-medication and unnecessary, expensive procedures.
3. Dismantling of state-funded public health and primary care.

The session concluded by drawing together the threads of personal health and the right to health and emphasising that individual health and well-being could only be realised if the right to health is demanded by the community.

DAY 3

The day began with a quick recap of the learnings of the previous day. The exercise in power play, and important points from the session on the women's movement and health rights movement were recalled.

Session 7. Understanding Rights by Aarthi Pai

Aarthi began by asking how many of the participants knew about the Constitution of India. Only a few knew about it, and they likened the Constitution to a set of rules to govern the country.

In response to the question of whether the Constitution had given us human rights, the majority said it hadn't, because in their experience, when they approach the authorities they are not heeded, and they cannot access their rights. When asked if their own places had their own Constitution/set of rules, they responded in the affirmative. Taking the discussion further, Aarthi asked if the "Constitution" of Chitradurga had made possible Aadhar cards for sex workers. Did Bellary? Did Gokak? Some did, some did not, and some said the Ration card and Voter's ID were

common. Aarthi remarks, “Sex workers have managed to achieve what no one else has managed to achieve: they have been able to have their own constitutions.”

Aarthi then went on to relate what human rights as a notion meant in the lives of sex workers: the right to religion, work or education. Participants also discussed the concept of universality of human rights, that goes beyond citizenship. For example, a sex-worker from Bangladesh working in Maharashtra is also entitled to rights and basic amenities. “Giving food to another country’s resident is our duty,” said Parimala, and Aarthi quipped that she would send all the Bangladeshi refugees to Parimala’s house!

The discussion went on to relationships with people from other countries, and other religions, and the need to go beyond borders and boundaries while understanding human rights as rights you get at birth. An exercise in understanding exclusion and denial of rights because of identity – religious, sexual orientation or foreigner – helped to make the abstract notion of rights more accessible and real.

Aarthi then described the four pillars of human rights: the right to life, equality, dignity and liberty. The participants were divided into groups and asked to discuss and prioritise what rights they needed in order to survive:

- Group 1
Food, education, shelter, clothing, clean air, nutritious food, sexuality, healthcare, natural resources, voting rights, societal rights.
- Group 2
Good environment, health, nutritional food, residential privileges and birth certificate, religious rights, educational rights, labour rights, right to speech, social rights.
- Group 3
Right to liberty, health rights, education, clothing, social rights, housing.
- Group 4

Nutritious food, health care, education, good environment, equality, right to freedom, social justice, right to association; political participation.

Subsequently, participants were asked to elaborate on terms like social justice, fundamental rights and equality. They were then asked to come together in one single “pyramid of rights” with wooden Jenga blocks. Participants had arguments on the design, structure and priority of each of the rights, with some arguing that health was more important than food and some that clean air was more of a priority than social rights. These questions and the process of prioritising were discussed, after which a pyramid finally emerged. The group had prioritised food and nutrition, living conditions and hygiene, health and the right to basic services like electricity and water and right to education.

Once the team managed to construct the pyramid, Aarthi pulled out one of the Jenga blocks, resulting in the whole structure collapsing. This led to the conclusion that all rights are essential and one cannot exist without the others.

Session 9. Theatre and Movement by Anuradha H.R.

Warm up exercises and ice breaker games were conducted to set the mood after a sumptuous lunch. After a lot of fun, the participants were divided into teams and Anuradha shared the fundamentals of theatre. She explained that an ensemble on stage is a collective and every action is collaboratively transformed into visual, audio and text mediums for an audience.

Activity 1. Picture frame

The first activity was revolved around “picture formation” during which participants were asked to compose an image from their previous day’s learnings. Each team would compose a still picture that would be interpreted by the audience. The teams used their imagination and beautifully composed few stills from their learnings of previous days. Where one team depicted the Maya story, another showed the scene of the Manipuri mothers disrobing and protesting in front of the Indian army. Another team used Aiman, Shanti and Amuda in their picture to depict a typical story

of a rape victim intelligently placing the characters into roles of a lawyer, doctor and a nurse. The teams carefully followed instructions and successfully conveyed a message visually.

In the next round, the teams were asked to add into the picture by stepping into the frame, trying to weave a story by using other characters to build a story. They were asked to explore the dominance of each character. Every new participant who was added into the story line was required to play with the power that the previous character possessed and use it to manipulate the power equation and produce an image. Interesting storylines thus emerged and they were able to depict a story as it flowed by the addition of every participant. The participants got a chance to explore the power play of dominance, and get ideas about shaping the structure of dominance as a collective. They also learned that working in a team can produce interesting results, a learning that was explored in greater depth in later activities.

Activity 2. London Statue

Participants were asked to stand in a line and the one in front was designated the leader. They had to walk as stealthily as possible towards the leader to eject her from the game. However, the participants were not allowed to move when the leader was watching them as the leader wielded the power. Briefly sitting on a chair and chocolates were used as incentives to finish the game. Participants were made to negotiate with the person in authority who had more power than them.

Debriefing

In the first round, Nisha who was the leader and had all the power shared her experience, "As they all kept moving towards me, I felt threatened." She explained that she spontaneously developed strategies to win the game, such as turning suddenly and giving less time for the participants to move. Aarthi's role in the exercise was to take power away from Nisha. She got closer and won the game by taking her place.

In the second round, when she had replaced Nisha, Aarthi said she felt threatened by Nisha because of an anxiety that she would grab power back. Halamma said that she moved discreetly and was camouflaged by Nisha. Aarthi used her authority to change LONDON to A and she also

kept moving from her position. Halamaa on the other hand crept closer inch by inch and touched Aarthi and finished the game. Nisha then spoke about her feelings of reclaiming authority from Aarthi, which became her goal and the reason for her perseverance. On seeing her repeated efforts, participants actually stopped competing and even started giving her chocolates to complete the task. This strategy became a collective effort of the whole team.

When Halamma was in the position of authority, she said that the sheer number of all the participants moving together as a collective gave her chills down the spine and started to shake her confidence.

Anuradha then drew these perspectives together to understand how in theatre as in activism, collective efforts can help in negotiating with those in power. The very fact of being together and striving for one cause can actually start to shake the foundations of the authorities.

Activity 3: Group presentations

After tea break participants were divided into three teams and were asked to devise small performance pieces of 6 min each using content derived from two days' training as a springboard. They were given ample time to come up with ideas and asked to use theatrical tools as well as a song in their piece. After an interlude, they assembled in the hall to showcase their short skits.

Group 1 devised a play about how facilities provided by the government were biased against the sex workers' community.

Group 2 devised a play about caste discrimination, showing how so-called 'lower' castes were tortured by the so-called 'upper' castes. Symbolism of Ambedkar's statue and Gandhi's three monkeys were effectively used to make a point. Songs with improvised lyrics added to the production. The open-ended play without preachy 'solutions' drew much appreciation from the audience.

Group 3 devised a performance about the realities around sex-selective abortion resulting in the abortion of female foetuses. Aggression and pressure from the husband and mother in law were very relatable. Irony and humour were also effectively used to retain interest in such a sombre topic.

DAY 4

Session 9. Review

During the review of the previous day's learnings, participants who had not spoken before, shared how some of the sessions had been useful for them and they had picked up the courage to speak after the first two days.

Recapping the session on abortion, Aarthi asked participants whether abortion was a bad thing. Six of the participants who said "yes" were asked to move to one side. Aarthi then asked the rest what they felt about abortion. A discussion ensued about the different aspects of the ethics of abortion itself and abortion following sex-determination. The questions of choice and reproductive rights were also debated in the context of accidental pregnancy, pregnancy following rape, and pregnancy when women are unable to care for the child. Regarding the question of abortion as a right for victims of rape, especially minors, there were differing views. One was that the minor girl should be able to have an abortion and get on with life. Another view was that the rapist (in this case the girls' father) should be made to pay for the crime, by having a reminder in the shape of a baby. The morality of 'destroying a life' by aborting a foetus was also counterposed with reproductive rights and a woman's right to control her own body. The politics of language, such as terming abortion as 'murder' as well as the judgementalism and stigma attached to abortion were discussed in the context of campaigns of the women's movement.

The link between the right to abortion and sex work in terms of control over the body was discussed in a way in which participants could easily relate. "Do we woman own our husband's body?" The response is a vehement "No".

Meena puts this in perspective by saying that when the body is equated to property, the politics of ownership and control come into play. In sex work the *gharwali* has authority over the girls, and they use their authority to retain power. This power and authority get misused because of not understanding the notion of equating human bodies to properties.

Aarthi added to the discussion by citing the example of Savita Hallappanvar, a dentist from Belagavi who was working in Ireland, who lost her life in 2012 when she was pregnant. She developed complications, but doctors did not allow her to terminate the pregnancy even though she had developed a septic infection. This was because laws in Ireland, with a Catholic majority population, did not permit abortion, even though the mother's life was at risk. After a campaign by women's groups, trade unions and health activists in Ireland, this law was amended in 2013. The direct impact of religion on reproductive rights was questioned in this case,

The interplay of religion, sexuality and reproductive rights can also be seen in the lives of Devadasis. A participant who is a Devadasi herself said, "I got to know that my body belongs to me only after all the training and workshops."

A discussion then ensued about the Devadasi system and the laws prohibiting it in Karnataka. The debates in the Dalit movement also came up for discussion, with some feeling that a patriarchal view among Dalit leaders tended to influence the way in which the lives of Devadasis were perceived. A complex and contradictory display of casteism by not allowing a 'lower' caste sex worker to touch the common well in the village or enter the temple, but 'permitting' sex, was yet another example of the different ways in which social taboos and power played out.

Session 10. Community Empowerment by Kiran and Raju, Community coordinators

The VAMP Institute is an opportunity for learning together. Communities are capable of learning from each other and the following session was also an opportunity to strengthen training skills.

Raju spoke about community strengthening and asked all the participants to sit with their CBO members according to their districts. His presentation talked about the how sex workers' community needs to work with each other. He stressed the need for outreach to sustain the movement.

Nisha mentioned the Rubaru program conducted in Delhi to interact with and learn from other movements by marginalised communities. Shaping policy and creating an enabling environment is essential if laws are to be critiqued and amended. Sex workers as a community need to be trained and equipped with information to start a dialogue with law makers. For example, dialogue with policy makers about topics such as the difference between sex work and trafficking is essential for effective advocacy. Another important topic is promoting the human rights framework, adapted to the local context and local needs. Community workers know ground reality and that Karnataka and Maharashtra and Kerala, for example, all have different cultures. Every program that is conducted has to be connected to the local situations and hence knowledge of the local community, its cultural context and language becomes an essential tool for any intervention programs.

Activity: Organisational mapping

Each group was assigned to discuss factors that are important for all CBOs while working on empowering their communities. Each group was to note on chart paper the work that they have already done and also note the challenges that they encountered and surmounted.

Group 1. Chitradurga SSS

Work achieved: Finding new community members; SSS community registrations by giving ID numbers to new members; giving information about health; giving legal help to community members; conducting targeted interventions.

Challenges: New members do not cooperate with the systems and conditions of the CBO; difficulty in developing community-based organising; problems in conveying information and establishing

communication with the community sex workers with regards to the systems of the CBO; difficulties in reaching out to the police, lawyers and doctors at times of crisis.

Group 2: Ballari

Work achieved: To create awareness of diseases in the community; social justice to the women in the community; social justice for HIV+ women and children; create awareness by getting testing along with protesting forced testing; identifying new women and their agents; dealing with legal issues if women are convicted of crimes.

Challenges: Establishing the CBO and making sub-groups to ensure efficient functioning; protecting women from HIV.

Group 3: Davangere

Work achieved: Holding meetings with everyone from the community at regular intervals; providing ICTC (Integrated Counselling and Testing Centres) service to the community workers; door-to-door checking of CC and giving information on ICTC.

Challenges: Court cases and communication with police and lawyers; abolishing social inequality; identifying new members and giving them identification numbers.

Group 4: Gokak

Work achieved: Controlling alcoholism among sex workers; information about contraception; registration during targeted interventions and giving them ID numbers.

Challenges: Placing women from the community in various posts in the CBO; funds to carry out programs; effective communicating.

Group 5: Dharwad

Work achieved: Building a sense of community among sex workers; giving health information; ICTC work; getting supplies for the sex workers; scholarships for children.

Challenges: Communicating with children during awareness programs; getting women's rights for sex workers; difficulty in communicating the importance of contraception for sex workers.

With this the four-day training program came to an end and a vote of thanks was offered to all the participants who could make it to the sessions and all the facilitators for their efficient participation. We all broke for the day and bid farewell to one another. The participants packed up their luggage and left in a bus to majestic to travel to their respective homes.