

## **Course for Development Activists**

September 2011 to March 2012

**Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies** is pleased to announce the second round of six week course in Contemporary Politics for development activists. Development activists today are entrusted with complex responsibilities: of implementing policies, schemes and laws formulated by the government; of mediating between local caste and tribal communities and the government officials; even of bringing in 'social transformation' by changing people's marriage practices, eating and living habits! There are several challenges facing the development activists today: they need to be aware of specific schemes, policies and laws; cognizant of the local political dynamics and also win the support and empathy of the communities with which they work. This course makes an attempt to equip the activists with some political and conceptual tools necessary to understand the complex condition that they inhabit.

The first batch of twenty activists from Chatri, Aman Vedika, Sannihita, Caring Citizens' Collective and Anveshi attended the course from February to July. The participants should be nominated by their parent organizations and are expected to continue till the last module. They are expected to read, write and participate in the discussions during the course. Though the course - lectures and reading material will be predominantly in Telugu, knowledge of English is preferable. A nominal fee of Rs.500 will be charged for each candidate for the course.

### **Course modules and issues**

*Violence against women:* What are the issues, perspectives and analytical tools raised by women's movement in understanding domestic violence and rape? Can such violence be addressed through formulation of better laws and better policies? How should we understand the possibilities and limitations of law in addressing violence against women?

*Women's health, population programmes and development policies:* Is there a need to understand women's health as specific issue? In what ways has political economy shaped the policies on women's health? In what ways has population policy shaped the way women's health is addressed in public health programmes in the country?

*Development and political economy:* Should we understand development as economic growth, duty of the government or the entitlements that the governed populations seek in civil and political domains? What are the major debates on development that took place since the time of independence? What role do the NGOs play in this process?

*Childhood, education and schooling:* Currently, the relationship between children and schooling is being understood in terms of right to education. There is a need to broaden such an understanding so that the gap between the world of textbooks and school and the life-worlds of children can be seen and addressed. What tools are available to get to such issues?

*Law and movements for rights:* How have the rights movements theorized the political role of law? What role does the law play in mediating political conflicts including that of development? What is at stake when issues of domestic violence or labour disputes or custodial violence or extra judicial killings reach the courts as 'cases' or 'violations of rights'? How do we understand the politics of law in such cases?

*Caste and Dalit movements:* How have Dalit movements challenged prevalent notions of development, caste, gender, feminism and politics in our country? How have they challenged the operations of caste in social and political terrains?

*Secularism and Muslims:* How do we understand the co-existence of secularism and discrimination against Muslims in our country? Why is Islam named as the cause of backwardness in the popular discourse despite what committees on Muslim backwardness have repeatedly stressed? How do we begin to understand the lives

of Muslims in our state, especially in Hyderabad?The course for development activists on contemporary politics came to a close on 2nd July 2011. We had a nice farewell session where the participants shared what they expected and (un) learnt during the six months. I wanted to share a few of the interesting things that they said.

### **Feedback on the first round**

Nearly all the women participants reported that they now are more inclined to read. Some said that they are able to read news more carefully, and think critically about news reports about field in which they are working. Some said that reading is slowly becoming a part of their daily life. They said that they found Streevaada raajakeeyalu quite difficult to read initially but are now able to persist with it. Two of the youngest participants want to take membership in our library. Others put in a request for more reading material.

Many male participants said that they were most influenced by the module on women's health, especially Veena's lecture on backpain. Kondal, I believe, went back and read Savalaksha Sandehaalu that very night! They said that even though they were quite skeptical about 'streevaadam' or women's movement during the first session, they felt drawn into the discussion after they heard the lectures on women's health. The CCC batch also had a discussion about male sexuality after listening to Sheela's lecture on 'family planning'.

They appreciated the course design, each of the resource persons, the care and attention that they received during the course and wanted it to continue for some more time! They said they want to listen to more lectures in future on the topics discussed in the course.

The highlight of course was when one of the participants declared that he took to beef-eating during the course. He described in detail how he was skeptical of beef but decided to experiment anyway. Now he is convinced enough about its taste (not

bad!) nutrition (good) and non-harming nature (no stomach upset) to introduce it to others in his village!

I think that our objective of introducing them to different ways of thinking about rights, development, gender worked to an extent. The credit goes to all the resource persons. Srilakshmi, Ravinder and Vijaya provided incredible support. But it is Ashala Srinivas brought an intangible, qualitative presence to it by owning up the programme.