

# BALWADIS

OF THE DECCAN DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

## A REFLECTIVE STUDY



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## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank everybody in DDS, the balwadis and the sanghams, for providing me with a new experience of a vision of holistic development.

It has not been easy to temper my enthusiasm with an impersonal and critical eye - I hope the resulting analysis will be found useful by all those concerned.

Lakshmi Krishnamurty  
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## Balwadis of the Deccan Development Society - A Reflective Study

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### Introduction

The Deccan Development Society (DDS) was registered in 1983. From some years before this, a group of six men friends, wanting to do something meaningful with their lives, cogitated among themselves and explored the physical and mental areas of where and what they could do. DDS was the out- come of this churning. They knew they wanted to work in rural areas and with the poor towards enabling them to gain and keep control over their own lives.

While the six still keep in touch, it is one of them, Satheesh, who has continued to be absorbed full-time in the running of the organization.

The first funding DDS received was for making water pipes for farmers. DDS today is a far cry from its early days. Dreams were dreamt and on the ground, DDS shaped their dreams in keeping with day-to-day experience.

DDS started with forming men's sanghams (groups), as a vehicle for proceeding towards their basic goal of enabling people to be in control of their lives. Experience led them to forming joint sanghams of men and women. This finally evolved into concentrating on all-women sanghams. Today (2003), there are 75 sanghams with some 3500 members - all women.

"Why this shift to women's sanghams?"

Because they realized that it was women who were the real farmers and it was they that kept sanghams functioning on a continuing basis.

DDS also realized that women live their lives holistically - incorporating food production, a symbiotic relationship with the environment, social interactions, health care, etc., into one system - one thing leading into and interlocking with other components to form a logical and meaningful whole. It is not as if this holistic way of living their lives is a consciously-thought-out strategy. It is something that DDS came to understand and work with while consolidating and strengthening the process with their own inputs.

For instance, during PRA exercises, the following came to light:

- ❖ Whereas men (and policy makers) favour cash crops, women prefer food crops - feeding the family is **their** immediate worry. Women, across caste and class, plumbed for the yellow sorghum as the favoured crop. This is a hardy cereal and allows for crop diversity in the field - an important factor in making up the meal (cereal, pulses, vegetables), in an economy whose precariousness endangers food security.

- ❖ Again, men appeared to be more conscious of 'superior' and 'inferior' grain. Rice over sorghum - it connotes status.
- ❖ Women place a very high value on the ritual uses of grain - underlining a survival need by giving it ritual status. This ritual status has little or no importance in men's eyes.
- ❖ It is not as if this system of belief and practice, is a water-tight, 'forever' system. Winds of 'development' and more recently, of globalization have made their inroads, sometimes with benefit but also creating confusion and conflict.

Traditional knowledge is debunked and time-honoured practices disrupted - shaking confidence and faith in a known way of life.

This is where DDS stepped in - to reaffirm traditional knowledge and practice, in pursuit of the wider aim of **restoring and consolidating control over their own lives, for the people DDS works with.**

According to DDS, "At the heart of all activities is the principle of access and control which leads to the issue of autonomy of local communities. The autonomy becomes far more important in a globalizing world of shrinking national boundaries and disappearing sovereignties. In this context, it becomes far more important for local communities to give themselves certain spheres of autonomies to protect themselves from becoming victims of the unseen forces of globalization."

Following from this, the DDS **Mission Statement** states: The mission of the Society is to address and reverse the historical process of the degradation of the environment and people's livelihood system in this region, through a string of land-related activities like permaculture, community grain fund, community green fund, community gene fund, collective cultivation through land lease, etc.

The **goals and related activities** deduced from this, are for gaining and institutionalizing autonomy, re: the following:

- ❖ Food production;
- ❖ Seeds;
- ❖ Control of natural resources and their management;
- ❖ Education and livelihood skills training;
- ❖ Health and health care;
- ❖ Market; and
- ❖ Media.

**The fulcrum of the programme is the Sangham.** DDS works in 75 villages, of Medak District, Andhra Pradesh, spread over four Mandals - Zaheerabad, Jharasangam, Nyalakal and Raikonda. All the programmes are in collaboration with and routed through the sanghams.

## Balwadis - In Perspective



Balwadis were first started in 1986, in response to a need expressed by Sangham women. The very young needed to be looked after when the women were away at work. Also came the realization that development for the community was not possible if children were not given the opportunity for education. The balwadi, as one woman said, is an investment for their own future as well as the future of their children.

Till 1990, balwadis were run by a DDS worker, the teacher and the cook. Thereafter, their responsibilities were transferred to a newly constituted Mothers Committee which then took over the collection of fees, the buying of provisions and the general overseeing of balwadi functioning.

In 1992, there were 13 balwadis. Today (2003), there are 22 balwadis, catering to some 730 children. In the early days, balwadis focused on the 4 to 6 age group. But in 2000, a change was made in favour of a younger age group - the 2 to 4 year-olds. Now about 40 to 50% of balwadi children are in this age group. The balance is consciously tipped in favour of girls, as, from the beginning, DDS was inclined to work with the most deprived. In the balwadi, children are divided into two groups, the younger and the older, for convenience of interacting with them.



As stated earlier, balwadis were started in response to the need of sangham women to have a place where their children are safe and occupied, while they themselves went to work.

At first the DDS team did what they and the children enjoyed most - played games. It is only later that they realized that this is a very important part in the education of the young child - play.

This sense of fun and enjoyment is the basis of the balwadi education programme. There are three aspects to the balwadi programme:

- ❖ Creating a joyful learning atmosphere.
- ❖ Providing nutritionally wholesome food.
- ❖ Preventive and curative health care through the use of indigenous herbal and home remedies.

Children stay in the balwadi from 9 a.m. to 4.15 p.m. The time is filled with play, story-telling, painting, songs, clay-work (a great favourite), some literacy and importantly, going out on nature walks, understanding and learning about the environment.

The weekly time-table is as follows:

**Table I: Activities**

Mon.	Conversation	Literacy	Playtime	Numeracy	Story	Clay work
Tues.	Do	Do	Songs	Do	Do	Drawing
Wed.	Do	Do	Making Colours	Do	Do	Nature Walk
Thurs.	Do	Do	Games	Do	Do	Origami
Fri.	Do	Do	Songs	Do	Do	Clay work
Sat.	Do	Do	Experiments with nature	Do	Do	Drawing

This time-table is not adhered to mechanically - it depends on the children's moods - the teacher adjusts the day's programme accordingly. The balwadi looks alive, with the children's drawings and paintings plastered all over the walls. The clay toys the children have made take up the window sills. . Details of the curriculum and teachers' training will be discussed in a later section.

Once every 6 months, all the balwadi children are brought together in a day-long **jatra** (fair). Singing, dancing, painting, playing games, eating together - the jatras provide an occasion for fostering a feeling of togetherness, enjoyment and a sense of wonder. The balwadi children are welcomed in the primary schools, as they are already 2 steps ahead of other children in what they know and importantly, in the easy adjustment they are able to make to school conditions.

The spirit of the balwadi is carried forward for older children as well. **Night schools** are run for working children and **summer camps** for preparing children for mainstream schooling. And also the **Green School**, which combines vocational and formal education in the attempt to make schooling relevant for these children.

Another important activity at the balwadi is the food time-table. It is perhaps the only programme which keeps the children's tummies full from morning to evening - from 9 in the morning to 4.15 in the evening.

**Table II: Food time-table.**

Breakfast	Lunch	Snack
Finger millet porridge (twice a week)	Jowar roti with dal and vegetables(twice a week)	Roasted chickpea (every day)
Wheat porridge (twice a week)	Rice khichdi with pulses and veg. (twice a week)	Fruit (once a week)
Jowar porridge (twice a week)	Wheat khichdi (twice a week)	Eggs (once a fortnight)



As soon as children come to the balwadi, they get porridge - this ensures attention-maintaining energy levels. Lunch is a substantial and tasty, belly-filling meal. Younger children rest for a while after lunch. And just before going home, all the children get a snack.

Not the least significant aspect of this feeding programme, is that the food is all local food, grown on land attached (not literally) to each balwadi. The land is managed by the local sangham.

In 1991, DDS had some savings from a NORAD-support fund. With the consent of the funding agency, this money was used for buying land towards sustaining the balwadi programme. This was first tried out in 5 villages. Success extended the process further.

In 1997, the Bernard van Leer Foundation provided financial support for 28 balwadis run by sanghams in 28 villages. As of 2003, there are 22 balwadis functioning, of which, 19 have lands. The average land per balwadi is 5 acres, ranging from a maximum of 7.20 acres (1 balwadi), to a minimum of just over 3 acres (2 balwadis). There are 3 balwadis without land and at present food items (raw) are supplied to them from the produce of the other balwadi lands.

**The third aspect** of the balwadi programme is the **health care** provided to the children by trained health workers. They carry plant-based medicines with them and treat scabies and other minor such problems. Additionally, they give the children **preventive** treatment by way of a daily spoonful of a powder which is a combination of herbs which increase immunity, prevent coughs, colds and stomach upsets. Usually these medicines are taken as a cure, but here they are used as a preventive. Over the years, the combination of nutritious food and the herbal medicines seem to have worked towards eliminating any incidence of a major and/or prolonged illness. The children I saw in the balwadis I visited, all looked well and full of energy.



The unique feature about the nexus between the sangham, the balwadi and the lands, is that the link has been made organic, not enforced. Sustained 'well-being' of each is a function of their mutual inter-dependence. The Sangham (jointly with DDS) owns the land; the women of the sangham look after the land and reap the produce for the benefit of their own and the other children from the village who come to the balwadi. If the sangham collapses, then the land reverts to DDS.

Sangham members manage the balwadi. They select and appoint the teacher and the cook. Management is carried out basically through 2 committees of sangham members - the Ration Committee and the Land Management Committee. Health workers visit the balwadi daily. And the whole is overseen by sangham members/mothers - punctuality of teachers, the efficiency of the cook, provision of timely, balanced and tasty meals, etc.

### The Increasing Centrality of Balwadis in the Functioning of Sanghams



Two incidents, crises in fact, during the past few years have highlighted and firmly fixed the significance of the balwadi in the minds of sangham members.

**The first crisis** happened in 1995/96, which saw a drying up of funds for running the balwadi. This proved a blessing in disguise. After discussions with DDS staff and cogitating among themselves, sangham women decided that balwadis **had** to be kept going

and consequently took the following decisions:

- ❖ Each member would contribute one potful of grain per month.
- ❖ Each member would contribute Rs.5/- per month.
- ❖ Each mother of a balwadi-going child would contribute Rs. 10 to Rs. 15/- per month.
- ❖ All sangham members benefiting from DDS schemes (PDS and Land Lease participants, SC Corporation land beneficiaries), would contribute in cash and/or kind.

The balwadis ran for a whole year on this basis. By the time DDS got funding from BvLF in 1997, the sanghams had become strong in their belief in themselves. Their own ability to keep the balwadis running, without any outside funding, empowered not only the sangham members but also strengthened bonds across all DDS programmes.

When BvLF funding **did** come, it made possible a strong resurgence of balwadi activities.

Sangham members continue with the practice of contributing a potful of grain/vegetables/





pulses, every month to the individual balwadis they manage; as also the money towards running the balwadi.

In addition to this, Sangham members contribute labour towards weeding and harvesting the fields - foregoing their wages for labour contributed. I met one such group of sangham women in the fields of the Cheelamamidi balwadi. There is 5 acres of land here and the women had come to cut the crop. We sat down

under a tree and chatted for a while. "Balwadi children are smarter than other children," they said. "They talk more and are less shy."

"The balwadi is to the children what the sangham is to us," one woman said, "Aren't we smarter than other women!" she laughed.

However, enthusiasm about the health of the children was greater. "They don't get sores any more; their eyes are brighter; they don't get colds - they look well."

The women were unanimous in saying that the food was very important, especially for the younger children. Education, yes, for the older ones - but that too was secondary compared to food and health. And of course, children were safe while they were at work. Didn't the older children mind not getting food like their younger siblings did at the balwadi? "Yes - so sometimes we give them a rupee or two to buy something to eat."



This Cheelamamidi sangham is a 'good' sangham. They jointly protested and got a bore-well dug in their village. They said men say, "You are women - this is your time!"



**The second crisis** which faced the sanghams was the advent of the ICDS programme in 1998. Many of the villages which had balwadis, now had the government anganwadi as well.

Now the question was this - should parents send children to the anganwadi where there were no fees to be paid, no contributions in cash or kind to be made and no worry about participating in the management of the centre? With the balwadis these and many

other involvements are the responsibility of the sanghams. Which to choose?

A large meeting was held in Dec. 1998. Women from 19 sanghams attended the meeting to discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of balwadis and anganwadis. Detailed lists were drawn up. Pros and cons were weighed. And the following was the outcome.

### The plus points:

- ❖ Our balwadis recognize not only the problems of children but also that of their mothers.
- ❖ Our balwadis have a number of checks and balances.
- ❖ Our balwadis offer a variety of activities for children like games, songs, making toys, drawing, etc.
- ❖ Our balwadis look after the health of our children.
- ❖ All sangham members have a right over the balwadi. They keep vigil over it.
- ❖ There is an organic relationship between our balwadis, night schools, summer camps and the green school.
- ❖ We have a lot of experience and confidence in running our balwadis. We do not want to lose it.
- ❖ Our balwadis offer the children a variety of foods.
- ❖ We manage farm lands related to our balwadis. This offers us an opportunity to work together for our children.
- ❖ We celebrate a lot of festivals at the balwadis.
- ❖ Our balwadi teachers are friendly with the children and look after them with care.
- ❖ Our balwadis look after our children the whole day.

### The minus points:

- ❖ Every member has to contribute Rs.5 per month.
- ❖ Every mother pays a fee of Rs. 10 per child per month.
- ❖ Every member has to contribute a potful of grain every month.
- ❖ We have to bring rations every month.
- ❖ We have to issue rations every day.
- ❖ We have to work on balwadi land for free.
- ❖ If there are any disputes within the sangham, it reflects immediately on the balwadis.

The advantages of the anganwadi were listed as:

- ❖ We don't have to pay fees.
- ❖ We have no burden of responsibility.

At the end of this it was decided that the sanghams would continue to run their own balwadis - at least for another 3 years. In 2003, the sanghams feel fully justified in their faith in themselves and their balwadis. And there is no question of discontinuing the balwadis. If anything, balwadis have become more central to sangham functioning than their other activities (the public distribution system {PDS} scheme, income-generation activities, etc.)

## Educational Aspects of the Balwadi - Further Details

### The Curriculum

When balwadis were first started in 1986, their main business was to keep children occupied, while mothers were away at work. And this was done through play, games, songs and some literacy.

Gradually, the curriculum became more ordered. In keeping with the DDS philosophy of promoting local knowledge, local songs and stories were collected for teaching in the balwadi. In the same spirit, content of the syllabus reflected DDS' interest in environment and their involvement with local agricultural crops and practices.

An example of a one-month syllabus of 1991: It is woven around 'flowers' - talks, discussions, songs, games, stories, experiments, drama, nature walks and all class-work, including literacy, revolved around the topic of flowers.

The curriculum has been revised from time to time to contextualize it and to more closely align it with the central concerns of the programme. In 2000/2001, it was felt that while DDS was working towards a cultural renewal of the village communities, this was as yet not sufficiently reflected in the curriculum. So the new curriculum was based on the topic of diversity - i.e., of foods, crops, soils, festivals and people in the area - so that children from this very early age get the opportunity to widen their horizons to accommodate variety and diversity.



There is a Curriculum Development Team, made up of two of the senior workers, Ms. Rama, who is in charge of the Green School and two experienced teachers. This team updates the curriculum from time to time, based on experience in the classroom and always towards more closely aligning it with local knowledge, customs, practices and environment. The team has put in a lot of hard work and is feeling good, 'high' on what they have achieved.

### Training

The very first extensive curriculum was what the first batch of trainees received at the training given to them by the Andhra Mahila Sabha in Hyderabad.

The AMS training went on for 10 months - in the beginning for 5 days a month, then 2

days and then 1 day a month. The AMS pre-school training encompasses story-telling with pictures, recitation, action songs, acting, drawing, etc. This really pertains to methodology. The content for these methods was then contextualized to fit in with local conditions and needs.

Eleanor Watts, a well-known educationist, was associated with setting up balwadis in 1986. She evolved a general curriculum, which Ms. Rama of the Green School (who herself was trained by David Hosburgh and has long experience of working with children), carried forward in her own training of the teachers. In 1993, Ms. Rama transferred full-time to the Green School. The AMS training followed this.

The teachers have on-going training. They meet for 2 days a month, every month. They discuss the previous month's work - the merits and the problems. Then together they decide the 'topic' round which the syllabus will be built for the next month and work out the details in smaller groups.

Once a quarter, training is conducted at different balwadis and teachers take turns conducting demonstration lessons. These are then discussed in the general group and suggestions for improvement are made. Then again, once every 6 months, a 3-day workshop is held for preparing teaching aids, mainly based on the use of cards - picture cards, number cards, etc. The training sessions provide teachers 'space' to explore their own creativity.

Another outlet for their creativity is the **Balwadi Patrika**. Each issue is devoted to one topic, e.g. Soil, seeds, trees. Different groups of teachers prepare different issues. A typical issue contains songs, stories, drawings, riddles, etc. The Patrika is for internal circulation and is used as a resource in the balwadi.



One thing has to be kept in mind. The teachers themselves come from the same sort of background as the children; by and large they are first generation learners. Their own learning (Class III to Class X) has been the usual rote learning with emphasis on literacy and numeracy. The DDS karyakarthis (workers) education too is not very different (as is the case with our educational system in general). Teachers and karyakarthis are not into "joyful learning" or "drawing out the potential of the child", and other such child-centred concepts and corresponding activities, never having experienced it themselves - they are most comfortable and secure with conventional teaching methods. They have mastered and do conduct 'joy of learning' related activities. But it is not very clear as to what extent they have internalized the spirit behind the concept.

Teachers are positively supported by DDS in acquiring new attitudes, but such a change for the teacher community as a whole, is handicapped by the fact that there is a not unnoticeable turnover of teachers. There is not enough incentive for better qualified teachers. Also it is in keeping with the DDS philosophy to select local girls. Daughters-in-law of the village are preferred, as (hopefully) they have come to stay as compared to daughters, who will go away.

The teachers need to experience all that they are expected to provide for the children. Not only creativity, but 'space' and the exhilaration that comes with the acquiring of new skills and knowledge - not as a one-time achievement, but at regular intervals.



Children are always learning - given the right atmosphere and circumstances - and so of course do adults, if only at a slower pace. But the stimulus for this has to be sought after or provided. While we consciously attempt to do this for children, it is not so consistent in the case of adults, who are mostly left to themselves to seek out stimuli for growth.

For these teachers, it is extremely important that their own development be paid attention to, for, keeping their own curiosity, creativity, sense of wonder, mental and emotional growth alive, is germane to their doing the same for children.

DDS changed focus from the 4 to 6 year-old to the 2 to 4 year-old. Dr. Anandalakshmy, in the course of an earlier evaluation, pointed out that the teaching was still aimed at the 4 to 6 year-old. Christine Peters, a researcher and trainer is at present giving the teachers training which will equip them with the capabilities required for interacting with the 2 to 4 year-olds in the balwadis.

Apart from this, all teacher training and follow-up is conducted by an internal team - in keeping with the aim of achieving autonomy in various spheres. This works very well as far as routine and follow-up training is concerned. But it might be worthwhile, from time to time, bringing in new trainers/resource persons and different methodologies/points of view, for providing fresh impetus to the teachers.

Then again, while DDS is paying a great deal of attention (environmentally and culturally), to contextualizing subject-matter of classroom transactions, it might want to think about exploring the personal and the emotional angle as well - and perhaps they have, but it is not overtly expressed or acknowledged.

Children love writing their parents', siblings', their own names - especially on the drawings they do. This is an easy route to literacy.

The 'joy of learning' methodologies, which are becoming popular, at least in discourse, are expected to make children self-confident and increase their self-esteem. Such methodologies are closely related to the sphere of emotions - and this aspect, we do not usually consciously plan for.

"What makes me feel good?"

"What has made me feel bad?"

"When do I laugh?" "And cry?"

"How do I feel this morning?" If bad, why? If good, why?

"When I sang in front of those visitors, what did I feel?"

"When that boy beat me, what did I feel?"

"When I beat that girl, what did I feel? When she cried, what did I feel?"  
And so on and so forth.

Children, 3 to 4 years onwards can relate to the above type of questions and naming their feelings is a first step to recognizing them and thereafter learning to control them.

This brings us to the daily 'conversation' sessions. The ones that I noticed were all cast in question/answer format, the teacher asking all the questions. This method is geared to extracting information the child has. It is about facts, not ideas, opinions, attitudes. And not aimed at making the child think, reflect, interact. Moreover, this type of 'conversation' covertly posits a superior-inferior relationship. This is not how we talk to a friend, an equal. If one of the values we are attempting to inculcate is a sense of equality, then there has to be give and take - the child needs to question and to feel she can question the teacher. And the ensuing interaction is what will make the child conscious of her own feelings, opinions, values and help develop her thought processes, discover and fashion her personality. This is of course simplifying a very complex matter, but conversations and other classroom interactions are one of the means in our hands to inculcate 'life skills' and to help alter perceptions of power relations.

For this to happen in the classroom, it is necessary that teachers experience parallel reflections and discoveries in training sessions.

"How do I feel when I am scolded (when young, now) ?"

"How do I feel when I am humiliated?"

"What experience in my past has made me feel great?" "Terrible?"  
Etcetera, etcetera.

### Internal Evaluation

The Internal Evaluation exercise that DDS staff (chiefly 3 workers, whose educational level is Class X ) undertook, during 2000/2001, has contributed towards:

- ❖ Sharpening their critical faculties.
- ❖ Understanding qualitative indicators in quantitative terms (e.g. cleanliness, classroom environment, children's participation.)
- ❖ Applying this evaluation to rationalizing future planning.
- ❖ Demystifying " Evaluation".

Two aspects of the balwadi were evaluated:

- ❖ The internal functioning of the balwadi.
- ❖ Management of the balwadi.

For the **internal functioning of the balwadi** 7 criteria were taken into consideration:

- ❖ Sanitation.
- ❖ Attendance.
- ❖ Classroom environment.
- ❖ Teaching material.
- ❖ Play material.
- ❖ Children's participation.
- ❖ Teacher's performance in training.

For each criterion, 4 indicators were set up, e.g. for classroom environment the indicators are - displaying children's drawings; children's drawings and relation to the monthly topic; name and date on the drawing and overall impression.

For the 22 balwadis, points (on a 100) were given for each of the criteria. So, when one adds up the points for all 7 criteria and takes the average, we arrive at a composite index for each balwadi. The average composite index for 22 balwadis is 54. 11 balwadis fall below the average and 11 fall above. The range is from 30 to 87.

The 3 balwadis at Ganeshpur, Gangwar and Narsapur, which do not have land, all fall in the below average category - at average points of 39, 49, and 49, respectively.

The 3 balwadis with the highest scores are:

Yedakullapally - 87

Cheelamamidi - 74

Potpally - 70

The 3 with the lowest scores are:

Ganeshpur - 39

Yelgoi - 31

Algole - 30

For the **management of the balwadi**, again, 6 criteria were employed for judging efficiency.

- ❖ Sangham members/mothers.
- ❖ Sangham supervisors.
- ❖ Ration committee.
- ❖ Land committee.
- ❖ Health workers.
- ❖ Teachers, cooks, supervisors.

The assessment quantified an informal understanding that the DDS staff had about the performance of the persons occupying various positions on the management structure.

Again, for each of the 22 balwadis, points (on a 100) were given for each criterion. The composite average for all 7 criteria is 49. 10 balwadis fall below average and 12 above average. The range is from 30 to 71.

Of the 3 balwadis without land, Ganeshpur is above average (64), and the other 2 fall below average, at 30 each.

The 3 balwadis with the highest score are:

Mamidgi - 71

Yedukulapally - 64

Ganeshpur - 64

The 3 balwadis with the lowest score are:

Edulapally - 31

Gangwar - 30

Narsapur - 30

Analysis of the 2 aspects of the balwadi - the internal functioning and the management system, do not yield sufficiently matched results to warrant any firm conclusions. However, the exercise is invaluable as a step towards analyzing and understanding the programme and the concept of evaluation.

The indicators need some further elaboration and a certain amount of refinement.

For instance, when I visited the field, at one balwadi (Mamidgi), we divided the 35 older (4 - 6) children into 4 groups and asked them what they thought a good balwadi was.

All the 4 groups said that a teacher who played and sang with them, a 'nice' teacher, was a must for a good balwadi. They also mentioned lots of play material, a big playground, trees, etc.

We later repeated the same exercise with sangham members (70), representing 11 of the 22 sanghams which manage balwadis. And with teachers - 18 of the 22.

Sangham members were divided into 3 groups for discussing what a good balwadi is. The first point that each of the groups made was about the teacher:

"She must be like a mother - she must love the children."

"She must be close to the children."

"She must come on time and give regular meals to the children."

Here again, trees, playground, toys, more rations, good buildings, etc. were also mentioned.

The teachers too were divided into 3 groups. The interesting thing was that none of them mentioned anything about the quality of teacher required for running a good balwadi. Trees, toys, plates, glasses, small tables, a bell, good drinking water and other such physical facilities were mentioned.

The children and sangham members clearly realize the importance of a nice/loving/friendly teacher. This is one of the important aspects of the balwadi that needs to be factored into an evaluation of the balwadi.

Staff, teachers, sangham members need to sit down and work out what the indicators are, for analyzing what the qualities are for naming a teacher as good, bad or indifferent. There is also a need to go into more details of what a 'classroom environment' is; what is the relationship between teacher and child; between child and child, etc. And for management, what is the relationship between sangham members and as between sangham members and the teacher. Because, relationships play a significant role in shaping the efficiency of functioning.

Since DDS' emphasis is more on life skills than on literacy, the above various factors need to be understood with greater clarity and analysed with greater precision.

This is not to take away from the merit of conducting an internal evaluation. Merely a suggestion to take the exercise further.

## A Summing Up and Some Recommendations

As earlier recorded there are 3 components to the functioning of the balwadis:

- ❖ The educational component.
- ❖ The nutritional component.
- ❖ The health component.

And there is the management aspect which encompasses all three components. Management is more closely related to the nutrition and the health components than to the education component. These two components are so woven into the social and cultural fabric of the communities involved, that sangham members are at home and at complete ease with the ins and outs of managing food and medicine - thanks to the DDS policy of promoting local foods and indigenous medicine.

With education, the picture is somewhat different. In the first place, the sangham women are largely illiterate and as such not familiar with the finer points of education, whether it be ECCD, pre-school or school. This is not the case with cropping patterns or medicinal plants.

But, more importantly, the education component is radically different from local ideas of education, whether it be formal, or what goes on in the daily life of the child. Regarding formal education, the community wants literacy and numeracy skills and discipline. It has taken them time to acknowledge that play, songs, fun, etc., do **something** for their children. But there is no doubt in their minds that the nutrition and health components of the programme take precedence over the education

component. What they do recognize is that the balwadi makes it easier for their children to succeed in joining and doing well in primary school.

The non-school, home and community education is attuned to conditioning boys and girls to fit into their different roles in society. There is no conception of 'realizing the potential' of the child or of increasing self-confidence and self-esteem. Creativity, a sense of wonder, critical thinking, etc. do not find a place in the world-view of local communities. These are new concepts being introduced to these communities, which therefore, not only need negotiation, but greater inputs from those in DDS who believe in this pathway to the growth of the individual.

DDS, in attempting to promote life skills in the balwadis, **does** cover one aspect which is familiar to the community - the emotional. All activities in the balwadi are for providing stimulation for the physical, cognitive, social and emotional growth of the child - though the 'emotional' is not so clearly spelt out and the 'social' is understood somewhat differently from what the community understands. As far as the 'emotional' is concerned, in the home, cuddling the baby, bathing the child, combing hair, etc., are all indicators of emotional stimulation - even though they may not be 'named' as such.

DDS has an excellent opportunity to extend the notion of emotional and other stimulation to the home. Sangham members are very close to DDS and the functioning of the balwadis. Dialogue and discussion re: the known area of emotional security in the home environment, via care, touch, speech, etc., is easily possible in the convivial relationship that exists between the organization and the people. This can then be followed by/ woven along with stimulation in the other spheres of the social, the cognitive, etc., - proceeding from the familiar to the relatively unfamiliar. This would be extending 'education' for the 2 to 6 year-old to an earlier stage of the child's growth and covering both the areas of the home and the balwadi.

**The Recommendations** set forth here relate more to the education component than to the nutrition and the health components. Some of the recommendations already made in the body of the report are repeated here.

### The Education Component

- ❖ The curriculum could include something more of the personal and the emotional than at present.
- ❖ Children could get some 'free play' time, when they can work things out for themselves, rather than be guided by the teacher all the time.
- ❖ 'Conversation' could be made a two-way process with equal participation by child and teacher.
- ❖ Ways of stimulating the child's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development could be extended to the home for the pre-balwadi, as also for the balwadi and the school-going child.
- ❖ All the above points need to be covered in teachers' training. They could undergo experiential training for purposes of self-discovery and acquiring/ increasing a sense of empathy with children. Such training would help in exploring their own values, attitudes, beliefs, prejudices.

- ❖ Teachers also need on-going stimulation for themselves, by way of new training inputs, talks/discussions by resource persons, so that a widening of their horizons is made possible - which is what is expected of them in interacting with children.
- ❖ The Balwadi Patrika provides scope to the teachers to explore their creativity re; the balwadi curriculum. It might be worthwhile providing them with an outlet for individual creativity - songs, poems, stories, which have nothing to do with education, but with their own particular proclivities and capabilities. A library of Telugu, other Indian language and world literature could help expand horizons further.
- ❖ Even if balwadi children cannot read, a library of story books which they can access at any time is a sure incentive to acquiring reading skills.

### The Nutrition and Health Components

- ❖ Mothers and teachers say that if the child is regular at the balwadi, a change for the better in her health status can be seen in 45 days. This could be more scientifically tracked by keeping records of height/weight/age and other related aspects of health.

### Documentation, Research, etc.

- ❖ The very interesting process of DDS programming is lost to other NGOs, for lack of documentation. DDS is well-entrenched in its philosophy and methodologies - documenting the process on an on-going basis could also help in self-analysis and future meaningful planning.
- ❖ The self-evaluation exercise needs to be analysed, refined and carried out on a regular basis every year or two.
- ❖ A number of research studies can be carried out: Tracer studies of children after they have left the balwadi - this would include those students who have now become teachers of balwadis and staff members in DDS; the relationship between the sangham and the balwadi; effect of feedback from the field on the curriculum; methods of socialization prevalent in the community and as attempted in the balwadi.
- ❖ Teachers could dialogue among themselves on what puzzles them, what data they need to run the balwadis better and come up with small research studies which, apart from providing them with valuable data, would also demystify the concept of 'research' for them - just as self-evaluation helps in demystifying the concept of 'evaluation'.

DDS quite consistently follows its philosophy of seeking autonomy and growth for the people it works with. The above suggestions are made in good faith, for furthering this very aim.

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