

06. ADATS : A Gender Integrated Approach – Anuradha Talwar (Jul1993)

1. SCHEDULE

The following programme was followed:

18.7.93	(Afternoon)	Discussion with Mahila Trainers
	(Evening)	Discussion with Ram Esteves
	(Night)	Reading of documents
19.7.93	(Morning)	Reading of documents
	(Afternoon)	Discussion with Ram Esteves
	(Evening)	Attending Situation Meeting
20.7.93	(Night)	Reading of documents
	(Morning)	Case studies in new area (Kanganahalli and Kanivenarayanapura villages, Chickballapur Taluk)
	(Afternoon)	Discussion with K.C.Sooryananda, Field Assistant and Raghavendra, Extension Worker
21.7.93	(Afternoon)	Meeting with 7 VHWs and 7 CSU women representatives of Yelagalhalli cluster
	(Evening)	Discussion with T.Jamuna, Mahila Trainer
	(Morning)	Reading of documents
22.7.93	(Afternoon)	Meeting with 4VHWs and 6 CSU women representatives of Kamatampalli Cluster
	(Evening)	Meeting with women of Nagarlu village
	(Morning)	Discussion with Ali, Field worker
23.7.93	(Afternoon)	Meeting with 4VHWs and 3 CSU women representatives of Chencharayanapalli Cluster
	(Evening)	Meeting with women of Chencharayanapalli village
	(Night)	Discussion with Ram Esteves
24.7.93	(Morning)	Discussion with L.Nanjundappa, BCS Secretary
	(Afternoon)	Meeting with 9VHWs and 9 CSU women representatives of Margankunte Cluster
	(Evening)	Discussion with Laxminarasamma, VHW of Margankunte
24.7.93	(Evening)	Meeting with women of Jeekavanlapalli village
	(Morning)	Discussion with Venkateshappa, BCS President and MAG Javid, Projects Assistant
	(Afternoon)	Discussion with Maggie Thomas, ex-Projects Assistant
	(Evening)	Discussion with Rani Madappa and N.Saraswathi, Mahila Trainer

2. BACKGROUND: ADATS, ITS IDEOLOGY AND ITS WORK

ADATS works in 4 Taluks of Kolar district. Most of the area here is mono-cropped, and there is also a fair amount of disparity in land holdings. The poor in the area are mainly agricultural labourers and marginal farmers and these form the main beneficiaries (96%) of ADATS' programme. The area seems homogenous, both culturally and socially, and is more or less untouched by industrial development. The major political forces in the area are the Congress, the CPI(M), and the Janata Dal. In one of the Taluks that ADATS works in, the Dalit Sangha,

an organisation of the backward castes, also play an important role. A faction of Naxalites also used to be present in one of the areas in which ADATS now works. While the CPI(M) did at one time try to oppose the work of ADATS, there has for the last few years been no strong opposition to their intervention from any of these forces or from any other forces as far as I could gather.

Interviews with the core and senior staff of ADATS and with the chief functionaries of BCS (a total of 11 persons) and reading of documents was done. Certain important features of ADATS' work have been drawn out of these interviews and these form the context in which their work with gender issues must be observed. These features are given below:-

2.1. Target Group and Geographical Coverage

At present, ADATS works in 425 villages. Of these, it has worked in 244 village for less than 3 years, in 120 villages for less than 6 years and in 88 villages it is in the withdrawal phase, i.e., it has worked for between 6 years and 15 years in these villages and is now in the process of withdrawing its staff from these areas within the next 2 years. In addition to these, there are 81 villages which have "dropped out" (15%) i.e., these villages in which work has been discontinued because they were unable to meet the conditions laid out for implementation of programmes by ADATS and the people's organisation or Coolie Sangha(CS).

ADATS works with a particular class of rural people, agricultural labourers, whom they refer to as coolies and they work with both men and women. ADATS believes that coolies are poor because they have been deprived of their rightful share in the available resources by middle and rich peasants. Hence, their main objective is "to assist coolies in their struggle to assert their rightful position in village society". In addition, they aim to "remove impediments of caste and gender bias, which stand in the way of coolie unity".

It also tries to organise an "effective minority" in the villages, i.e., it aims to organise a section of the coolies in such a way as to enable them to influence the course of main stream development. ADATS, thus, knows that it is not always possible to organise all the coolies in a village, but it aims to organise a large enough section in such a way in each village that this section determines much of what happens in the village.

2.2. Organisational Structure

ADATS works on the "two organisation principle", i.e., "keeping the promotional organisation (Voluntary Organisation) and the people's organisation (Coolie Sangha) as separate entities with the clear objective of organisational withdrawal of the Voluntary Agency once the Coolie Sangha is consolidated".

ADATS has now become a well established organisation, with a history of over 15 years of work. Its institutional structures and practices are well established. It has a total of 622 staff members to cover the 452 villages it works in actively at present. Each of these villages has in them a woman village level health worker (VHW) and except those in the withdrawal stage each also has a village level worker (VLW). Besides these, are supervisory staff like Field Workers, Field Assistants, office staff known as Desk Workers, and a Core Staff which is also involved in policy making.

The Coolie Sangha has the following structure –each village or hamlet has a Coolie Sangha Unit (CSU) which consists of 30-40 families on the average. 4-10 CSUs are federated into a Cluster, and all clusters are in turn federated into Taluk level Coolie Sangha. ADATS staff works with the elected functionaries of the Coolie Sangha (CSU Representatives, Cluster Secretaries, Taluk Secretaries) who are elected at various levels. CSU Meetings are held

every week, and CSU representatives meet other representatives from their cluster at a meeting once a week. Taluk level meetings which are attended by all representatives and all cluster secretaries are held once a month. Meetings at all levels are attended by ADATS staff working at that level. All meetings are held very regularly with attendance, quorum, minutes etc, being maintained. In addition, all ADATS staff meet once a week to talk about matters of relevance in their field work.

2.3. Programmes

ADATS has a number of programmes such as a Credit Fund, a Health Programme, a Child Sponsorship Programme, etc., all of which can only be used by the villages if they regularly hold meetings.

2.3.1. LARGER ISSUES

It has chosen to deliberately concentrate on local issues, taking up issues only at taluk level. Its leadership and that of the CS show distrust of other organisation involved in networking and action at the state level and national level. To quote their papers “we are careful to cooperate only with serious and like minded NGOs and hesitant to join any NGO network”. They also feel that issue-based campaigns lead to glorification of a few individuals, rather than building up sustainable long-term organisations. Many of the staff said repeatedly in interviews that issue-based networking led to people’s organisations which only came together at times of need and then break down. Such attempts they feel cannot create a village-level organisation which is active on a day-to-day basis.

2.3.2. INSTITUTIONAL BACKUP

ADATS has a large and expensive infrastructure (computers, vehicles, building, etc). It also spends a huge amount on programmes. By its own calculations, it has invested Rs.18,378 per beneficiary family in the last fifteen and half years.

Within ADATS, there is a hierarchical system and there is a fairly strict demarcation of responsibility. Staff at the higher levels is well educated and the general policy of the organisation is to take in only well qualified people to work at the level of supervisory staff (though there are one or two exceptions)

Due to extensive computerisation and documentation, information is easily and readily available. This information system is used to monitor its work on a regular basis as well as to give feedback to the members of the Coolie Sangha.

With reference to women certain special features of ADATS’ work are as follows:

2.3.3. IDEOLOGICAL POSITION OF WOMEN

Though working with both men and women, ADATS give special emphasis to women. It has special safe guards and provisions for women in all its programmes. ADATS believes “women are doubly exploited as coolies as well as women”, and are therefore “in a position of double disadvantage”. The roots of this exploitation according to their papers are “intricately woven in myths and half truth... deeply ingrained prejudices and suppositions which are very private and personal in character; and macho norms of village society”. Also, women themselves have “their own in-built inhibitions and undeveloped faculties”. It is therefore necessary, they feel, to have special provisions within programmes for women. ADATS also believes that it is necessary to backup this ideology with actual money power in the hands of women in its programmes. To quote ADATS, “it is not enough to be fair and even handed when it comes to the question of women. Attempts to give a separate

attention to women could easily disguise more intricate forms of discrimination through apartheid like policies of separateness, where ultimately pittances are thrown at them. It is therefore vital that *compulsory* spaces are provided for women to participate in all the normal and everyday activities of the development efforts –the Coolie Sangha- while at the same time creating special fora for them to meet and develop separately.

2.4. Women Representatives and Fora

In keeping with the above since 1986-87 (at ADATS suggestion and insistence), at least one of the three elected representatives in the CSU has to be a woman. In 1988-89, ADATS realised that even though 1 CSU representative was a woman, this was not giving sufficient importance and space for women to express their problems. Hence, a separate forum known as the Mahila Meeting was started in all the villages. At least one woman from each CSU member family has to attend these meetings. However, Mahila Meetings are platforms within the Coolie Sangha, and there is no separate registered body for coolie women.

2.4.1. WOMEN'S POWER OVER PROGRAMMES

The Mahila Meeting has been given wide-ranging powers. Most important, all decisions taken in the CSU about disbursement of ADATS money in the form of loans have to be sent to the Mahila Meeting for approval. The Mahila Meeting has the power to veto these decisions, without giving any reasons. ADATS, in turn will release funds if the Mahila Meeting passes them. The credit fund, from which loans are given now stands at Rs.1,70,84,971.

Two of ADATS' main programmes for CSU families, Child Sponsorship and Health are routed through Mahila Meeting. Each village is allocated an amount from the total budget, and the Mahila Meeting then has the power to determine how this money will be spent. In the case of the Health budget, the Mahila Meeting selects the Village Health Worker (VHW) and decides on her monthly payment. They also decide on how much to pay each family in times of health problems. For the Child Sponsorship budgets the Mahila Meeting decides on beneficiaries.

Each Mahila Meeting has also been given a small amount ranging from Rs.1,000 to Rs.5,000 as a Petty Credit Fund. These are for emergency credit needs of the women. The money lies with the CSU woman Representative or the VHW. Any women member can borrow from this fund for a period of couple of week. This fund has been especially set up to help women avoid sexual harassment by the landlords, which was a common feature earlier, whenever women went to borrow money. A report is placed every week on the amount of borrowings, returns and the balance in the Petty Credit Fund, and other programmes.

The amount and the percentage of total funds made available for these programmes in the last three years is given below:

Health Care	Rs	22,82,965	(4.58%)
Children's Education	Rs	5,40,007	(1.08%)
Petty Credit Fund	Rs	5,87,500	(1.18%)
Total funds made available to Mahila Meeting	Rs	34,10,472	(6.85%)
Total ADATS expenses	Rs	4,98,21,989	(100.00%)

2.4.2. TRAININGS

According to Maggie, a Project Assistant, who worked for ADATS till December 1992, trainings of at least 5 women from each village were conducted right from the time the Mahila Meeting started. The persons trained were generally the CSU women representative, the VHW and 3 other active women. During the trainings, which were for 3 days each, the main

focus was to explain that programmes like the Petty Credit Fund, Health Budget, etc, were instruments which women could use to improve their status within their families, and in the society. The emphasis was on strengthening women so that they could fight on issues which affected them as women.

2.4.3. WOMEN ON THE STAFF

Within ADATS, a conscious attempt has been made to sensitise staff on gender issues. This has been done in staff meetings, and also by Maggie (ex-Project Assistant). In addition, as policy, there is also “the conscious use of a gender bias free vernacular, flexible work timings, a supportive work environment, specially with regard to children, and the lack of division between the personal and political”.

Of its total staff of 622 persons, 239 are women. Their representation at various level is as follows:

Level	Total	No. of women	Percentage of total workers at that level
Village Staff	538	229	42.57%
Cluster Staff	38	-	00.00%
Field Staff	27	7	25.93%
Intermediary Staff	8	1	12.50%
Senior Staff	6	1	16.60%
Core Group	5	1	20.00%

The 229 women in the village staff are almost all village health workers (VHW). Only two of these are VLWs. According to ADATS’ policy, VHWs are village women who are chosen by the Mahila Meetings to do health work. They are trained and paid initially by ADATS, but are later accountable to the Mahila Meeting.

The seven persons at the field staff level are known as Mahila Trainers. Their main role is to “ensure that congenial conditions are built for the total and unreserved participation of women” in the Coolie Sangha building and consolidation process. They are also responsible for organising training sessions for village women in the management of the petty credit fund, health budget and child sponsorship budget. Three of the Mahila Trainers have attended 10 days training session for Community Workers. Gender issues were a part of this training.

The 2 women in the Intermediary staff and Senior staff are responsible for accounts and administrative work. The woman in the Core group, Shubha Chacko, who had joined only a week before the study was made, is known as the Project Assistant. She is to focus especially on gender issue. In particular, her responsibility would be to “enhance established systems and practices by introducing new experiences and insights and to enhance the conceptual clarity and analytical skills of village staff”, especially in relation to gender. However, she will also be responsible for general coordination, planning and supervision. For the past 5-6 years, another woman, Maggie, was occupying this position. She left in December, 1992.

At the Senior level, ADATS had earlier also tried to recruit a number of women, especially at Senior Staff level, but has been unable to retain them.

3. IMPACT ON TARGET GROUP WOMEN

A questionnaire covering all possible aspects of a woman’s life was used to talk to women from 2 villages Kanganahalli and Kanivenarayanapura villages in which ADATS has just begun work, or in which it has not worked at all. Key aspects which could be thought of as indicators of women’s exploitation were identified through these interviews. These problems were:

There was a definite preference for male children in villages where ADATS had not worked.

- i. Girl children were sent to school less frequently than boys.
- ii. Mothers were reluctant to allow their unmarried daughters to go out unescorted.
- iii. The reputation and character of an unmarried girl were important factors when marriage negotiations were going on.
- iv. A daughter's marriage was an expensive affair, with a lot of expenses on jewellery and often resulted in indebtedness and sale of land.
- v. Cases of desertion, bigamy and wife beating were fairly common.
- vi. Women ate at the end, after serving everyone, and sometimes food fell short for them.
- vii. Husbands received health care sooner than wives in case of illness.
- viii. Male relatives and husbands did not help much in the housework.
- ix. Women did not always get equal wages for equal work.
- x. Women were not able to get work other than coolie work (agricultural work) and stated that unemployment was their biggest problem.
- xi. Land was in the name of men, even when the land was received as part of their dowry.
- xii. Decisions about family property, sale of land, livestock, family expenditure, etc, were thought to be male prerogatives.
- xiii. Women did not participate in public gatherings in the village.
- xiv. Women had poor self images and felt it was better to be born a man.

4. IMPACT ON KEY ISSUES

49 women from 4 clusters which covered a total of 26 villages were asked their reactions to the issues given above in the cluster meetings, i.e., their reactions were elicited in groups and not at the individual level. It must also be noted that these groups consisted of women who were either village level health workers (VHWs) or women representatives in their village Sangha. Hence they were women who received maximum exposure to ADATS' work and way of thinking. They were also women who were capable of taking up leadership roles within the village, and could therefore be termed the more advanced section of village women. ADATS had also been working in these villages for a sufficiently long period of time, so that it was possible to judge whether changes had taken place and whether its work was responsible for these changes. Thus, ADATS has been working in Yelagalhalli cluster for 5 years, in Kamatampalli cluster for 8 years, in Chencharayanapalli cluster for 6 ½ years and in Marganakunte cluster for 5 years.

In addition, village-level women meetings were also conducted in 3 villages and the reactions of the women (in groups of 20-30) were also drawn out. Of these ADATS has been working in Nagarlu village for 15 years. In fact, this was one of the villages in which ADATS first began its work. ADATS has worked in Chencharayanapalli village for 6 ½ years and in Jeekavanlapalli village for 5 years. The reactions of all these women were as follows:

4.1. Preference to male child

“Earlier, we used to feel that a girl was a liability, as her marriage would get us into debt. The mother was cursed for giving birth to a daughter. We felt that a boy would look after us in our old age, but the girl would go away. Now we feel that both are our children, and both are looked after well. If my daughter were educated, after marriage she can discuss things and

contribute to decisions. She can also add to the family income and live better than we did” (a woman from Jeekavanlapalli village). This was the opinion of all the women we talked to. A reason cited for this lack of bias for boys by a VHW from Kamatampalli cluster was that Sangha members did not believe in customs and caste any more, and were therefore able to arrange for dowry-less marriages.

4.2. School going for girls

Women of the Chencharayanapalli cluster, who were from 4 villages reported that earlier only 3-4 girls used to go to school in their villages. Now, they reported an attendance of 15 boys and 15 girls in one village, about 20 boys and 10 girls each in 2 villages and 21 girls and fewer boys in another village. However, when questioned individually about sending their daughters to school, not all said that they were sending their daughters to school. Kamatampalli cluster showed a similar trend. Villages in Marganakunte cluster also reported similar increase in the number of girls attending school since the Sangha had started. In this cluster meeting, were women from 2 villages who had just recently joined the Bagepalli Coolie Sangha. While other women who had been with the Sangha for a longer time reported that they were sending their daughters to school, the 2 new women reported that they were not sending their daughters to school.

For non-Sangha members, Kamatampalli cluster women reported that the same pattern of increased school going for girls was there. They said that this was because of the general changes in the surroundings. They felt the

Sangha was a part of those changes, but other societal changes were also having an effect. However, Chencharayanapalli cluster women reported that non-Sangha members were not sending more girls to school.

In Nagarlu village the village with the longest history of ADATS work, women said that they sent all their children to school, irrespective of sex, and that non-Sangha members were also copying them. The women of Yelagalhalli cluster said that they had also sent girls to school after the Sangha came into existence, and reported that the child education budget had been especially helpful in this regard.

4.3. Mobility of Women

The women of Yelagalhalli cluster reported that they were still quite concerned about a bride's reputation when choosing her for marriage. However, her capacity to earn was also an important factor. They also reported that after the formation of the Sangha gossip and suspicion had reduced, resulting in greater mobility for girls and for married women. Women from Chencharayanapalli cluster, Kamatampalli Cluster, and Nagarlu village gave much more positive responses on this issue, stating that unmarried girls were sent out for work, as otherwise, they would not be able to prepare their daughters for an independent life.

An ADATS conducted skill training programme was cited as an example of allowing daughters greater mobility, and trusting them more by the women of Chencharayanapalli cluster and Nagarlu village. The women of Nagarlu village added that the fact that girls were going out to work or to learn a skill did not act as a barrier when finding grooms for them. They further stated that when they had been young, their parents had never allowed them such freedom. In fact they would have been thrashed soundly, if they had dared to move out of the house! Nagarlu village also had 6 Muslim women who were members of the Sangha. These women stated that they did not use the veil any more—even when they went to a strange place. They had started doing these after the Sangha was formed.

4.4. Marriage expenses

A count was made of the total number of marriages (where the girl belonged to the village) that had taken place in the last one year in their villages and of the number amongst these which had been simple marriages. The figures are as follows:

Yelagalhalli	8 simple marriages in 7 village
Kamatampalli	7 marriages in 5 villages, of which 4 were for Sangha members, with an average cost of Rs.2000-3000. The other 3 were marriages in the landlord families.
Chencharayanapalli	10 marriages in 4 villages, of which 4 involved costs of less than Rs.1500, 4 cost between Rs.3000-7000, and one involved expensed of Rs.30,000, as the boy was an educated one from very far away.
Marganakunta	54 marriages in 9 villages, with 52 at a mass wedding ceremony at the monthly taluk level Bagepalli Coolie Sangha meeting at a cost of less than Rs.100 per couple in which couples from families who were not Sangha members also participated; one wedding in a coolie family (non-Sangha member) which cost Rs.10,000 and 1 wedding in a village which had recently joined the Sangha cost Rs.20,000.
Nagarlu	1 marriage in 1 village which cost about Rs.100 and was conducted at the BCS meeting.

In addition, it was stated by the women that a simple marriage ceremony at the Taluk level meeting was quite popular and the idea of reducing marriage expenses was becoming popular amongst poorer families who were not Sangha members.

4.5. Marital Disputes

A count was made of the total number of marital disputes that had taken place in the last one year in the villages, which the Mahila Meeting had tried to solve.

Yelagalhalli	12 cases in 8 villages
Kamatampalli	2 cases in 5 villages
Chencharayanapalli	5 cases in 4 villages
Marganakunte	4 cases in 9 villages
Nagarlu	1 case in 1 village and that too of a non-Sangha member. The women could not resolve the problem.
Jeekavanlapalli	3 cases in 1 village.

The women of Kamatampalli cluster said that they had had to deal with many more such problems earlier, but with regular intervention by the Mahila Meeting, these problems had reduced.

4.6. Bigamy

As far as bigamy was concerned, the women of Kamatampalli cluster and Nagarlu village (even the Muslim) ones said that was not customary amongst their families. Chencharayanapalli cluster on the other hand reported that there were 7 cases of bigamy in their 4 villages, 5 of which had occurred after the formation of the Sangha. The members had been unable to control the men. Yelagalhalli reported that after the Sangha had been formed, they opposed all such marriages very strongly. In fact, they were opposed to a second marriage even in the case of a widower, insisting that he should look after his children single-handedly, like any widow.

4.7. Drinking

In Kamatampalli Cluster, the women reported that there used to be many drunks in their villages, earlier. Now only about 16 men drank heavily. Of the 5 villages in Kamatampalli Cluster, 2 reported that there were no cases at all any more. Chencharayanapalli cluster reported that earlier in 1 village all the men used to drink very heavily and used to get into drunken brawls. Now they drank in very controlled ways. One village said there were 10 heavy drinkers earlier, but now there was only 1. Another village, in the same cluster reported 3 cases earlier, but now only 1 drinks. In Yelagalhalli the women CSU representative had had the liquor den removed. No wider movement had been launched, and the women in all areas talked of the Mahila Meeting and the Sangha as a means of controlling the drinkers, rather than fighting the liquor shop owners. In Yelagalhalli, the women claimed that the non-Sangha members had also started to adopt the norm of non-drinking, because they saw the advantages of economic gains from it.

4.8. Eating with the family

All the women claimed that after the Sangha had started they ate with all the members of their family instead of later. Women from Jeekavanlapalli village, however, said some of them still ate at the end.

4.9. Preference to Health care

All the women claimed that they received health care in time now, and no difference was made between men and women. A special advantage, they said was the decentralised health budget which was in the hands of the women, and the presence of the VHW. In older villages, like Kamatampalli cluster and Nagarlu village, they even felt women should get first preference in health care, as otherwise the housework would not get done.

4.10. Equal wages for equal work

All villages reported equal wages for equal work. The wages had also increased, but were still below the government declared minimum wage. A major factor leading to increase in wages was the implementation of the dry-land farming programme by ADATS, which had provided them with work at higher wages for a long period of time and led to the rise in wages as well as establishment of the equal wages norm. They also said that non-Sangha members had benefited from this, also, as their wages had also increased.

4.11. Employment

All the villages claimed that they had 5-6 months of coolie work, at the maximum. While earlier many had to migrate in lean months, now they have found alternative employment through the credit fund of the Sangha; some have started businesses; others have cattle, etc.

4.12. Help in housework

Many women claimed that their husbands helped in housework, especially in fetching water and fuel, and in caring for their children. It was not clear whether this was always a totally new phenomenon, as a few said that their husbands used to help a bit earlier also. Housework, on the whole, however remained the woman's responsibility primarily.

4.13. Finances

Land was still majorly owned by the men, but decisions as regards financial matters were often taken jointly, especially when a loan from the Sangha was involved. Often there were reports of men giving their entire income to their wives to manage the family finances.

4.14. Participation in Public affairs

In villages where the CSU existed, the CSU meetings and functions arranged by the CSU were the only major public occasions. The women participated in these functions, and also in the CSU meetings. However, the extent of participation in the CSU meeting was limited to the CSU Representatives and VHW and a few other women in the case of newer villages. In older villages, sometimes joint meetings were held and the women felt in a few years time, they would be able to participate equally in joint meetings. The women blamed their lack of participation to the fact that none could look after the children if they and their men folk went to the CSU meeting together. At the cluster level, no women could get elected as the Cluster Secretary. 2 women had stood for Cluster Secretary's post, but both had lost. The opinion generally was that women's lack of ability to go from village to village at night; their illiteracy; and the lack of confidence of people in their leadership ability was responsible for their inability to get elected to these posts.

All the women said they were quite happy to be women and seemed to have positive self-images of themselves and of their own capabilities.

In addition to the above, the interviews with the staff also gave the information that sexual exploitation by landlords of coolie women had earlier been common. It was common for landlords to ask for sexual favours in return for petty loans that they gave to the coolie women in times of need. It was, in fact, to prevent this problem that the Petty Credit Fund had been started, and it had succeeded in helping the women to overcome this problem.

5. IMPACT ON THE TARGET GROUP: A SUMMARY:

It was very clear from the discussions held with the target women that ADATS' work had an easily discernible positive impact on women in the target group. Thus, there are now the following changes visible:

- i. A visible decrease in the preference for male children over female children;
- i. Some increase in the number of girls being sent to school;
- ii. Some increase in the mobility allowed to unmarried girls;
- iii. A very visible increase in the number of simple marriages, with a number of mass weddings at the Bagepalli Coolie Sangha Taluk level meetings, and a drastic fall in the custom of dowry;
- iv. Some fall in the number of marital disputes and bigamy cases due to regular intervention by the Mahila Meeting;
- v. Decrease in the amount of drunkenness amongst men;
- vi. A change in the practice of women eating after everyone has finished their meal;
- vii. Equal wages for equal work for men and women though, still less than the government minimum wages;
- viii. Alternative employment in the lean season for women and men, through the Credit fund;
- ix. Some amount of joint decision making in financial matters;
- x. Women having positive self-images.

It was also clear from the answers the women gave that these changes had come about due to the Coolie Sangha's presence, as they could not cite any other force which may have caused these changes. Also the extent of impact seemed greater in villages where ADATS had worked for larger periods. Interestingly, the influence of the Coolie Sangha Unit, which, in ADATS' terminology, formed the "effective minority" in the village, also spread to non-

Sangha members. This was especially true in the issue of receiving equal wages for equal work, dowry-less marriages, schooling of girls, and in some cases, reduction of drinking.

The impact has not been positive so far in terms of women taking on leadership roles outside their own villages, or in larger mixed fora. Also, women have not as yet begun to participate in the Coolie Sangha Unit meetings, which remain almost entirely all-male affairs. Sharing of housework and child care is also not there, as yet. Ownership of assets is still with the men.

6. IMPACT ON WIDER ISSUES

As a policy, ADATS believes that “it is vital for people’s organisations to come together in formal unity... but we are careful to cooperate only with serious and like minded NGOs, and hesitant to join any NGO network”.

When asked about what conditions they would lay down to look for close association with other organisations, Shivanna, BCS Secretary and Javid, Project Assistant, felt that regularity in organisational meetings; the concept of representatives rather than leaders; attention to gender; development of mass of members, rather than one or a few leaders; transparency in finances and everything else were some of the vital aspects they would look for. As these conditions are adhered to very strictly, and as ADATS is very suspicious of other organisations, they relate to practically no one else when it comes to working together on issues.

ADATS also has another important view-point on the issue of reacting to forces which emanate from outside its target group’s immediate geographical area; it feels that such reactions are often in the form of issue-based campaigns, and result in people’s organisations which unite only at times of need. Hence, long term organisational development is neglected, and no long term changes achieved. As a result, the BCS and the other Taluk level Sangha rarely react or act on issues which are outside their own geographical area. Thus, while within their area, the BCS controls most political events – be it elections to the Mandal Panchayat or Dairy Cooperatives or controlling communal reaction – its political power does not manifest itself in protesting against or striving for changes at a wider level.

People who work in the BCS and ADATS at the senior level are, however, aware that such forces are at work which have an impact on their work. For example, Ram Esteves, the Director and Mario Esteves, the Executive Assistant, agree that due to the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), over the past few years, the amount of Government money available to the Taluk for repair of roads, health, rural development, etc., has decreased and that it will decrease even more in the future. In their view, this will effect the lives of the women, especially, as they are the main users of health services, both as mothers and as women. The Coolie Sangha can only make up for this loss in marginal ways they feel. However, on the other hand, their reaction to SAP is not by organising with others to protest against such policies. It is instead to try and adjust to it. They are trying to find spaces within the economy, in which the Coolie Sangha members through skill training, economic programme and some bank loans, can find a market and survive the onslaught of SAP.

They also admit that there is an increasing tendency of violence against women, especially due to the onslaught of video and cinema. Also, there is the tendency in society to objectify women, and to use their attributes for commercial purpose. However, they feel they are able to fight these forces in the villages where the Coolie Sangha is strong. And that it is not their responsibility to act when some event takes place elsewhere. They also feel such a reaction will not be effective, and is therefore a wasted effort on their part. This is in spite of the fact that in Bagepalli town itself, they admit that there has been an increase in prostitution over the last few years. Maggie, their ex-Project Assistant, also felt it was vital to react to wider forces, which had a strong effect on the status of women. She gave the example of school text books, which made children accept a lop-sided view of male and female roles in society. She

felt it was a failing on ADATS' part to not act with other women's groups on such matters. She also felt that such forces could finally nullify the new pro-woman culture that the Sangha were so successfully propagating.

Even the action of all Taluk-level Sangha uniting on a particular issue is a comparatively new phenomenon for ADATS, as the other Taluk level Sangha, besides the BCS, have come up recently. The impression I got, which needs to be checked, is that even the BCS organising protest actions as a whole on any common issue is not very common. Collective protest seemed more common at the village or cluster level.

7. IMPACT ON WOMEN STAFF

ADATS has a very low percentage of women at the higher levels. In fact, there are only 10 women amongst the 46 workers at the Field Staff, Intermediary Staff, Senior Staff and Core Group levels (21.7%), while at the village staff level, there is almost equal representation with 229 women amongst the total of 538 (42.57%). This is in spite of the fact that ADATS has always claimed to have a pro-woman recruitment policy and has insisted on recruiting only women sometimes at the Field Assistant level.

In fact, a couple of years ago, a number of well qualified (Masters in Social Work) women were recruited, yet none of them stayed on for longer than a year. The reason why most of them left seems to have been their inability to adjust with rural life and their inability to organise their own personal lives in such a way as to put work priorities before family obligations.

A set of women who could now be called the mainstay of ADATS women staff at the higher level are its Mahila Trainers. These women are all graduates who belong to nearby Taluks. They are from semi-urban backgrounds and from middle class or lower middle class families. Most of them have been in ADATS for a few months or at most a couple of years. Those women, perhaps, because of their newness to the organisation, do not have much understanding of ADATS' ideology. Even the ones who have been there for a longer time (e.g., Jamuna) have a good understanding of ADATS programmes, but not of the theoretical ramifications of gender. So, at the moment, they are ill-equipped to play the expected role of ensuring that "congenial conditions are built up for the total and unreserved participation of women" in the Coolie Sangha. Many of them (quite unsurprisingly, as they are so new) have also not developed a commitment to the work, itself, and like the city women who left, they have also not made to work a part of their life. So, whether they continue to work in ADATS or not depends on whether such commitment develops in future.

On the other hand, the huge number of village level health workers at the lower level seem to have no means of rising up in the organisational hierarchy. While men who started as VLWs have become Field Workers, Field Assistants and even the Taluk Level Secretary and President of the Sangha, no such openings see available for the VHWs. This seems to be mainly because none of them are very educated, and the work of an ADATS staff member or at the higher levels of the Coolie Sangha requires formal education in the way in which it is designed and executed.

ADATS has thus put an emphasis on recruiting women who are well qualified, formally, and has not looked for commitment to or aptitude for work when recruiting women staff. As a result, while it has employed qualified women, like the M.A.s in social work who took on the jobs of Field Assistant, it has not been able to retain such persons. Similarly, it has evolved very few avenues for committed, but educationally unqualified workers to rise up from the grass-roots, from the level of VHWs, because of the system it has evolved and of its own insistence on educational qualification.

At the same time, it has not evolved system which once a person is employed, involve the person more and more in the work and make the person more committed to the work.

From what we could gather, one of the reasons for this could be the lack of emphasis on actually and in reality, breaking the barrier between the personal and political. For example, ADATS has understood and has dealt with patriarchy in the target group very effectively. Women in the target group have come together to discuss common problems and to evolve strategies to fight with these. Discussions on issues of exploitation take place regularly. However, within the staff, the relationship seems to be much more professional. Patriarchy as it exists for middle class women has not been discussed.

This is not to say that structures which are positive for women have not been dealt within the organisation. It is also true that ADATS deals very sternly with any anti-woman action e.g. a BCS Secretary who tried to get married again, or have an extra-marital affair was dismissed. A positive attitude towards gender within male staff, flexible work timings, etc., are all there, but the retention of staff and their increasing commitment to work is not only a question of having positive structures, but also of fighting patriarchy within the minds of women staff, so that they are able to use these structures positively. The work for staff members has thus become a means of liberating the women from target groups and is not also seen as doing very importantly a means of liberating oneself, as a woman.

8. A SUMMARY – TOWARDS GUIDELINES

ADATS' work has had definite and positive impact on women in the target group. The key aspects of ADATS' work which have made this possible in the opinion of their staff and in my opinion, are as follows:

1. A separate forum has been set-up, where women's problems can emerge and be dealt with and in which the women can develop the power to deal with problems.
2. Within the programmes, women have been given a great deal of power. They are able to veto decisions which the men's forum take and also decide on flow of benefits from other programmes.
3. As ADATS ensures that the size of its programmes are fairly large, and that all families in the Sangha are totally covered by them, families derive definite material benefits from ADATS' work. They also benefit from issue-based struggles (like wage struggles). As a result, the men do not resist the new thinking that ADATS is introducing.
4. ADATS works with both men and women, so it is able to throw out any problems the men may have with issues that the women bring up.
5. Meetings and intervention in the village level and other fora is done with great regularity, and this has an impact in changing the way in which men and women think. The fact that there is a huge paid staff with at least one or two persons per village make it easier to intervene with such regularity.
6. The staff of ADATS both men and women has been sensitised on gender issues, and is therefore able to deal with such issues effectively.
7. The fact that ADATS organizes an "effective minority" in the village, and that it ensures that it is also covering a substantial geographical area, instead of working in scattered pockets makes their work have greater impact.

In addition to the above, it must also be noted that ADATS works in an area which has a homogenous population, and with a homogeneous target group. There are also no other major political forces with which ADATS has to fight for political space. These factors also make it easier for ADATS to work at the local level, and make its work more effective.

Within the organisation, ADATS has established a pro-women's culture, by sensitising its staff members to gender and by making work arrangements as suitable as possible for women. However, in spite of this it has not been able to find a large number of committed women to work with it at the senior level.

Women in the target group have also not taken up leadership positions within the Coolie Sangha. With certain positive steps, like special help for illiterate women, help to travel at night from village to village, etc., and with the formable atmosphere that already exists within ADATS, this should also soon become possible.

While ADATS has been able to positively influence the lives of the women it works with directly, this impact has also spread to the lives of non-Sangha women in some villages. However, ADATS and the Coolie Sangha are still, out of choice, not using the political power and gender consciousness that they have developed to influence the lives of women in other areas where they may not be directly working.