

ASHA FOR EDUCATION - AUSTIN CHAPTER



1. Who are the Irulas ?

- Tribal community living in the southern parts of India
- ‘Irula derived from the tamil word ‘irul’ implying ‘darkness’ or the color of the skin of the irulas
- Belong to Negrito (or Negroid) race – oldest people to have come to India.
- Traditional rat and snake catchers. Life and sustenance depended heavily on forests (The Forest protection Bill (1976) changed everything)
- Recognized by the GoI as a scheduled tribe.
- Ongoing struggles – Opportunities and benefits from the government seldom reach them, bonded labor, no representation in law making bodies – covered by BBC article (<http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/579/bbrcicemills.pdf>)

2. How and why was the Bharathi Trust formed ?
What are Sarpams and how are they associated
with Bharathi Trust ?

- Formative years
- Served as a full time teacher for street children in Bangalore and later worked for women's rights in Chennai slums.
- While working with children and women in Chennai slums, she came to know about the plight of the Irulas
- Founded Bharathi Trust and Asha supported Bharathi Trust's efforts in establishing 8 motivational centers for the Irula tribes to help children ramp up and go to schools.

Sarpam

Bharathi Trust Formed Sarpam and the unorganized workers union.

- Different activities of the Sarpam include:
 - Building local leadership in Irula tribes
 - Educating people of their of basic rights, understanding and utilizing schemes available from the government.
 - Sarpam represents the Irulas to the government and many of its members are now included in government committees.
 - Sarpam created awareness among the people through protests on the issues of bonded labors while articulating their demands to the govt.
 - After the Tsunami struck the Sarpam organized communities to help and support each other.

3. What are the laws governing bonded labor in India ?

Can you cite a few instances when the local, state or central administration clearly declared that the problem exists ?

How were the bonded irula laborers released ?

- Article 23 of India's constitution was translated to legislation - Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976 (<http://www.vakilno1.com/bareacts/bondedlaboursystemact/bondedlaboursystemact.htm>)
- UN Human Rights committee on bonded labor in India (<http://www.antislavery.org/archive/submission/submission1997-08India.htm>)
 - Responsibility of implementing law on State governments, who underreport or deny existence e.g. Tamil Nadu
 - Vast majority of bonded laborers are from SC/ST - underprivileged sections of the society
 - Failure of implementation of law – non-existent vigilance committees
 - Estimated 10 million bonded laborers in India
 - Estimated 15 million child bonded laborers in India
- Instances of acceptance – Rajasthan mines, Agricultural workers and land confiscation in Rajasthan, UP and Punjab, Rice mills in Tamil nadu etc.

Bonded Labor in Thiruvallur district

- 1000 rice mills across Tiruvallur District of which around 150 are functioning in Red Hills employing about 50 bonded laborers residing in the mill premises.
- 90% of the workers are illiterate and do not even know their age. Women, men and children, work 19 hours a day without holidays.
- Three generations have lived, worked and died in the same mill. Wages are 0.79 Rs/hr (33 cents for a 19 hour work day), far below the legal minimum wage rate conditions of 10 Rs /hr, (\$1.8 per 8 hour work day).
- They do not know how much money they get, though they are told by their rice mill “owners”, they owe Rs 40-50,000 each for past “loans” which keep growing with double interest. Females have had to work immediately after childbirth and in some cases leading to death.

Awards and Honors

- Best social work Award, Lion's Club Chennai, 1999
- Best community worker award, Irula Society, 2000
- Best social work award, Medha Patkar, 2003
- National speak out Award, Sonia Gandhi, 2005
- Heroes Acting To End Modern-Day Slavery, 2006
(Trafficking in Persons Report – US Dept. Of State)

Photos :

- <http://data.ashanet.org/datastore/data/Chapters/Austin/Projectpics/siddamma/sknagar/sknagar.html>
- <http://data.ashanet.org/datastore/data/Chapters/Austin/Projectpics/siddamma/SiddammaUSTrip/SiddammaUSTrip.html>

Asha's Involvement

- Past
 - Motivational centers
- Current
 - Fellowship
 - Resource center
 - Project Freedom
 - Tsunami Relief & Rehabilitation

4. Why is Bharathi Trust working on organic farming and a resource center ?

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- Many rehabilitated bonded laborers had land allotments from the government
- Small farmers from all communities in the area were facing a crisis and this was the story in most parts of India – An Agrarian crisis with Farmer suicides
- Providing a space for communities to experiment with alternative organic low cost farming techniques and an alternate school for sustainable development.
- Siddamma met Nammalvar during the Tsunami relief and rehabilitation.

More reading :

Asha Q&A : http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/579/resource_ans4jun05.pdf

Sanjeev/Anita's essay :

<http://www.ashanet.org/austin/projects/siddamma.html>

Photos :

<http://data.ashanet.org/datastore/data/Chapters/Austin/Projectpics/siddamma/resource.Jan06/resource.Jan06.html>

Review

- 3 site visits between Jan 2006 to April 2007
- Conference calls almost every month
- Updates in Meeting
- Discussions related to organic agriculture

Reading material : Project page

(<http://www.ashanet.org/austin/projects/siddamma.html>

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Salient developments in the last year

- Reaching out to the farmer community in the surrounding area (<http://www.ashanet.org/austin/projects/siddamma.html>)
 - Training workshops
 - Visits by resource persons
 - Distribution of resources
- Many farmers being interested in the developments at the resource center and adopting methods
- Irula families working at the resource center
- School structure almost complete
- Successful groundnut yields
- Successful sunflower yields
- Challenges faced and overcome



Estimated budget from 2006

- On project page : http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/579/rc_budget.pdf
- Total requirement at that point was around Rs. 21 lakhs
- Asha Austin's support so far : \$21,220 (Rs. 9,37,392)
- What happened with the funds ?
- What are we reviewing ? The specific accounting and balance sheets, like in an audit ?

Cows and Cattle Shed

- Purpose
 - Organic manure depends heavily on cow dug, cow urine, dairy products.
 - Irula families own a cow each and they are form of sustenance for them
 - Shed should be constructed in such a way to help collection easy and provide adequate shelter for cattle
- Specifics
 - Sloping floor
 - Thatched roof
 - Ventilated set up
- Estimated cost
 - Shed : Rs. 60,000
 - Cow : Rs. 60,000 (6 cows)
- Actual
 - Shed : Rs. 71,095
 - Cow : Rs. 53,570(4 cows)



Spot quiz!

5. Name two crops with successful yields in Bharathi trust.

Activities to control soil erosion due to heavy rains

- Purpose
 - Unexpected torrential rains caused heavy erosion of top soil. Sand and mudslide from the sides of the hills broke the barrier on the edges
 - Hollow or caveding land had to filled up
- Specifics
 - JCB machine was used to restructure barriers and fill up caveding land with jelly stones and sand
 - Emergency funds pool
- Estimated cost - none
- Actual – Rs. 97,576
- Photo/Video :

<http://data.ashanet.org/datastore/data/Chapters/Austin/Projectpics/sidda/mma/resourceJan06/resourceJan06-Pages/Image4.html>

Ox

- Purpose
 - For ploughing and transport of material
- Specifics
 - 2 oxen
- Estimated cost – Rs. 28,000 (1ox with cart)
- Actual – Rs. 18,500 (2 oxen)

Spot quiz!

6. How can rain water harvesting and soil erosion be related in the context of the resource center ?

Travel Expenses

- Purpose
 - Training, transport of material
- Specifics
 - Purchase of seeds, manure
 - Field work, settlement of accounts etc.
 - Siddamma's travel to Pallipat.
- Estimated cost – Rs. 1,20,000
- Actual – Rs. 61,069.50

Field Worker's Salary

- Purpose
 - Harvesting, ploughing – specific time periods need more labor
- Specifics
 - 5 workers at Rs. 2000 salary, each based on duration of work in the field
- Estimated cost – Rs. 1,50,000
- Actual – Rs. 1,03,250



Spot quiz!

7. Brainstorm on what could be a good question on follow up regarding Travel expenses and field worker's salary – no qns on numbers, accounts, balance sheet etc. please (Audited statement will give details)
(First valid idea agreed upon by the group gets a prize)

Land

- Purpose
 - Relevant qns on purchase, purpose etc. are at http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/579/resource_ans4jun05.pdf
- Specifics
 - Owner wanted to sell entire land with water sources
 - Extra acreage had only entry to land
- Estimated cost – Rs. 13,00,000 (10 acres) + 1,90,000
- Actual – Rs. 15,00,000 (13 acres, 8 acres of wetland)

Advance for seeds

- Purpose
 - Need to be paid for supplier of seeds
- Specifics
 - Had to be used from this pool of funds
- Estimated cost – none
- Actual – Rs. 10,861.3

More ?

- Next session will be on upcoming budget
- What about the 3 remaining qns ?

8. There is a creek running through the resource center land, though its seasonal it's a water source. What can we do with it ?

9. They grow bunch of millets at the resource center.
Why are millets good for u and considered a part of good agricultural practices?

10. More and more farmers need the organic manure or ‘Panchagani’ – how can we make more – will collecting in drums suffice ?