

## *National Convention of Voluntary Organisations*

12-13 December, 2009

### **A Report**

The Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini (RMP) recognizes that voluntary organisations play a crucial role in nation building, and will continue to do so. It therefore considers competency creation in voluntary workers to be one of its primary objectives. The RMP had organised the first National Convention of Voluntary Organisations in June 2008. The aim of this convention was to create a common platform for voluntary organisations across the country. The many challenges facing voluntary organisations came to light during this convention. It was felt that the RMP could facilitate the voluntary movement by acting as a training agency and mediator in the formation of an VOs-network that would draw strength from a shared sense of purpose.

Taking the initiative forward, the second National Convention of Voluntary Organisations was held on **12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> December 2009** at the RMP's Knowledge and Excellence Centre at Uttan, Maharashtra. The theme of the convention was "**Karyakarta Nirman**" (Making of Voluntary Activists). 122 delegates from ten Indian states, representing 80 voluntary organisations, attended the convention.

Of all the challenges voluntary organisations face today, the most pressing one is paucity of adequately trained and motivated volunteers. The second convention discussed ways to create a strong motivated force of volunteers that would take up the cause as a mission, rather than as a career. Various aspects of volunteer creation were discussed: how to motivate, mentor and train volunteers; the personal aspirations and financial security of the volunteers; the need to remove misgivings about employee-volunteers; the need for role models.

Besides the stalwart voluntary activists who formed the speakers and panelists at the convention, the event was also graced with the presence of Shri Arvind Rege, a trustee of the RMP, and Shri Sunil Deshpande, senior RSS functionary. Mutual discussions and interactions with these activists made the convention rewarding experience for all delegates.

### **Inaugural session:**

Shri Milind Betawadkar, programme officer of the RMP, initiated the proceedings by extending a warm welcome to all the honoured guests, speakers and delegates. A short film about the nature and scope of the Prabodhini was then screened, following which, Shri. Ravindra Sathe, Executive Director of the RMP, and also convenor of the convention introduced the theme of the conference, namely, “ Making of Karyakarta”.

He observed that the pace of volunteer formation was slowing down, and the sector was plagued by a lack of motivated workers and leaders. “A volunteer needs to be created”, he said, “and there is a certain process that produces good volunteers”. He hoped that an outline of an effective training and mentoring process would emerge over the two days of the convention.

Shri Bharat Pathak, Organising Secretary of the Deendayal Research Institute, New Delhi, delivered the Inaugural address. Shri Pathak said all organisations - even terrorist and anarchist ones - need honest , committed and dependable workers. Voluntary organisations are no exception to this rule. Producing workers for constructive social work is a laborious process because those who seek to bring change in a harmonious manner must imbibe qualities like consistency, patience, empathy, inclusiveness, and pragmatism – and these can only be built up over a long period of time.

The process of moulding a volunteer, he said, begins with recognising the capabilities and expectations of the raw volunteer, then charting out a growth path for him and putting him through rigorous training and hands-on experience. “The success of the mentoring process comes when the volunteer works not for the *Shreya* ( personal recognition) but for the Mission”, concluded Shri Pathak.

The Inaugural address was followed by a Keynote speech by Prof. Bal Apte, Vice Chairman of the RMP and the All India Vice President of the BJP.

Prof. Apte said that it was important for different voluntary organisations to come together from time to time, because “A Convention like this gives Voluntary workers strength, and comfort that they are not working alone,” . It is an opportunity to network, compare, and learn from each other. He recommended that organisations should be clear that the purpose of grooming volunteers was not to train people to run organisations, but train them to serve the nation.

Prof. Apte deplored the trend where NGOs deteriorate into a business, their main goal being to garner maximum possible government grants. At the same time, the wariness about accepting government funds to run developmental programmes was unwarranted, he clarified. There is nothing wrong, per se, in availing of government

funds. Indeed, if the honest and committed NGOs do not accept government support in order to retain administrative autonomy or for other reasons, the nation's money earmarked for social development then goes to the less deserving organisations.

Prof. Apte said that volunteers must not only have a burning determination to work for the cause, but they must also be able to work harmoniously in a group. "Volunteering is not an individual activity", he said, warning that excessive individualistic tendencies of an otherwise efficient and committed worker could prove to be a disadvantage.

He recommended a pragmatic approach towards volunteer motivation. He said that desire for financial security does not devalue the contribution of the volunteer. It is the leader's responsibility to transform his mindset from that of an employee to that of an activist. Whether employee or volunteer, the biggest gratification the person seeks is recognition and respect, and this must be given where due. Each volunteer should feel like the owner of the cause, and for this, he must be a part of the decision making process. "The aim of volunteer training should be to create constructive minds, not angry rebels and protesters against the system," he concluded.

In the post lunch session, Smt. Sudha Kothari, Shri Anand Hegde and Shri Pravin Patkar held a panel discussion on ' Motivation for Work'. The discussion was chaired by Smt. Kumud Chavare, senior journalist, Navbharat Times, and Director General of RMP, Dr. Vinay Sahasrabuddhe.

Shri Patkar is the founder-activist of **Prerana**, an organisation that tries to wean the children of sex workers away from the world of flesh trade by providing them education and employment opportunities. He said that motivation cannot be done from a cabin, the motivator must demonstrate his expertise, commitment and results on the field itself.

Shri Anand Hegde, founder of the Kadamba Charitable Trust (for environmental conservation and rural development) and four-time MP from Karnataka, found a great difference between the motivations of political workers and social workers. He candidly stated that political workers are spurred by personal ambition, and may not display sustained interest in a cause unless it furthers their career in some way. A social worker sometimes develops political ambitions, but a political worker cannot be converted into a social worker. He echoed Shri Patkar's views, saying holding periodic motivational camps would not enthuse workers, it would have to come through sustained work and personal example.

Smt. Sudha Kothari is a social activist who has worked for the empowerment of rural women. She has been instrumental in creating an all-India federation of self help groups, with a wide network spread across the country. In her experience, role models that evolve within the community are the best motivators. The transformation of one of their own women into a confident leader who can deal with authorities, handle money and make important decisions proves to be an inspiration for many community workers. She felt that voluntary organisation must empathize with the problems of its workers,

offer emotional and financial support if necessary, so that volunteers would get a sense of oneness with the organisation and the cause.

The panel discussion was followed by a slide presentation on the "Millenium Development Goals" ( MDGs), and their relevance to the Volunteer Training process. This presentation was made by Dr. Vinay Sahasrabuddhe, Director General of the RMP.

In 2001, at the beginning of the new millennium, the UNO declared eight Millenium Development Goals - time-bound goals for human development that had to be achieved, globally, in the early part of this century, to which 189 countries, including India, are signatories. Dr. Sahasrabuddhe pointed out that some of the MDGs were already a part of NGO objectives, and that it would be a good idea to benchmark activities to these goals wherever possible. The eight MDGs are:

1. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
2. Universal Primary education
3. Promoting gender equality and empowering women
4. Reduction in child mortality
5. Improvement in maternal health
6. Combating HIV AIDS/Malaria/Other diseases
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability
8. Developing a global partnership for development.

Smt. Lalita Kumaramangalam, an experienced social worker and senior BJP functionary from Chennai, was the Chairperson of this session. She suggested how these MDGs could immediately be incorporated in our day-to-day living.

The day ended with a screening of some documentaries about voluntary organisations.

On Sunday, December 13, the morning session comprised of a group discussion on Training of Voluntary Workers. The delegates were divided into four groups to discuss the current volunteer training scenario . Training shortfalls, resource needs, training faculty, and the need for structured training programmes were also evaluated.

It was found that almost half of the participating organisations had no formal training programees; for those that do have systematic training for its volunteers, the training suffers from ad-hocism and inadequacy. The lack of trained workers hampers the effective functioning of the organisation. The discussion revealed that volunteers need to build competency in the following areas:

1. Project Proposal writing
2. Presentation and communication skills
3. Computer and internet usage skills

4. Legal issues pertaining to their field

5. Fundraising

6. Procedure for approaching government authorities and knowledge of governmental rules, regulations and schemes.

It was found that organisations complain about a lack of skilled trainers, but this is out of ignorance rather than non-existence of experts. It was suggested that the Prabodhini could fill this lacuna by drawing up a list of able and willing subject-experts, and providing this to the interested voluntary organisations. The VOs themselves have in-house expertise that could be shared with other VOs, for which active networking would be useful. The discussion also emphasized a need for incorporating 'training needs assessment' and 'training evaluation' programmes in each voluntary organisation.

Shri Ratnakar Patil, Executive Officer (Projects) thanked the delegates for these recommendations and assured them that the RMP would make efforts to address these issues when formulating the training programmes the Prabodhini offered.

The group discussion was followed by a presentation by Shri G. Vasudev, a senior functionary of the Vivekananda Kendra. The theme of this presentation was "Eternal values of a Development activist and the Present situation."

Shri Vasudev said that the GDP-based development paradigm, developed in the west and aped by the rest of the world, was basically flawed. It emphasized a financial, profit-based definition of growth, thereby creating an insatiable desire for wealth, unhealthy competition and consumerism. Fortunately, the world has finally realized the many drawbacks of this development pattern, and is now beginning to talk about the three Es - Equity, Ecology and Economics -whose harmonization should be the founding principal of growth. This may be new thinking for the west, but it has always been a part of the Indian philosophy.

Western models of growth created a pyramidal society with a few powerful rich decision makers at the top of the hierarchy, and a vast majority of powerless and vulnerable people at the bottom. The solutions offered to reorganise this society more equitably often give rise to worse problems. They create conflicting groups within society, for example, the Dalits vs the Non Dalits; the Rich vs the Poor; the Men vs the Women. A conflict free process that aims to raise the people from the bottom-most section to the top, rather than dragging everyone to the bottom, is what we should aim for. Spirituality and inclusiveness should be an important dimension in the development paradigm, concluded Shri. Vasudev.

The post lunch session comprised of a panel discussion on "Mentoring of the Karyakarta", in which the participants were Smt. Nileema Khetan from Udaipur, Shri Basant from Bihar and Prof. Rajkumar Bhatia from Delhi. This session was chaired by Dr. Hitesh Vajpayee, Voluntary activist and Senior BJP functionary from Bhopal.

Considering that reformists need a team of committed volunteers, they must ensure that the spirit of the volunteers does not flag, said Dr. Vajpayee. He then invited the panelists to provide their insights on the mentoring process.

Smt Khetan, Chief Executive of Seva Bharati, Udaipur, observed that the goals of the organisation determined the relationship between the 'owner' and the volunteer. An VO today has increasingly come to mean an organisation that will carry out government programmes more cheaply, efficiently and hopefully, more honestly than government agencies would. In this case, the volunteer remains merely an organisational tool, an employee; if an VO defines its function to be that of a vehicle of social transformation, a volunteer becomes a co-creator who feels ownership of the cause. Smt. Khetan felt that there is a tendency to view the paid worker as less committed to the cause, which is unwarranted. Employees also do the job as efficiently and honestly as unpaid volunteers. The challenge, she said, is to encourage them to internalize the values of the organisation, which would turn them from employees to activists.

Prof. Bhatia, Professor of Economics from Delhi, student activist and ex-president of ABVP, recommended that voluntary organisations establish a dialogue with the volunteer to assess his needs and aspirations, and try to support him in achieving them. Shri Basant, veteran Gandhian Sarvodaya activist and rural development activist from Bihar, agreed with him, saying basic volunteer needs like economic stability and recognition for work must be met in order to retain the workforce.

The panel also discussed ways to deal with errors and unreasonable expectations from volunteers "Praise his achievements in public, and point out the mistakes in a one-to-one closed door session", advised Prof. Bhatia. But if the expectations of a volunteer were beyond the organisation's ability to meet, he said, the organisation must allow the dissatisfied worker to leave, no matter how good he was, or how long term the association may have been. "Everybody is important, but nobody is indispensable", is the message the organisation must send out.

The Valedictory Session was the last session of the Convention.

There were three releases of publications during this session :

1. the e-copy of the booklet "Voluntary-Social worker : Mindset"
2. a booklet on "Art of Project Proposal Writing"
3. The souvenir on Karyakarta Nirman for the second Annual convention of Voluntary Organisations.

The release function was followed by the felicitation of two remarkable voluntary social workers. Smt Nivedita Bhide, a full time worker of the Vivekananda Kendra, who accepted the award for exemplary service to society on behalf of Vivekananda Kendra; Shri Subhash Velinkar, Principal of a college in Goa and a senior RSS functionary, received the award for his contribution in the field of educational reform.

The two award winners then shared some of their life-experiences with the audience.

The Convention concluded with an address by Shri Suresh (Bhaiyyaji) Joshi, General Secretary of the RSS. The tragedy of society today, he said, is the scarcity of living role models who can inspire volunteers. If the motivation, values and desire to work are strong, training and mentoring happen automatically. The only mentoring needed, then, is to observe and emulate the role models.

Though highly motivated social workers like Baba Amte and Anna Hazare achieved much by their individual effort and vision, solitary activists may not always be able to complete what they set out to do, given the finite lifespan of a human being; an organisation, on the other hand, can outlive people; its long term continuity may give the cause a better chance at completion. To ensure the long term viability of these organisations, they must have a reliable and renewable force of voluntary workers – this is the biggest challenge facing voluntary organisations today, not lack of material resources.

It is imperative that the effort and enthusiasm of the volunteer must be sustained, he said, in the interests of the larger cause. For this he exhorted the voluntary organisations to make the volunteer an integral part of the creative and decision making process.

The delegates reported that the convention had served to rejuvenate their sense of purpose and they had gained knowledge from their interactions with the other voluntary organisations. They hoped the RMP would continue to take the lead in bringing together Voluntary Organisations in future.

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