Information or Learning - my learning curve

"I realised the value of those few minutes of reflection, more than the day-long classes much later in life. I got to know during that time that along with various learning methods such as learning through reading, learning through seeing, learning through hearing, reflection was also a learning method."

Joining Andhra Pradesh Rural Poverty Reduction Project (APRPRP) in late-2002, we started our work as community coordinators (CCs) in the mandals (Blocks) assigned to us after training and field induction.

Coming to me, I was allotted the fishing villages in the Nizampatnam and Repalle mandals in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. Within a few days of starting work there, I was also selected as a member of the District Livelihoods Resource Group. Four CCs from the district were selected as members of this group. Our designation was also changed to Livelihoods Associate (LA). All the four CCs who were selected as LAs including myself, Rammohan, Venkateswarlu and Nayak were told that we had to attend a training session in Hyderabad immediately. The training, which began on February 14, 2003, lasted for two months and ended on April 15.

It was a rigorous training with four classroom segments and three fieldwork segments. We had to apply all the things we had learnt in classroom segments in the field, share those experiences back in the classroom training, and clear any doubts we might have. That was one training that had put the four of us, who had thought of coming to the training as a fun activity, through the hoops. Almost eight hours of classroom training, and assignments that were to be completed by early morning. Numerous books and reports to be read. Before coming to the training, we had assumed that we could go out occasionally in the evening if there was any free time and see the City of Nawabs. But, that was one training which did not give us any leisure time to go out of the training centre gate, leave alone Hyderabad city. We used to get training on various aspects such as, rural poverty and its various aspects; rural livelihoods and the issues associated with them; the need to mobilize people and establish Self Help Groups (SHGs) with them; analysis of livelihoods; gender; management of natural resources, etc.. Personally, this training had opened my eyes to a whole new world. The entire training was conducted under the guidance of our *Guru* in this field, Muralidhar Garu.

Murali Sir used to come almost every day at the end of the training. He used to pick one person randomly from among us and ask, what did you learn today? When we replied, we learnt what poverty is like and the various reasons for it. He used to retort, didn't you know all of this before

— **this is not learning**. Whatever our answers were, pat came his reply that this was not learning but only a piece of information that we heard.

While talking about learning, he used to draw the picture of a learning curve. He used to say, whenever a new idea goes into your mind, it must shake the opinion that you previously had about the subject. There must be a clash between your old notions and the aspects that you heard recently. Your old opinions about the subject should become more energized and should push you towards a new awareness. You are said to have truly learnt something after you get out of the inner conflict and go through a new development, awareness and opinion. Have you learnt anything in this way today? he asked everyday.

Whenever we found out Sir was about to come to the class, we all used to get stressed about what/ how to answer the question about what we learnt today. Dreading that he would choose us if we sat in the front benches, we used to shift to the back benches before he came.

But, I realised the value of those few minutes of reflection, more than the day-long classes much later in life. I got to know during that time that along with various learning methods such as learning through reading, learning through seeing, learning through hearing, reflection was also a learning method.

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