

Bolti Lakeerain
(Talking Lines)

A Report On

Comics Workshop and Exhibition

19th - 24th May 2007

Kalyanpuri- East Delhi

Organised By

World Comics India, Delhi

And

Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), Delhi



ISST's Community Outreach Programme

The Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), a non-profit non-governmental organization, was set up as a society in 1964 and registered as a Trust in 1980. ISST is dedicated to conducting research and action programmes to promote social justice and equity for the under-privileged with a focus on women. ISST seeks to link research with grass root activism and policy debates through various mechanisms.

The community outreach programme of ISST was started at 2 centres of West Vinod Nagar, namely Sonia camp and Nehru camp in Trans Jamuna region, in year 2000 with following objectives:

- To provide non formal education for school drop-outs
- Remedial education for school going children
- Adult education for women and young girls
- Awareness generation on health, sanitation, cleanliness
- Income generating activities, conducting legal awareness camps /health camps
- Organizing exposure trips for women and children.

The Community Centre located in West Vinod Nagar works with selected communities in the Trans-Jamuna region of Delhi state to cater to the articulate needs of the communities and facilitates awareness generation and service delivery.

ISST's community outreach program holistically promotes use of knowledge to help people better understand their environments, make the best possible decisions for the use of their resources and enhance the quality of life for themselves, their families and their communities through education and wise decision making. A remarkable difference can be observed in the participation of the community people on various social issues concerning their lives.

Our Community Outreach Programme at Trans Jamuna region is 6 years old. We have established a strong relationship with the community. Our key area of focus has been Empowerment of younger people in the community through Information, education and dialogic approach.

We emphasize on the Importance of Informed choice, because our ideology is that people who are able to act on the basis of informed choices are ultimately able to redefine societies and bring about social justice.

We reach out to the children in a variety of innovative ways, things they would enjoy and which will help them acquire knowledge. We help children to get admission into a formal school system, either government or private. Focusing on informal education, raising their awareness about their society, conducting theatre workshops to boost their confidence level and working on computer literacy programme has been some of our strategies.

The computer literacy programme has been gaining much popularity amongst the youth in the community as we have a comprehensive 6 months basic computer education module planned out which has helped a number of children who have passed out to acquire basic skill jobs.

From 1st May we started the Summer Camp at our newly established Kalyanpuri centre and organized various workshops to help children learn something new and interesting during this period which would increase their knowledge about various issues and enhance creativity.

The thought of organizing a Comics Workshop with the children of ISST's Community centres came to my mind to provide the children with a new media to communicate their expression and feelings about their surroundings which affect them. Also it can additionally help in boosting their creative dimensions.

Mr.Lakhindar Nayak, Mr.Tarun Bose and Mr.Sharad Sharma took immense interest in carrying out the 6 day workshop with the children. And helping in developing their interest in the comic's power!

It was an optional forum for children to participate, around 52 children came on the first day of the workshop but only 22 really got interested passionately and stayed till the end of the 6 day workshop.

The results were surprisingly amazing. 44 wall poster comics on a range of issues were ready at the end of the workshop.

A BRIEF BACKGROUND ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT COMICS WORLD



HOW DID GRASSROOT COMICS EMERGE?

Communication through verbal means evolved with the development of scripts and languages but were still mediums using which people interacted in the past centuries. Be it sign language, local tribal art on the walls or huge scriptures on the monuments but communication happened. The further evolution in literature and language created human divide-Literates/Illiterates. This made the communication more difficult to a common man. This gave the status and all the power of decisions, policy making and implementation to the ones who went through the formal education and marginalized those who had learnt from years of their experience under the sun and auspice of nature. The literate became the dictators and the others, voiceless, expressionless followers.

It has taken centuries for us to understand that it's not just the knowledge of words and alphabets that help us express but visuals are an equally effective medium which can bridge the society than divide. Amongst the various forms of arts which are professionally learnt also exists COMICS and more over GRASSROOT COMICS which needs just a sensitive citizen, an eye on local issues and a desire to serve the society. Drawing good hence fall secondary here.

COMICS- A Story said through more visuals and less of text in a series of panels.

Main stream media today is hijacked by political cartooning and import of comics strips from developed nations which are meaningless for the “*Aam Admi*”. Why can't Calcutta see a strip made by Sanjoy da and Rajasthan by Ranu Chawdhary who are the part of the system?

Keeping such ideas in mind evolved the concept of Grassroot comics. The idea is all about comics made by grassroot people on their issues and their stories for their locality. All that is behind the concept is Localization of Media and sensitization of local communities by their own people than outsiders.

The idea has now propagated to more than 15 states of the country and also discussed internationally with organizations and people associated with this cause.

World Comics India (WCI) is making constant efforts to disseminate this idea and reach to the remotest of the grassroots so that this newer medium reaches to the people from where it actually evolved centuries ago.

ADVANTAGES OF USING GRASSROOT COMICS

The major advantage of comics is their mass appeal that lies in the simplicity of the visual rendition of stories. This communication means has the potential to address all serious issues in a simplified manner. As specified earlier we recognize it as a great communication tool for the people where illiteracy is the biggest hurdle to cross. We train NGOs and activists in developing the skills of telling their stories through comics. The creators of the comics at WCI are the people at the grassroots themselves. They tell the stories addressing issues of social concern through characters and backdrops to which the people of the region identify with. And hence, the serious issues are brought forth to and grasped by the people readily. EVERYBODY CAN DRAW

The use of comics in Finland and other countries was confined to the campaign mode and it was left to the artists to design social campaigns. Professionals and fine art students were trained in the use of comics.

But in India, this movement took an altogether new shape and what has emerged is *grassroots comics* where communities have been trained to use the medium to bring social change. And World Comics (India) ensured that a network of grassroots comic artists use the medium in an imaginative and innovative manner.

And over the period of less than a decade, communities across India have used the medium to express a whole range of social issues whether it is the burning issue of militancy in North – East or taking literacy to the masses in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Trained comic artists in Jharkhand have been bringing out a wallposter for the past several years and the artists in Tamilnadu have prepared low cost comic books for distribution.

Underlying this movement where communities have been using comics to address development issues in their area is a belief that “*everybody can draw*” using a basic set of principles. Communities have been trained to tell a story in four panels and either between the lines or through the story itself, a social message is delivered. With rich visuals and minimum text, comics can really provoke people to think.

Telling a story in four panels may seem impossible, but the results are striking. For example, a 14 year old girl, who after being trained in comics told a story in four

panels – the first panel shows a man drinking, in the second he is shown smoking a cigarette, in the third he goes off to sleep and leaves the live butt in the home, and the fourth shows the home being razed to the ground. This was used as a tool in the campaign against alcoholism in Tamilnadu.

However, what is to be noted is that telling the above comics in words may bring to mind visuals associated with it, but cannot substitute for the original comics – that is the power of this alternate media, which is taking firm roots in the country.

The main impetus of "*comics for social development*" is to identify the social issues faced by the people at the grassroots and what according to them can be the effective solutions. World Comics India recognizes comics as a powerful alternate medium of communication which has a mass appeal as it catches the attention of all and is cost effective.

There is no specificity regarding the social issues that can be addressed through this mode of narrative art. The important thing is to have a good story, with interesting and engaging characters which the readers can easily identify with. The comics stories developed by the people at the workshops in different parts of the country address all major issues like education, health, gender bias, corruption, environment, conservation of resources to name a few. But the important point is that these comics provide different views on a particular issue, for e.g., the water issue is viewed differently in Rajasthan, in North-east and down South. This difference in perspective calls for different strategies of solving an issue in different regions. WCI identifies itself as a catalyst helping to bring issues along with the different perspectives into public debate.

- That comics are only about humor would be an understatement. America saw the conception of underground-comics which addressed topics generally considered taboo. This underground comic's movement gained ground in Europe too. In India, we have initiated this form of comics to bring to fore stories of people and movements usually forgotten in the blitzkrieg of political news. An Underground comic about Meira Peibis movement of Manipur is the first one in the series. Recently Graphic Novels have made an acclaimed presence in the literary world. Joe Sacco, creator of *Palestine* and *The Fixer*, is a stoic example of recognition to the art of cartooning. We have artists like Katja who take forward this art from depicting topics like death to representing countries through visually narrated travel diaries.

COMICS AS A MEDIUM IN SOCIAL CHANGE!

While people across the globe have been thinking of alternative media that can be used imaginatively to empower communities, a new movement started taking shape in Finland where a group called World Comics began using comics for social change in countries like Tanzania, Mozambique, Cuba etc.

In the beginning, there were some sporadic attempts to use them differently but when illiterate women in and around Tamilnadu and Rajasthan started using it as a tool to

express social evils that plague their communities, it first became clear that comics could be powerful tools of advocacy. Also, it was being realized that here is a medium that breaks illiteracy barrier and since it is a cost effective medium (all one needs is a A-4 size paper, a pencil and an eraser); it began to take the shape of a powerful movement.

The movement got a real shot in the arm when Sharad Sharma, a young media professional joined them. Being a cartoonist, first in a newspaper and then in a prominent news channel, he started appreciating the use of comics for bringing about social change; and being an activist with a social bent of mind, he resolved to make it a tool for social change.

Participants of the Workshop

Indira Camp

- Bablu- 14 yrs
- Ajay- 15 yrs
- Mukesh-15 yrs
- Mahesh- 15 yrs
- Dharmendra-17 yrs

Nehru Camp

- Alka- 8 yrs
- Seema-11 yrs
- Neha Yadav- 15 yrs
- Mahesh Kumar- 13 yrs
- Manoj Kumar – 14 yrs

Sonia Camp

- Manoj- 12 yrs
- Vinod- 14 yrs
- Amarjeet-9 yrs
- Mukesh- 7 yrs
- Zahir- 12 yrs
- Ramsevak-8 yrs
- Sandeep-11 yrs

West Vinod Nagar

- Anchal- 14 yrs
- Sakshi- 18 yrs
- Hitesh- 16 yrs
- Satendra- 12 yrs
- Bharat- 14 yrs
- Rajendra- 13 yrs

Kalyanpuri

- Ravi – 14 yrs
- Sonu – 12 yrs
- Sudhir Pal- 16 yrs

<i>Our Team</i>	<i>Facilitators</i>
Deepika Singh (Research Associate)	Sharad Sharma (Cartoonist, WCI)
Amita Joshi (Coordinator, Community Outreach Programme)	Lakhindar Nayak (Trainer, WCI)
Manju Negi (Field Supervisor)	Tarun Bose(Journalist)

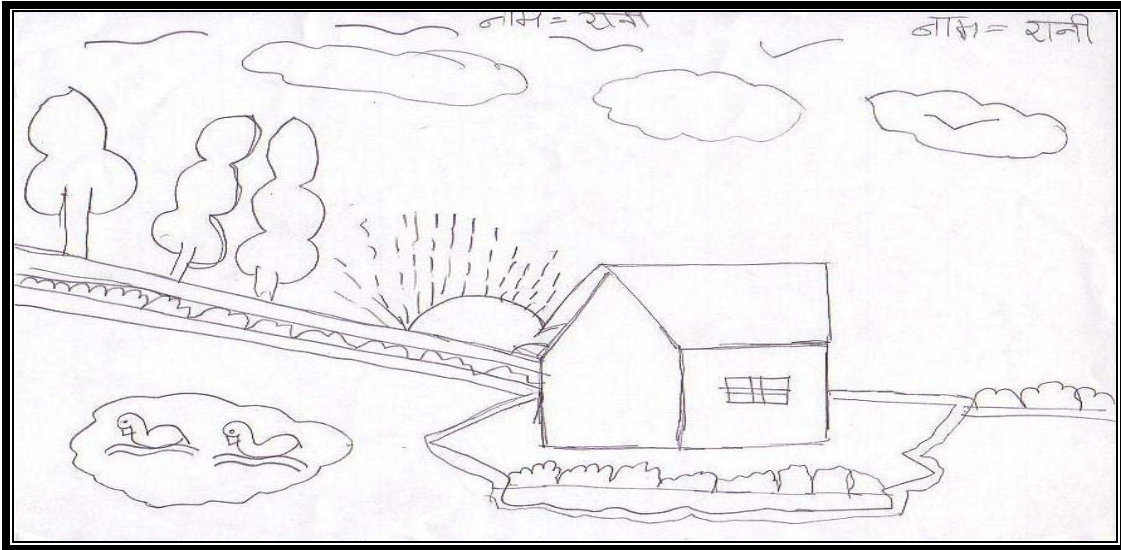
WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Day 1

On the first day of the workshop, 52 children from all our centres came to attend the session. A brief introduction about comics was given to children and their perception was received on the same. The concept of grassroots comics was introduced and participants

were led through the process of sketching and free hand drawing to get rid of the fear of express their ideas in form of visuals with pencil and paper. The first exercise was drawing whatever came to the mind of the children. These are some of the sketches which were drawn by the children of various age groups.

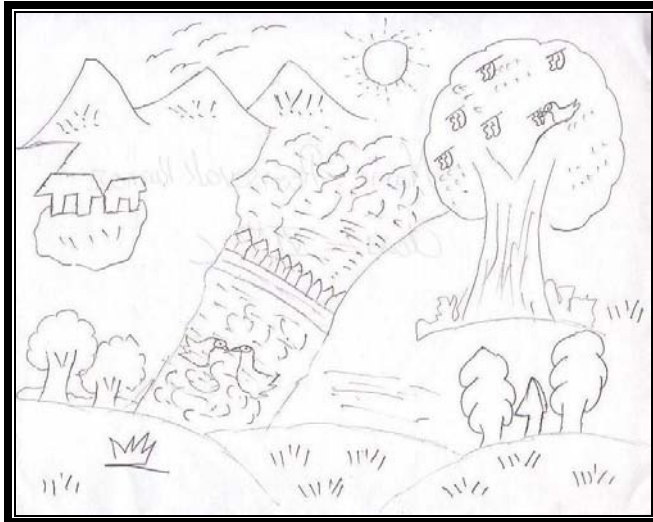
Rani, 8 years



Amarjeet, 9 yrs



Seema, 11 yrs



Alka Chaurasia, 10 years



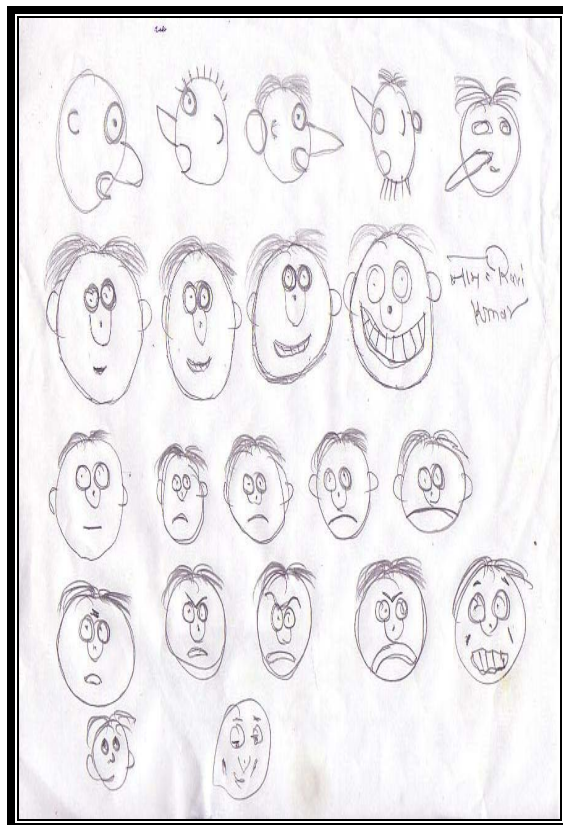
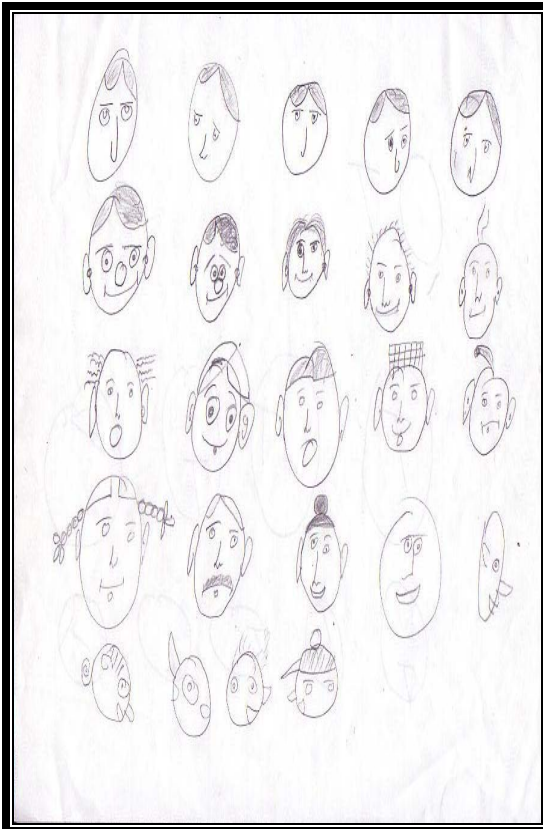
The second exercise was sketching each others facial expressions and to do this they were divided in groups of 2 and then were asked to draw as far as possible same facial features of the other person as they could.

Reeta, 15 yrs



Day 2

Second day started with facial expression exercise! Children were amused the ways facial expressions could be actually shown on the paper and enjoyed playing around with different emotions.



Day -3&4

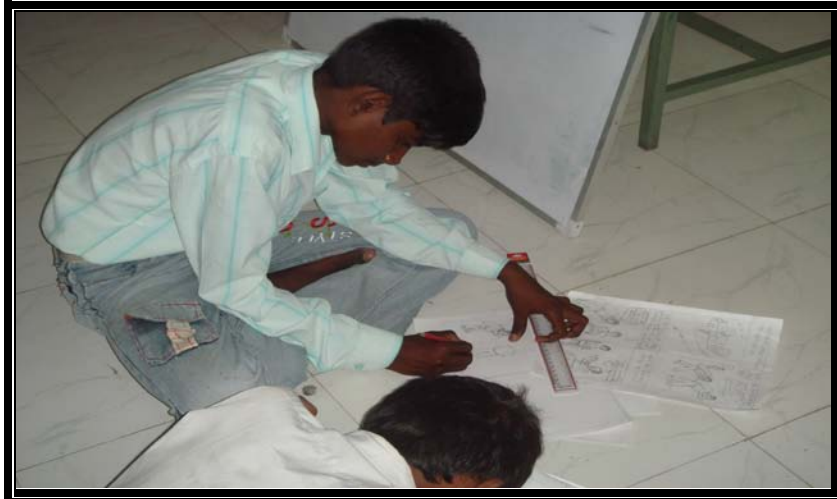
Once the sketching and facial expression exercise was completed, participants were asked to pick up stories from their everyday life, situated in the region they come from. Each story was then put up for discussion with the group. There were things to watch out for at the level of structure, form (in view of a four panel comic book story), the number of courses, and the content- where ethical and moral positions of the story, its message, were debated.



The stories were quite remarkable- mixes of urban and rural situations- as the children were traveling to their villages in holidays. Some of the stories were open ended- and were left open for a lively discussion.



Working on Visual Scripting, dividing their stories into 4 parts and translating them to visual stories by conveying the message in 4 boxes, which is the standard pattern of wall poster comics, was the next exercise!



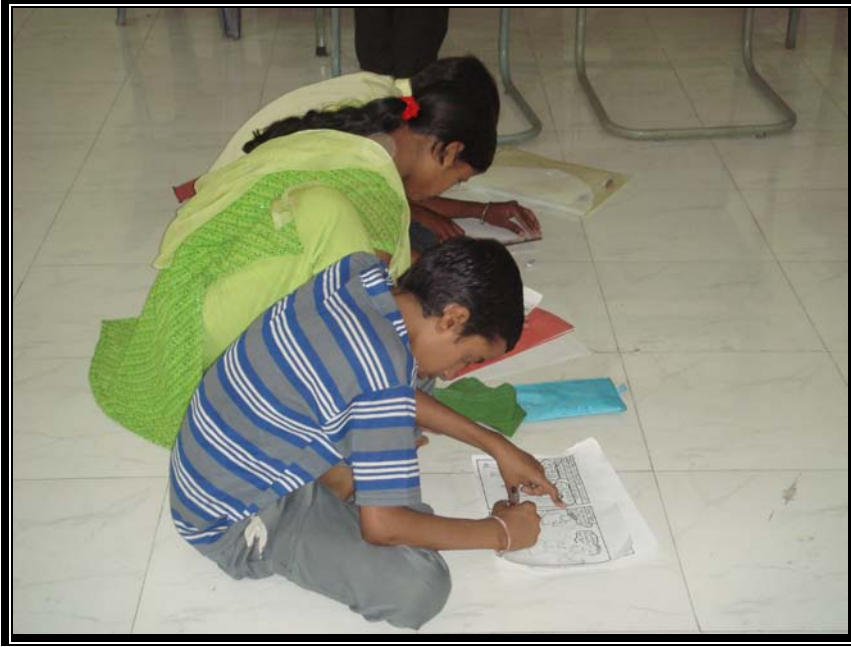
Day 5

Body Posture Exercise



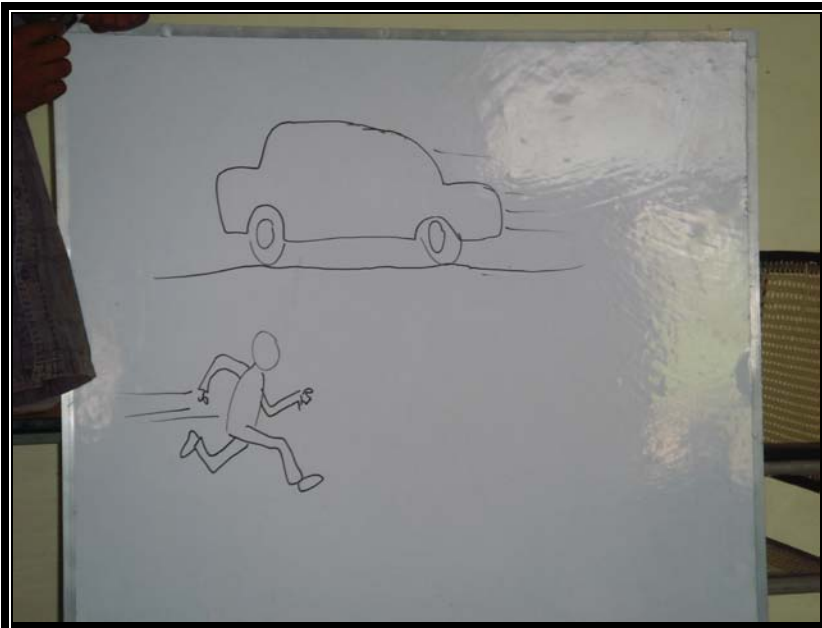
Day 6

Finishing touch and Inking.



Special Effects Exercise

Children were oriented about how to give special effects to their comics and they really enjoyed this session.



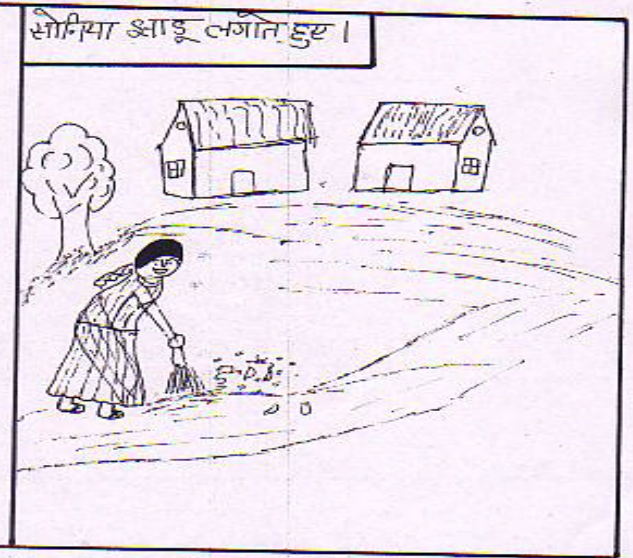
Critical Appreciation...

The participants and trainers conducted a critic's session on the last day. The children critically learned to visualize each comic with an eye of a social artist. It was commendable to see their constructive comments, and how positively children took the comments. The ability to critically appreciate a comic poster enabled them to improve the quality of the comics.

COMICS SPEAK COMMUNITY PROBLEMS IN EAST DELHI.....



लड़की अनपढ़ तो देहज ज्यादा



MUKESH ISST

Less Educated the girl, More the Dowry:-

The girl wants to get to school but father stops him and asks her to complete the household chores, she sadly picks up the broom and starts cleaning the house. Now one day, a proposal comes for her marriage, the boy's family asks how educated id their daughter? The father sadly says she is not literate. The boy's father comments that he needs to give more dowry for his daughter since she is not even literate. The father of the girl regrets of not allowing her daughter to attend school.

Story and Art by: - Mukesh

दहेज की मार



नाम- राजेंद्र
1981

How the Dowry Damages the Life of A Girl?

The girl and boy's family are having a negotiation on dowry. The girl's family requests to keep their daughter happy and is ready to pay a high price for it. After marriage, the mother-in-law tortures the daughter-in-law, the girl in agony and pain decides to return back to her parental house and shares her plight with her father. The father goes to the police station to file a complaint but the policeman demands a bribe to help them, and poor father again becomes a victim.

Story and Art by:-Rajendra

जुगाडू पुलिस



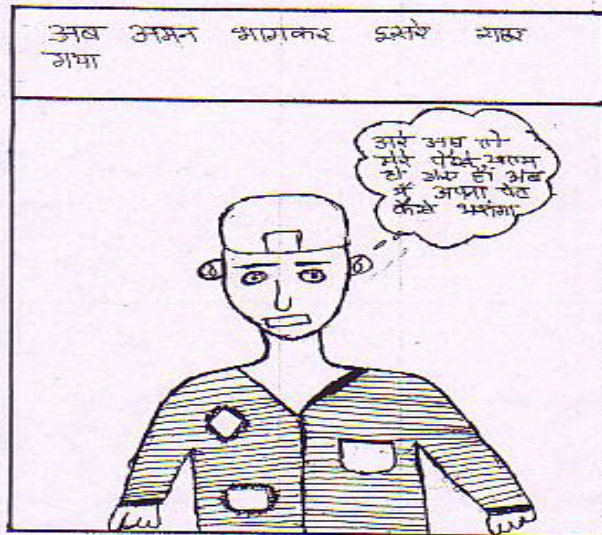
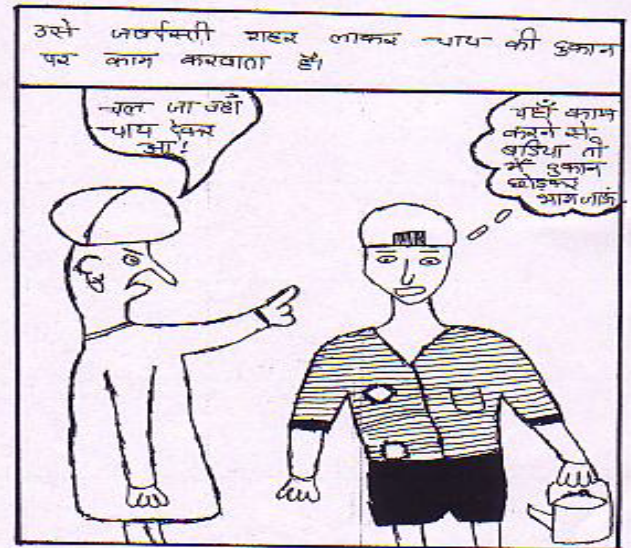
नाम - धर्मद्वि कुमार
[SATHI]

JUGADU POLICE:-

Once two policemen on a bike are passing by a street and see two people fighting on the road. Suddenly it strikes one of them that it could be a great opportunity to arrange money for their party. So they get hold of each of them and demand them to pay 500 Rs/- and promises to leave them. Dalal and the other man easily pay them the money to rescue themselves from police clutches and under the impression that the case would be filed on their rival. In the end, policemen are shown spending that money on alcohol, smoking and food which were their perceived party agenda and mock at the dumbness of the two people fighting and wish to get across more of these kinds of people so that they keep getting money for their so called parties.

Story and Art by:-Dharmendra

क्या करे अमन ?



HITESH SINGH

हितेश सिंह ठाकुर

What Should Aman Do?

Aman was good in studies and wanted to study further but his uncle forced him to come along with him to city and help him in his tea shop. Aman felt suffocated after working in his uncle's Tea shop and decided one day to run away from his uncle's place without thinking much about his tomorrow. After leaving the home, he felt helpless without money, food and shelter. His plight forces him to choose the corrupt way of living and he becomes a pick pocketier.

Story and Art By:- Hitesh Singh Thakur

पानी नदारद



नाम - बबलु कुमार

No Water!!

A boy exclaims that there's enough water facility in his locality. Other day he shares with his friend that fortunately we have no water problem in our colony. Meanwhile their buckets are full and water is over flowing. They pick up their buckets and leave the tap open. Next day they come and get panicky to see no water coming in the taps. They are horrified and yell why the water is not coming as they are dying of thirst.

Story and Art by: - Bablu Kumar

नशी की लत



चोखा - धर्मेंद्र कुमार
I.S.S.T

Alcohol Addiction-

There are few adolescence taking drugs in the community. One boy approaches them and guides them about its harmful effects and advises them to leave it, but they ignore his comments and ask him to leave. Few months later, suddenly one of them gets an acute stomach pain and rushes to the hospital. The doctor diagnoses his kidney and lung failure. He is heart broken and while returning from hospital meets the same boy who once advised him to quit his addiction. He says "friend you were right, I wish I had listened to your advice".

Story and Art by: - Dharmendra Kumar

दूर गई झुग्गीयाँ



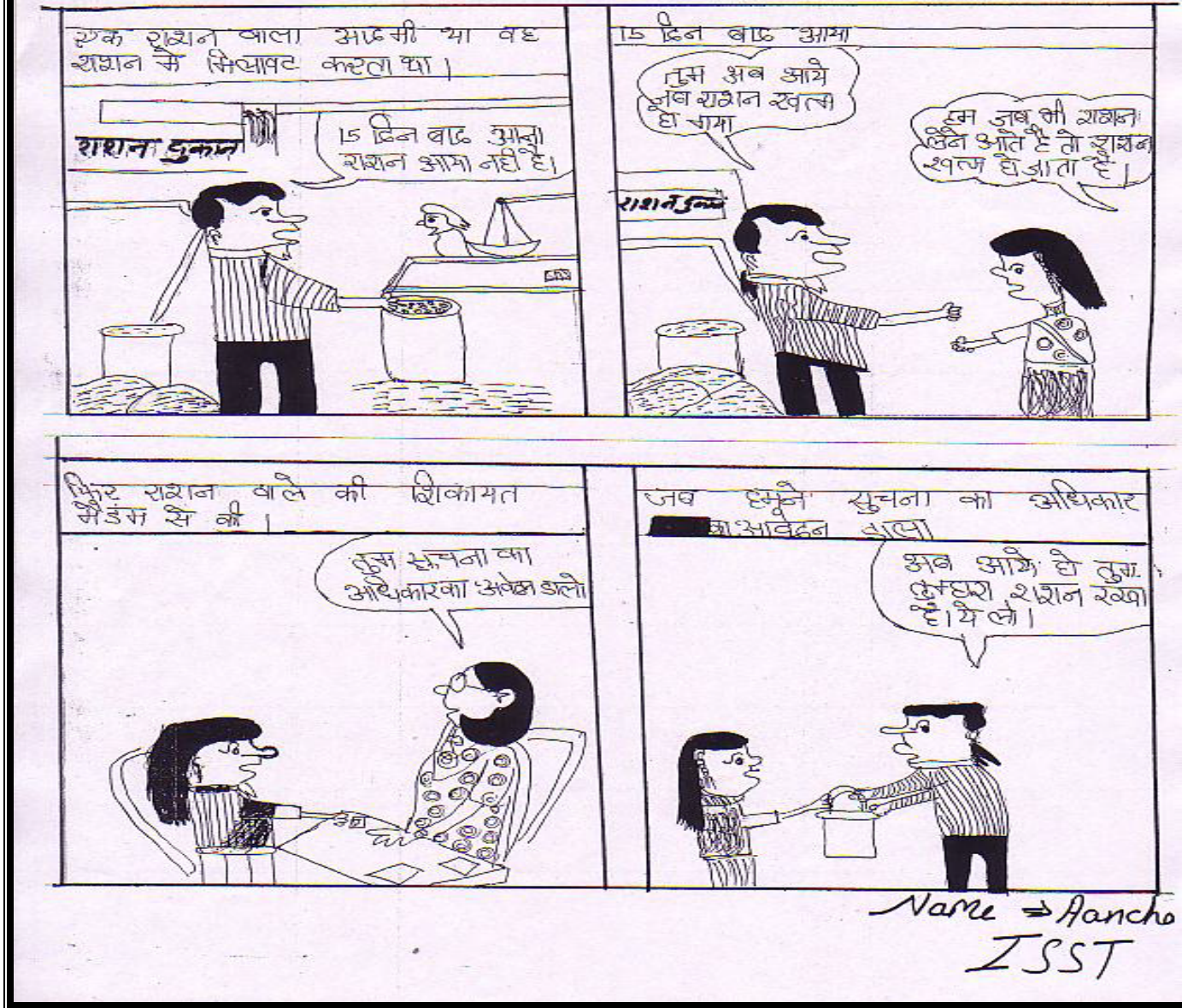
Sandeep-kumar

Slum Demolition-

The slum demolition people come to the community on one day with huge bull dozers to destroy the Jhuggis, the people are traumatized and yell for help. The inspector shows them the high court orders. Poor people don't understand a word but cry in pain that where are they suppose to go and live. The inspector says I don't know and orders the bull dozer person to move the machine fast over their houses and destroy all of them, without leaving a single one left standing.

Story and Art by: - Sandeep Kumar

कैसे निकला राशन



Corruption of Government Aided Ration Shops:-

The Ration shop's shop keeper is corrupt and tells his customers that stock is not available, so come after 15 days. When the person revisits after 15 days, he makes excuse that he is coming so late and now ration is finished. After feeling helpless, she goes to take advice from the community activist. The lady advises them to file a RTI. Soon after that, a change in the behaviour of the Ration fellow is visible, as he welcomes them to come and take their ration on time.

Story and Art by- Anchal

धूसरनोर पुलिस



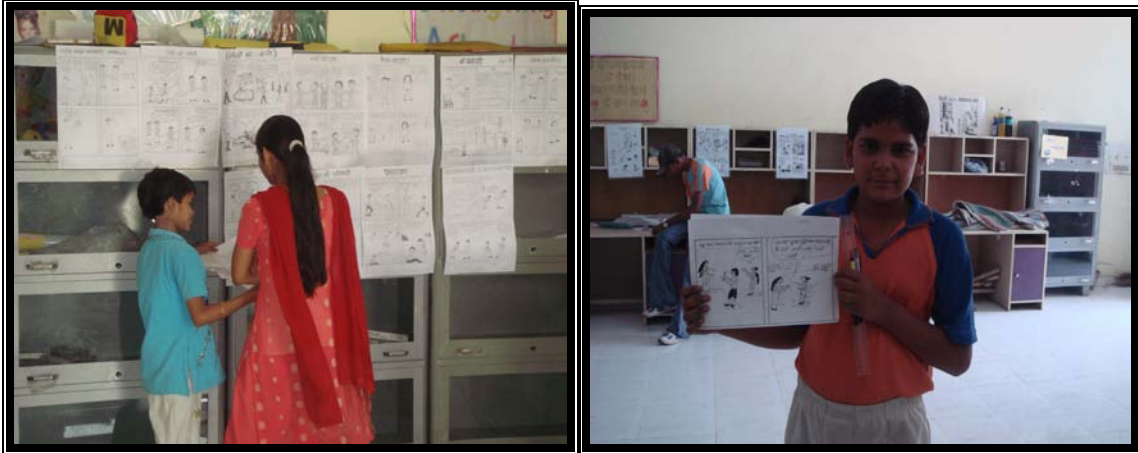
Corrupt Police

Once a man was increasing the height of his house. The police man sees him and asks him with whose permission has he started his project. He says no one. I am just increasing the height of my house not expanding or constructing anything else. The policeman terrorizes him to come to the police station or give him money. The poor man gives him 500Rs and the backhander leaves happily satisfying his greed.

Story and Art by: - Vimkesh Kumar

Analysis and Future plans

On the final day of the 6 day workshop, participants were elated to see their own comics being displayed. The wonder of being able to create ones own poster (after days of handwork), gave them immense sense of achievement and inspired them to follow their interest further.



The issues in their stories reflected the dimensions of the problems they face in everyday life. Starting from the deteriorating quality of education in their schools, to the demolition of the slums they reside in, corruption of ration shops, domestic violence and alcoholism to the behavior of police and other political leaders which have disturbed their little minds were articulated through this immensely powerful yet enjoyable media. Most of them said in the discussions there are lots of problems around them which they see and never thought of sharing it to others through any medium. Knowing about Comics, would help them communicate their thoughts and ideas about matter to a larger audience now and also provide them with a powerful communication tool!!

After the workshop the 22 participants and the co-facilitator had a few meetings and decided to follow up the interest they had developed in the media. The children suggested to start a comic club where in they would meet once a week and discuss issues and their stories and come up with their comic posters. They collectively decided to come up with the name “*Munna Bhai Comics Club*”. Every Friday they meet and work on designing one comic per person and intend to come with a publication every fortnightly. They also plan to carry their comics to the community and exhibit them in the market places, schools and probably publish in local newspapers and thereby are keen to know how they would be perceived and would impact the reader’s mind.