

**These Lines of Delight and Determination ...
...are Our Inspiration**

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Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha Society



Annual Report 2001 – 2002

Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha Society

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Recollections

At the time of writing this report we have entered our decennial year. All these years our inspiration has been the delight and determination shown and voiced by the sanghams to be in this programme - which had enabled women to determine their own lives and influence their environment.

Looking back on the processes, our achievements reflect in the space and recognition that the sanghams have carved for themselves. Being in the process has enabled them to enhance their self-image and confidence. Their increased mobility, access to information, collective action in bringing positive change in their immediate environment has given them a definite recognition. All these are visible in their capacity to map their own path.

The vision - mission workshop held during the end of March, 2001 has been the core of the present year's planning. We could achieve most of the activities envisioned in spite of the challenges that we had to face, especially, high turnover and limited trained and experienced team.

All the activities were geared to reach the federation members' vision of Ideal Federation in which the sanghams and federations have taken a major role. The autonomy of sanghams and role change, which are the key factors of decentralization process were prominently visible in this year.

The learning and experiences of the sanghams and the team is a rich resource in analyzing and understanding gender in a holistic perspective. This expertise and the material developed in the process is being accessed by various organizations both government and non-government from time to time. This year, with a view to formalize this the Samatha Gender Resource Centre (SGRC), a unit of APMSS, has been set up to facilitate the process of mainstreaming gender initiatives in various interventions of different organizations.

This report is a glimpse into the world of our sanghams. Out of a lot of our mixed experiences and concerns we have tried to put together few, the rest can only be felt and language too falls short to express them.

Towards Decentralization

To sustain the MS processes the Sanghams and Federations of the Mahila Samatha Programme have made noteworthy progress the past year as a step towards consolidation of MS objectives.

We have been able to get a sense of direction with the independent functioning of the Federations which was earlier clouded with several doubts vis a vis the way they could build their strength from one step to another. The deliberations at village, cluster and mandal levels have helped a great deal in this achievement. As the skills of the team were developed to nourish and strengthen the concept and implementation of the Federation processes, each and every aspect connected to it could be taken up for extensive discussion.

Women have been using the sanghams as a platform to bring about many changes in their lives for the past eight years. With these experiences they have been expanding their boundaries from village level to the mandal. All the sanghams in a mandal are unitedly fighting against the problems being faced by women. The formation of mandal level Federations has given a big fillip to this battle of theirs. All these experiences had a great impact on their lives. These federations are thus indicative of the journey of these women who have expanded their boundaries and sought changes in the working of the organisations and systems, they interact with and made them accountable.

Several discussions were carried out at the team level over securing adequate funds to take forward some of the ideas of the Federations. We could not reach a consensus although several opinions were expressed. However, the Federations brought a solution for all of us. In September 2001 the committee members of the four Federations met at Mahabubnagar and made choices - one is that, some amount from the sangham fund to be contributed to the federation and the other being contributions from each sangham member to the federation fund.

The members also took one more important decision; that they should meet every month to review the past activities and plan the future ones. Each Federation decided upon a date and the time for the meeting.

In the same vein, the four Federations of the Medak district too decided the date and time of their meetings at a meeting in the district in November 2001. They later expressed happiness that as a result of these decisions they have been able to overcome problems like non-receipt of information and are able to hold meetings with good attendance at designated venue and carry forward the programme as envisaged.

They felt that, for the federations to work more independently and successfully all the committee members should be taught not only writing and reading but also to be trained in the maintenance of accounts and registers. Following this request the accounts team started imparting training in a phased manner.

Federation Initiatives

For the children's education...

Every year the village level Sanghams have been admitting children to schools in their villages. However, this year, the task was taken up by the federations. The federation members travelled to every village in their mandal and sensitized the villagers, especially the parents of non-school going children on the importance of the education

and child rights. Though they faced opposition from some parents they could convince them and joined children in schools and hostels in a big way. They interacted with the school teachers and stressed the need for quality of education and stated that, lack of it is the main reason for high drop out rate. They requested the teachers and the Vidya committee members to play a responsible role in retaining the children for they have been brought to schools with lot of effort. They thus gained the attention of mandal education officers who have sought their help subsequently in government enrolment initiative - 'Chaduvula Pandaga'. We are humbled by this independent initiative of theirs.

At The Fairs and Festivities

Generally, the regular jatara or fairs are the venue for child marriages and jogini practices. The Federation members decided to use this as a platform to talk about the ills of both the practices. They have successfully carried out their strategy, organizing everything on their own and setting examples for others to follow.

The committee members of 'Narva' federation of Mahabubnagar district met in November 2001, and decided to establish a camp in the Kurumurthy jatara that was to begin in the same month and work on four main issues, namely child marriages, jogini initiation, health and AIDS. They discussed things like how many members from the sangham should work in the camp everyday and the expenditure on bus fares, meals, tents, etc., and made a plan. Accordingly committees were formed for various tasks.

A five members committee wanted to discuss about the place to set up the camp with the Department of Endowments and the local M.L.A. After three days of efforts, they could meet the M.L.A. He was happy to know about their initiative and recommended them to the concerned officials. They too, in turn appreciated the idea and allotted them a place near the temple for the camp. The Department of Endowments encouraged them by waiving the normally charged fee.

In order to legally stop child marriages and jogini initiation they have approached the local police station for their support. They had also invited sangham women from other mandals, MS team from other districts and BMK teachers. This responsibility was handled by yet another committee from the federation.

As this was being done for the first time they had planned to do this for a week and sought the financial support from MS for logistics. With this understanding they have successfully started their campaign. After couple of days they thought that they should negotiate with the local MLA for the provision of food to the members in the camp. Impressed by their enthusiasm this was readily agreed by the MLA who had organised for them to access free meal coupons from the temple authorities for 15 members daily. Encouraged by this the federation members decided to extend their efforts for another week too.

For 15 days they had relentlessly roamed all over the jatara venue and successfully could stop a child marriage and 9 jogini initiatives. They had interacted with parents who had planned to get their children married off or initiate into joginis. They were not only able to persuade the parents to postpone the date of marriage by two to three years but also impressed upon the parents to send their girl children to MSK.

Apart from this they had created an opportunity for the women to get their weights measured and had advised on health and nutrition. Around 150 young children who were not administered polio vaccine were given polio dorps.

They had shared their knowledge on AIDS by putting up posters, explained about the disease, its spread and precautionary measures and distributed information pamphlets. Going a step further they have not only distributed condoms which are the primary preventive tools against AIDS but took out rallies every evening for creating awareness on AIDS and to reach out to the larger gathering. When even the so called educated shy away from discussing AIDS the federation's efforts in creating awareness has not only surprised many but has received wide spread support and recognition.

The organizers were so impressed with the work of the Federations that they did not charge the electricity bill for the 15 days of the campaign. Not only that, they requested the Federations to hold a workshop every year and that the Endowments Department would bear the expenses for that. This boosted the morale of the team and the sanghams immensely.

Taking inspiration from these achievements the sanghams of Devarakadra mandal at Manyamkonda jatara, the members of Alladurg mandal Federation at Venkatakrishnapuram jatara and the sanghams of Tekmal mandal at Edupayala jatara conducted similar workshops. This became a step towards a new beginning. in influencing public opinion. Now it has become a regular event to organise camps and campaign at different Fairs.



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Bala Mitra Mela is a regular event conducted every year in November. This year however it was decided to conduct a Balamitra Forum on the occasion of Child Rights Day. In the meeting of the members of the four federation committees held in November 2001 at Sangareddy the members unanimously decided that they would conduct the Balamitra Prajavedika this year. Since it was the first time for them, they wanted the team to help in preparing the necessary plan. The rest of the responsibilities were taken care by themselves. Accordingly, the federation committee members organised themselves into various committees and decided who would handle what job. Then onwards, they started preparing for successfully conducting the peoples forums. In the same meeting they prepared a module to facilitate in the forum after discussing at length with the team.

As per this module, the People's Forum was to be conducted on November 19th and 20th. All the federation committee members reached Sangareddy two days ahead of the event and involved themselves in making the required arrangements. They split into committees as decided by themselves earlier and handled their assigned tasks. While one team divided the children into groups and setup discussion platforms to facilitate discussion, another team took care of food requirements including procuring the provisions and the third team took the responsibility of tent materials. Some went, helped by the team, to invite the District Collector and other officials to the forum, some others ably handled the task of registering the children.

The members of the federation were the facilitators. The children were divided into four groups and discussed the issues of Child Rights - Violence against children, Gender - Health, Child labour system - Child labourers, sharing their own experiences. The other members formed themselves into a group and discussed what they had done for children till then.



The second day they conducted a rally raising slogans on Child Rights. In the meeting that followed, the entire meeting, including invitees, the District Collector, the Director, District Primary Education Project (DPEP) and the Director, Mahila Samatha, on the issues that came to the fore in group discussions, was handled by the members themselves. They brought to the notice of the District Collector the facilities required for education in the rural areas. The Collector responded by

promising to improve the facilities. He ordered then and there the concerned officials to take up action. The results of the survey on 'Child Labour - Education' were explained to the Director, DPEP by the team members. He promised to extend the support in mainstreaming the child labour. The director, MS enquired about the federation members experiences in organizing this forum and praised the efforts of them. Everybody who attended this forum congratulated for organizing such an event successfully with minimal involvement of the MS team members. The whole process is not only a good experience for them but also enhanced their level of confidence and trust in themselves.

Details of Registered Federations

Mahaboobnagar

Mandal	Name of Federation Sangham	Regd. No.	Date of Meeting (every month)
Makhtal	Swatantra Bharata Mahila Sangham	5638	20
Maganuru	Arunodaya Mahila Sangham	5464	10
Utkuru	Swechcha Mahila Sangham	1342	20
Narva	Kartavya Mahila Sangham	6603	19

Medak

Mandal	Name of Federation Sangham	Regd. No.	Date of Meeting
Pulkal	Swatantra Chaitanya Mahila Sangam	7134	Every Second Month 21st
Andole	Swasakti Mahila Sangham	6604	Every Second Month 27th
Alladurg	Navachaintanya Mahila Sangham	166	Every month 30th

During the 'Gamyam-Gamanam' (vision - mission) workshop which was held in March 2000 when the Federations presented 'An Ideal Federation – Activities to be Undertaken', we were hesitant and doubtful about several things and the processes to build up the capacity of the team and the federations to make this vision a reality. But the above such activities have considerably lessened our anxieties. We have also gained some clarity how to take these processes of federation forward.

The process of the Sanghams forming as Federations had intensified considerably in districts Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Adilabad too. As part of this process, the formation of cluster units went on well with their meetings taking place regularly. The members discussed the role of a Federation and its identity and scope. The experiences of the older federations has given clarity over matters relating to the activities needed to be undertaken by them.

Sometimes there were problems like all sanghams not attending the meetings. Only the strong sanghams would attend and the weak ones would stay away. Or sometimes, those attended once would not be there for the second meeting. These were openly discussed and the strong sanghams decided that they should take an active role in strengthening the other sanghams.

Let's look at the special case of the Federation meeting held at Sirpur (U) mandal of Adilabad district on March 15, 2002. The Federation here started very recently. But they quickly evaluated the benefits they had as sangham, and how they could multiply if all the sanghams came together and worked as a 'bigger sangham'. All the women and men decided to work unitedly.

Towards this, Tumriguda of Sripur(U) mandal they decided that they should form sanghams in villages where there were none earlier so that all the sanghams could later come together as a Federation. They requested Mahila Samatha for assistance in the matter.

One interesting thing was that the sangham members themselves made all the arrangements and all the people of village celebrated it like a festival! They cooked meals for all, taking some part of the rice from the rice they got under 'Food for Work' scheme and some more rice and pulses from the Samatha Dharani programme - the collective farming initiative of theirs. As part of it they raise rice, pulses and other foodgrains depending on the land quality. They could share their own produce and were very pleased to do so.

The MS team is making continuous constructive efforts to make the experiences of the older federations known to the newer ones. However, we must admit that we have not been able to keep up to the pace of the Federation members in evolving programmes that suit their growing needs. One of the reasons for this was the shortage of personnel, both at the district and the state levels and the time that the new team members take to understand the process and the dynamics of the programme. The older staff had to cope with all of this contributing to the delay.

In spite of the unavoidable hurdles we - team and the federations are marching ahead in facilitating and enabling the federations to emerge as *'ideal federation'*.

Education cannot be limited to certain age, area or time. It is an unending, continuous process. Mahila Samatha considers education as not just reading and writing but as a process in which women come together, identify their problems, discuss them, take decisions together, implement them and reflect. We have been working on many issues for last 9 years to enhance the skills of sangham women towards this end. All these aspects are seen as an integral part of education in the MS parlance.

The Mahila Samatha sanghams have emerged as a force to reckon with in villages by taking up and successfully implementing a number of education related programmes thus proving the belief, 'an educated person is an asset to the sangham'. Although the attention was on the education of children earlier, it slowly shifted to that of adolescent girls and adult women. Now, the spirit is such that in few villages it is moving towards total literacy.

By taking inspiration from last year's achievement of admitting all school age children in schools in many villages, the federations have in addition to joining non-school going children in schools, taken up the task of achieving 100% literacy in villages as an important programme. Consequently they have been able to admit all school age children in schools in 11 villages. Also, this year the Balamitra Prajavedika in Medak District, was conducted by the federation members themselves.

Let's know more about the educational interventions and their results.

Children's Education

It is unfortunate if a childhood moves through the rigors of labour rather than the joys of education. There have been several attempts to make accessing education a Fundamental Right. But they have not always proved fruitful. There are several reasons for that. However, wherever the participation of the local community has been active, such attempts have brought good results.

This being the driving force of Mahila Samatha, the programmes undertaken with the help and support of the sanghams for children's education have earned positive results.

Evolving a comprehensive curriculum and supporting pedagogical tools to take forward the concept of education as an all-encompassing process, taking into account the socio-psychological factors rather than just a literacy exercise. The response has been extremely satisfying. We have been able to join a good number of children in the mainstream.

The Bala Mitra Kendras in such villages where all the children have been joined in the schools have been closed. In some villages, however, some centers were closed because of teachers pursuing higher studies or a job and



We stopped working ... started learning

where the community could not identify suitable candidates. The efforts of achieving 100 per cent enrolment in other villages are going on well, nonetheless.

Villages with 100% Enrolment

Sl.No	District	No. of villages
1	Medak	5
2	Mahabubnagar	10
3	Karimnagar	21
4	Nizamabad	5
5	Adilabad	29
	Total	70

At BMKs apart from literacy knowledge about health, Child Rights and other social issues are shared and discussed. Children thus who have participated in discussions are able to impart their knowledge to their family members. Wherever the BMK teachers are active the children participate with them in Kalajathas explaining various issues to the community.

A Bala Mitra Kendra is running in Munimoksham village in Hanvada Mandal of Mahabubnagar district. The teacher there has been teaching many things to the children with great enthusiasm and energy. He has also taught them, plays and burrakathas along with songs and games. Since child marriages were still prevalent in the village they all decided to mount a play on the issue. They found an opportunity to perform it during the Peerla (Muharram) festival at the place where the ritual is performed. All the villagers who had assembled there saw the play and praised the children and the teacher saying it had brought out clearly the problems and ills of child marriages. Touched by the children's efforts many of the present there had vowed that child marriages will not be performed in their village.

Similarly a Balamitra centre has been running at Danampalli village in Sankarampeta mandal of Medak district. The teacher there trained the children also how to hold the Kala Jatha. The members of the village Balasangham also participated in it. The children learnt it all with great enthusiasm. They performed a Kalajatha, finally on 26th January this year on the issues of education of girls and rights of children and received complements from the villagers.

In addition to Balamitra Kendras efforts have been made in some villages for 100% enrolment through "Vidya Sadasulu" (educational meets).

In these meets out of school children and volunteers were identified. Children were exposed to a healthy and joyful learning experience and encouraged to join the mainstream education. The sanghams and BMK teachers had taken the responsibility of retention and checking the school dropouts.

Several government and non-government organizations have given special attention to the possibility of making education a fundamental right. In this light, the work done by the MS has drawn many people's interest. Some government organizations have come forward to extend their support in this endeavour.



Importantly, the state DPEP officials wanted to initiate the total enrolment in few villages of MS project area with the support of MS team and the sanghams. As this is in line with its efforts MS has readily accepted the proposal. A survey was firstly conducted in the villages. Based on these surveys, four villages for each mandal were selected in five districts, in the first phase. This was followed by awareness programmes through Kalajatas and rallies. Teachers were then selected in grama sabhas with the help of the people and the centres were opened.

During a sangham meeting at Gandhinagar in Chityal mandal of Warangal district, it was realised that a large number of boys and girls are engaged as labourers. In the discussions on children's education, the women reflected that the village not only lacked in basic amenities but also proper schooling facility. The village had a school up to fifth standard. Though the register showed there were two government teachers, only one Vidya volunteer was actually working. The building had also collapsed and the children had no place to even sit.

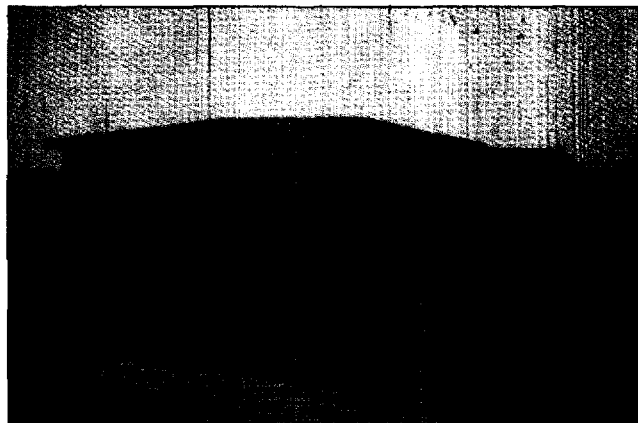
These issues were discussed in the sangham meetings and during Grama Vidya Sadassulu where the information on the Government schemes for children was shared. During the discussions on improving the conditions in the village with the villagers and sangham, it was decided to submit a memorandum to the education department for a school building.

Around the same time school buildings were being sanctioned by DPEP. When the villagers were informed of this, the sangham women, the chair persons of Vidya Committee and its members went to the district head quarters, submitted their application for school building and teachers, and explained the situation in their village to the concerned officers. The DPEP officers responded immediately and sanctioned the building as well as teachers. By being involved in this entire activity, the villagers recognized the importance of education. In a very short time 100% enrolment was achieved with the collective efforts of Vidya Committee, sangham and the villagers. The girls were admitted in Mahila Shikshan Kendram (MSK) while the boys in DPEP'S sporthi camp. Enthused by seeing their children getting into schools, the sangham members are now on the way to become literate.

In these centers also the curriculum and the teaching – learning material of BMKs is used and interactive processes of learning is adopted. The teachers of these centers are trained with the support of DPEP resource persons. They were not only equipped with simple methods of teaching and were also trained in material preparation. By the time

this report was being written many of the children from these centers were mainstreamed and the rest are expected to be mainstreamed by the end of this year.

Recognizing sanghams' role in effectively facilitating children's development through BMKs UNICEF, which has set in motion a sanitation programme at schools with District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), has requested the Mahila Samatha to undertake the programme in Medak district.



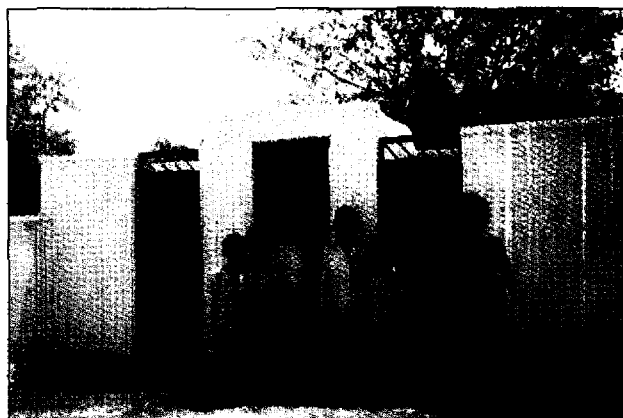
Our School

After discussing the matter with the sanghams, it was decided to take up this programme in Pedda Sankampeta Mandal in Medak. Right now the programme is being implemented in 17 selected villages. As part of the programme the schools have been provided with compound walls, toilets and water facilities. The resultant of this is not only sanitary conditions have somewhat improved in and around the schools but children were also educated on sanitation and hygiene. A rise in the enrolment of girls can be

observed as these facilities are improving.

As a result of this programme, there is also a greater interest among the children in utilizing and maintaining the new facilities provided. The girls especially have felt that such toilets should exist in their houses also for not only are they hygienic but also safe. Their parents have also been convinced to some extent. This could lead to a general improvement of sanitation in the village.

Also, as boys and girls form committees at schools, there is a good perception of equality leading to healthy competition and a qualitative educational scene.



.... Our Responsibility

Adolescent Girls Education

The response and successful intervention of Mahila Shikshana Kendrams in addressing adolescent girls' educational needs has been encouraging. Recognizing this the sanghams in Warangal district demanded for MSK at Warangal district for their girls. This year apart from this even in Nizamabad district, a mandal level MSK was started at Yellareddy. This is the first mandal level MSK. We had several fears and doubts about this especially regarding the retention of the girls during the peak seasons due to the close proximity to their families/villages and also finding suitable and willing teachers. But girls have dispelled all our doubts by successfully emerging after their one-year education at MSK. Many girls have joined the formal schools. One girl continued to stay back preparing for the seventh class examination.

Mahila Shikshana Kendras – Number of Girl Children

Sl.No	District	No. of Children
1.	Warangal	32
2.	Medak	36
3.	Karimnagar	32
4.	Mahaboobnagar	56
5.	Nizamabad	50
	Total	206

Like every year, this year saw many MSK girls appearing for the 7th class exam, (comparatively more than earlier years). From three MSKs, there were 15 MSK girls appeared for the exam. All except five girls have passed. These five could not clear only the maths paper and subsequently appeared for the instant exams in July and passed too. Of the 15, three passed out in first class, two, in second class and the rest in third class, making everyone in the Mahila Samatha proud of them !

Not only that, girls have been receiving accolades for their knowledge base and extra curricular activities everywhere in the districts whenever they participate. Though there are innumerable instances of this fact we cite two examples here.

Nagamani was a bubbly girl studying the fifth standard when her parents suddenly withdrew her from school. They got her married at the young age of just fourteen. In her marital life Nagamani had a lot of bitter experiences. Upon knowing about MSK She felt that may this is the place where she can overcome her difficulties. She convinced her parents and joined the Kendram at Nizamabad. Even while improving her understanding on various issues she would help younger children in improving their knowledge. She was friendly with everyone and ever eager to help others to solve their problems as if they were her own problems. The finest example of this is the way she convinced the Panchayat elders that their decision in a particular case was wrong and made them change it.

In December 2001, Sir Sumit Bose, Joint Secretary, Union Minister of Education and the State Programme Director of DPEP, late Sri Nagarjuna visited the Mandal MKS on their tour of Nizamabad district. When they enquired the children, their parents and the members of the sangham on education facilities in the villages, Nagamani expressed her views with great clarity and boldness than others and told them about the irregular attendance of the village schoolteachers. She questioned **why quality education is being denied to villagers**. She told them, because of this that those who could afford it were sending their children to Banswada for education and for some it was very difficult and simply dropping out of the school. If the standards at the village were good, everyone could have access to it. So she requested them to take necessary steps to ensure quality education.

The officials were highly impressed by Nagamani's boldness her clear understanding of the issue, her wisdom and articulation and promised to look into the problems immediately. Nagamani took good care of her own education also and passed the 7Th class exams with first class. At the time of writing this report, she was in 8th class. She is an embodiment of determination, diligence and application.

MSK girls stand first in cultural activities and sports, besides studies. Their mental and psychological strengths have grown well, giving them a spurt of new confidence. They outsmarted regular schoolgirls in several competitions and won prizes much to their own surprise. This has been helping them a great deal in assessing their potential and honing their skills further.

The girls of Warangal MSK have proved their mettle at 'Kishora Balikala Mela' (Adolescent Girls' Mela) in February 2002 by presenting wonderful cultural programmes.



The Kishora Balikala Mela was jointly organized by District Women's Development & Child Welfare Department, District Education Department and the NGO, Taruni, for the children of Government High Schools in the district. On learning about it, the MSK children requested the authorities to allow them also to participate in it. The organizers accorded to their request and informed them of the various events in the mela. The children of MSK chose to do a programme on AiDS for no one else was coming forward to take that subject. They prepared

a dance drama based on what they had learnt about AiDS in their course, with the help of local schoolteacher. They prepared their costumes and props in the short time available and got ready for the competitions.

They performed their show without any nervousness, covering the precautions against acquiring AiDS, prevention measures and condemning the revulsion prevalent against people with AiDS in society. Impressed by their understanding, the organization and gave them the first prize. The collector Sri K. Prabhakar Reddy was thrilled by the performance and announced a prize of Rs.200/- on the spot, along with the rolling shield. Apart from the accolades, they also received a special invitation from the Women's Development and Child Welfare Department to participate in the programme on International Women's Day.



Similarly in the competitions during Library week in Medak district, the girls of MSK won second prizes in essay writing and singing competitions.

MSK girls also take great interest in matters relating to environment. They exhibit good understanding, as it is part of their curriculum. They learn many things and do not forget them easily, they have been implementing various principles in life. One good example is their involvement in the World Environment Day. They took out a rally and

planted saplings in their villages. They gave the responsibility of the plants to village sanghams and to the Bala Sanghams. The MSK girls at Mahabubnagar participated in planting saplings at government offices, colleges and schools.

These children are thus not only proving their talent but also sharing their thoughts, experiences and creativity in the form of newsletters with the larger community. In the monthly newsletters, they incorporate the information they have learnt recent past, the festivals during that period, the places they have been to, etc. They make it more interesting by adding suitable little sayings and small puzzles. They are themselves writers, composers, editors, artists, everything for their newsletter and chose nice names too for their newsletters. We are trying to bring out a special issue of "Mucchata" – a quarterly neo-literate magazine, with the best contributions from these newsletters published till now.

Women's Literacy

Keeping in view the favourable and unfavourable conditions of last few years' literacy initiatives and also keeping in pace with the demand from the newly emerging federations more emphasis is placed this year on literacy for sangham women. Particularly, rallies and vidya sadassulu were held in villages and mandal headquarters. The chief objective of a vidya sadassu is to identify literate individuals in a village at a grama sabha and encourage them to take the responsibility of teaching others the skills of reading and writing. The limitations and losses of being illiterate are discussed here to create awareness. Village elders, officials participated in these vidya sadassulu in good number and explained the avenues and opportunities to access literacy. This has resulted in a healthy, convergent and enabling environment between the officials and the villagers.

This positive spirit has helped us to organize rallies on literacy at village, cluster and mandal level coinciding with September 08th – the world literacy day. Literacy melas were conducted in Nizamabad, Karimnagar and Mahabubnagar districts. These melas have provided a platform for women to reflect on the issues related to women's illiteracy and girl child education.

Adult Literacy Centers

Sl. No.	Name of the district	Centers
1	Medak	54
2	Mahaboobnagar	31
3	Karimnagar	38
4	Nizamabad	33
5	Adilabad	10
	Total	171



We can handle sickle and pencil with equal ease

Although the strategies of literacy camp and center were successful to some extent, keeping in view the interest of the sanghams and to achieve the expected results in full an initiative – ‘short-term MSKs’ were started. This programme in Medak, Mahabubnagar, Nizamabad and Adilabad districts earned good results.

Women who participated in this programme for five to eight days learn reading, writing and numerical skills through easy methods. The time and space that this intervention has created for women is used by them to critically analyse and reflect their crucial issues. They have also learnt to read and write the key words of the discussions.



We need this space and time to concentrate

At the short-term MSK, women also learn about nursery raising, grafting of plants, the technical information of hand-pump repairing and the making and using of vermi-compost.

Women were especially excited about interacting with many people associated with government departments and learning about their work. They passed on this information to others, which in turn proved a new beginning. In some villages, small libraries were also set up on the demand of the sangham women so as not to forget what they learnt by referring to the material at hand.

Short Term MSKs

Sl. No.	District	No. of Batches	No. of Sangham women Who attended
1	Medak	3	128
2	Mahaboobnagar	1	40
3	Nizamabad	2	28
	Total	6	196

Kamma is a member of the sangham of Seetanagar Village of Alladurg Mandal in Medak District. Her parents did not send her to school in her childhood. But they educated her elder and younger sisters. They did not send her to school so that she could look after her younger sister. She used to fret and fume against her parents that her life was sacrificed for the sake of her sisters, and that she felt low comparing herself against them because they were educated. Determined to get educated, Kamma joined a Sangham, she learned to write her name and a few two letter words. She observed that it was possible to learn reading books through the short term MSK and joined one such course and learnt numbers, addition, subtraction and some difficult words in just five days. These days she is studying the premier for adults and getting her doubts clarified

from a visiting voluntary worker or the children of her relatives. She keeps saying, "If my son was not so young, I would have learnt much more!" She is utilizing all available time determinedly and feeling proud on her improved literary skills.

Sangham women have been trying to access various government educational schemes besides the MS educational activities. As part of these efforts, they participated in the 'Akshara Sankranti' programme taken up by the government. Some sangham women played key role as 'aksharadeepikas' – literacy volunteers, in striving for literacy, last year. They participated in the second phase of the same programme this year too.

Observing the various efforts of MS for the education of the sangham women, the Deputy Director of Mahabubnagar District Saksharata Samiti requested us to become partners in their Akshara Sankranti Programme. Accepting this offer, MS took up this programme in 5 villages in each of the 7 mandals where it is operating.

Firstly, we identified the illiterates in the villages through surveys. Later we conducted village meets to inform the villagers of the survey results. In these very village meetings, we were able to identify education volunteers with the help of the villagers. When we told them all the details of the programme, the villagers promised us in one voice to render the help they can to achieve cent per cent literacy in their respective villages.

After these village meetings, the programme was formally launched in Ramannapally village of Hanvada mandal. The district Collector, the Director of District Literacy Committee, other district mandal and village level officials and the villagers participated enthusiastically in the programme. The officials presented the teaching materials to the education volunteers and books to those who came forward to learn. After a few days we trained these volunteers in preparing teaching aids and materials.

The programme launched with such fun fare ran well for four months. The volunteers were provided with training two times. After that the programme was called off. We could not dispel the frustration among the volunteers on not receiving any of the promised remuneration to them from the department, or the materials or the assistance. Even then we tried to enthuse them for another two months. But then the volunteers dropped out one by one. Since the team of MS was involved in various other programmes during that period, we could not improve the situation.

Yet by motivating school going children and taking their help we could continue the programme in some areas. On the whole, it could be said that about 20-25% of the men and women in the villages became newly literate. Women who got motivated by this programme are improving their literacy through other educational programmes being conducted by MS. This entire activity has been a valuable experience for us.

During the 'vision – mission' workshop held in early 2001 federation members felt that initiative of 'total literacy' is important to meet their needs. The effort is going on in villages which were specially identified. This has given impetus and strength to the on going efforts of making each sangham meeting into a literacy session which for various reasons had not been happening as envisaged for last couple of years.

Bala Sanghams

Having observed the analytical discussions on various topics, the adolescent girls felt they too need to have awareness about such issues and came forward to start their sanghams. All girls whether school going or not and between the age of 12 and 18 years in the villages could be members of these sanghams. They not only widened the objectives of the Mahils Samatha but also discussed the special needs of adolescent girls children and started working to solve their problems themselves. As part of these analytical discussions, training programmes, according to their requirements were taken up. Issues like girl child education, eradication of child marriage, protection of children's rights, family life, reproductive system, health, etc., were taken up. Meetings were arranged at cluster and mandal levels because of which they got an opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences with others.

Although it began with chell sanghams of only girls they took the shape of 'Bala Sanghams' as boys also showed interest in joining them to know about the issues. Only girls being aware of several things alone does not lead to equality was another perspective on the issue which brought in the boys. As the boys and girls sit together and discuss various issues and their unique needs as adolescents and take up appropriate programmes the feeling of equality and understanding gender is improving. They are also playing an important part in changing the mind-set of their families.

Having improved their understanding through study, play and analytical discussions they have taken up the responsibilities like joining child labourers in schools, identifying adolescent girls and sending them to MSKs, talking about child rights at schools and with parents in villages, protesting against gender discrimination, discussing the ill-effects of early marriages are a few to mention. They are also learning about village administration and natural resources to improve their understanding of their immediate environment.

While the members of Bala Sanghams in Nalgonda are maintaining meeting registers themselves in Medak and Karimnagar districts the Bala Sangham members have gone one step further and started savings. Small amounts from the savings are used discreetly towards any sangham member's needs. They are planning to deposit the savings at either a post office or a bank.

Bala Sanghams

S.No.	Name of the District	No. of Sanghams	No. of Children		Total
			Female	Male	
1	Medak	72	057	193	1250
2	Mahboobnagar	92	703	338	1041
3	Karimnagar	90	965	126	1097
4	Nizamabad	8	287	48	335
5	Adilabad	7	105	-	105
6	Warangal	10	156	96	252
7	Nalgonda	9	262	120	382
	Total	288	3535	921	4462

The Bala Sangham Melas held in Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Mahabubnagar districts have been good platforms for members to know details of other district members' activities. On the occasion of child rights' week in November the members of panchayats are made aware of child rights. In Medak and Nizamabad a forum emerged with the coordination of the Bala Sanghams of many villages.

The Children of the Bala Sangham of Torgal Village of Kanagal Mandal, Nalgonda district have on their own organised meetings to improve their understanding of various issues. In particular they discuss thread-bare topics like gender discrimination, child labour, child marriages and superstitions and try to apply them to their own lives. As a result, there is a remarkable change in their thinking and behaviour.

Fourteen years old Nagaraj is a member of this Sangham. One day there was a discussion on gender roles and discrimination in the Bala Sangham. The hot arguments and analytical debates made Nagaraju think. He has come to understand how women are subjected to discrimination at home and outside and how he too was a part of it. There is a considerable change in his thinking.

Earlier he never shared any work at home even when his mother asked him, but now he willingly helps his mother and sister, in household chores. And he was able to announce it proudly at the Bala Sangham meeting. Not just this. He is now teaching others whatever he has learnt. If any of the child labourers are unable to attend school because of the pressure of their employers or parents, he is able to see that they join school by explaining to the employers and parents about child rights and Child Labour Act. The transformation in Nagaraju has immensely pleased his parents.

Education Committees

The sangham women have been quick to recognize that to bring about any lasting qualitative change in any matter, they have to be in crucial positions of decision making bodies and not just as nominal members. Towards this end they decided to become active partners in all committees at the village level. They have also begun working on this. Their information levels had already gone up due to the campaigns held prior to panchayat elections. They decided to contest in the Vidya Committee elections in a big way. They discussed it among themselves, informed the villagers and sought their support. The villagers who were aware of the capabilities of the sangham women and familiar with sangham activities, elected them with resounding majority in some villages and unanimously in others. We are happy to inform that as a result more women have been elected to vidya committees more than ever.

The women have not stopped there. They played an active role in joining children in schools, in reminding the teachers of their responsibility of being regular, in giving qualitative education at schools and in overseeing proper distribution of rice to school-going children as part of a scheme. They also participated in meetings held with teachers and villagers to discuss problems facing the educational scene and took active decisions.

Chinna Gujjul is a small 'tanda' in Gandhari Mandal of Nizamabad district. In this village of the 40 Lambada families, there were a lot of children who did not go to school. Although the school was within 1 km distance, the parents hesitated to send their children to the neighbouring village. But since all the women in the village were members of the Sangham and the importance of education came up for discussion in the meetings many times, they developed an interest in getting their children educated. Although they had set up Balamitra Centre earlier itself, they felt a school was needed in their village because the teacher at the centre was not good. Renabai, a member of the Sangham was also the chair-person of the Vidya Committee. So it was easy for the Sangham members to pressurise the education department and get a primary school sanctioned for their village.


But they had to face a new problem. The teacher did not know their Lambadi language, so the villagers were not interested in sending their children to the school. Renabai then took charge of the situation. She went around the homes, got the children to school, spent time with them and taught them how to behave at school. She also doubled as teacher, made them to learn alphabet and numbers and dispelled their fears. She was thus able to admit 30 children to the school. She explained to the officials the activities they had undertaken under the auspices of Mahila Samatha and demanded in strong terms that their village needed a school building. The Collector immediately sanctioned a school building. But because of the rule that there should be a minimum of 50 students, the building has not been built so far. So they decided to themselves to provide a room for the school and take care of its maintenance.

There were requests from the sangham members and other villagers for Mahila Samatha Programme training and meetings for information. These requests were met with a concrete programme which helped for a qualitative change, despite occasional hiccups which the sangham members have been dealing admirably.

State level meeting and consultations were held for schools and village Vidya Committees in Hyderabad during March this year. Women who got elected to the Vidya Committees from Mahila Samata Sanghams attended this, which was held under the auspices of 'NEG', 'CRY' and 'Caford'. Various representatives of regional, state and national organisations, government teachers and head masters participated in the conference. The Sangham women boldly discussed their experiences and the problems and hurdles they have been facing in the committees during the meeting.

Since representatives of the District Primary Education department and the teachers apart from various organisations participated in these discussions, it was possible to discuss what ought to be done for the efficient functioning of Vidya Committees. The Sangham women gave good suggestions based on their experiences and the conditions in their villages. They informed that they have admitted to school all non-school going children in these respective villages and that they would work for joining children who still, don't go to school. They declared they would inform people of neighbouring villages of the information they have obtained at this conference and be partners in realising the slogan of 'Universal Elementary Education'. They also promised to help in procuring child rights.

State Level Consultation
On
School and Village Education Committees
March 27th & 28th, 2002, Andhra Pradesh, India



Community Participation in Universalisation of Elementary Education

FACILITATING AGENCIES

National Education Group (NEG) P.B. No. 1544, No.30 Sachidan Rd. Secunderabad - 500 003 Phone: 040-7717700 educate@bal.vsnl.net.in	Child Relief and You (CRY) No.1273-1, Prasad Ramam Bachchanal Rd. Cox Town Bangalore-560 005 Phone: 080-5484952 cry@cryindia.org	Collective Action for Rural Development H. No. 1-205-B-2 Near Water Tank Rd, Markapur-523 316 Prakasam Dist. Phone: 08596-22622 ca@ca@redfem.com
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The way they made good use of what they learnt in the training sessions and the dedication they showed in executing their responsibilities brought them kudos from everyone. **The publication of a photograph for the cover page of the report on this meeting, is measure of the recognition they have received.**

Child Rights

Mahila Samatha has been making consistent efforts towards the important segment of its action programme - child rights. As part of its endeavours it became a member of AP Alliance for Child Rights, a state level network.

Child Rights, as a subject, is an integral part of the curriculum at Bala Mitra Kendras and Mahila Sikshana Kendras. Children are able to discuss issues pertaining to their life in the light of new learning. We have also been trying to improve awareness about child rights among public by conducting every year a number of programmes during child rights week in 7 districts in which MS is active. The books and posters produced on this issue had been very useful. The folk art forms like palle suddulu and Burra Katha are also used in creating awareness. This year the rallies and meetings were organized in which the Sangham women, children from Bala Sanghams and BMKs, school teachers, students, SEC members and people's representatives participated.

In Karimnagar district MS took various programmes with the district level forum of AP Alliance during child rights week. Children from various schools and MSK participated in this programme. There were competitions for children in songs, elocution and essay writing and prizes were awarded. Kala jathas were conducted in the villages.

In Nizamabad district we conducted a two day Child Rights camp. On the first day members of Village panchayats, SEC members, public representatives, government officials and sangham women from three mandals participated in the programme.



We are no less ... We are competing with regular students and winning too!!

They were provided with the information on child rights. The role and responsibility of each of them in ensuring child rights was explained. Many of them said that they were learning these things for the first time. They also prepared an action plan for child labour, child marriages and children's education. In their respective villages right now, these have become an important part of their activities.

On the second day, a rally was taken out with school children of Bala Mitra and Mahila Shikshana Kendras. They were also shown the film Meena and the issues of sexual discrimination and child rights were discussed with them. Specially designed posters were used for this purpose. All the children declared they would work to join non-school-going children of their villages in their village school.

The analytical discussions held in Bala Sanghams on Child Rights helped in the members improving their understanding about them. On many occasions the members of Bala Sanghams talked to and convinced the parents of working children to admit them in schools. An incident in Nalgonda proves their capabilities in achieving their aims.

The Children of Toragallu village in Kanagal Mandai of Nalgonda district joined together to form 'Nehru Balala Sangham'. They held regular meetings to sensitise non-school going children and admitted them in school by convincing their parents. They now also discuss about health and child rights at their meetings.

When a meeting of Bala Sanghams was held at the Mandal level, the members of Sangham also attended it. A member of the Sangham by name Krishna was in the service of a land lord. He was very eager to participate in the meeting but was disappointed because the landlord's wife did not agree to relieve him on the pretext of work. All the children of Bala Sangham then went to the land lord and asked him to send Krishna with them. When the couple did not relent, they told them about child rights and that infringement of such rights could invite action by the police, the lady was taken aback. They had to send Krishna to the meeting. The children shared this proud victory with everyone else at the meeting.

Networking

- ◆ In order to eradicate the practice of Child Labour voluntary organisations, head masters of schools and government officials came together to form an Education Core Committee. Mahila Samiti was privileged to receive membership of this committee by virtue of its work in admitting child workers to schools and achieving cent percent enrolment in some villages. The members of the Core Committee met in a meeting held under the auspice of the District Collector and devised an action plan. On this occasion, the members visited Velupur Mandal in Nizamabad district and Chevella in Rangareddy district, where cent percent enrolment of child labourers to schools had been achieved.
- ◆ Mahila Samata has been a member of the Executive Committee of the District Primary Education Programme for the last two years. So, owing to our experiences in the field, we have been able to suggest to the programme officers what kind of changes in the programme would enable better and effective qualitative education.

Excursions And Educational Tours

Excursions contribute a lot to the process of creative development. By visiting new places an individual is able to develop the ability to analyse the subject from various angles apart from an ability to think in new ways. MS believes that acquiring information is an important towards self-reliance. So it provides the girls of MSKs to visit various areas and institutions every year. The girls visited not only the tourist spots in the districts but also visited Health Museum, science museum, planetarium, Archeological museum, the zoo, Golconda and Charminar in Hyderabad.

Visiting a post-office, bank, the Collectorate and radio station happen every now and then as part of their learning process. They also visit dams and research stations to increase their understanding of various resource infrastructures. Visiting these places actually in addition to studying about them helps them not only in better understanding but also in acquiring quality education.

The elders are as much interested in traveling as children. Even at short-term MSKs this became a favourite endeavour. Adult women too derive the same amount of excitement through exposure visits. Their visits to government establishments and institutions have developed their awareness considerably. They have seen how the sangham women in Kaudapalli Mandal of Medak district and the organisation CARPED in Burugugadda village has achieved total literacy. The visit inspired them so much that many women joined the short-term MSK to learn. They went back with great enthusiasm to their villages and shared their learnings.

Social Issues

The living conditions of women are being greatly influenced by the role that has been expected from them over generations and the traditions and customs thus formed. Because of this not only are they subjected to repression, but also hesitant to take their own decisions even in small matters. If they have to transcend this vicious circle and forge a head it is very important that they should understand and critically analyse and openly discuss means and ways of empowerment.

Mahila Samatha has been creating congenial atmosphere for such discussions right from its inception. Women have realised that fighting against social problems as a united whole brings better results than fighting as individuals. With this belief, for last few years, women have identified some of the social issues affecting their lives immensely and could bring in positive change to a large extent. These issues include: child marriages, Jogini practice, discrimination, violence on women, familial problems and issues like drinking.

It can be said that they have been successful in containing these problems not only at the sangham level but also in the villages. They are also working to bring down gender disparities by working on issues like recognition as women farmers and equal pay.



We will not let the violence continue anymore!

Earlier, women faced lot of resistance from their own family members and villagers for such efforts. But they did not flinch back. They moved ahead with courage, confidence and unity solving problems, they received good recognition in the villages. Slowly there is a change in the attitude and the villagers developed great trust in sanghams. So whenever above such problems arise, they give the information to the sanghams and consult them for solutions. They give a lot of respect to the suggestions given by the sangham members and are not hesitant to consult and take the help of the sangham whenever required.

Whenever any aberrations are reported the sangham members get in touch with the villagers, officers and federation members and prevent them immediately from taking place. During the present year in the 7 districts where MS is active sangham members stopped over 100 child marriages and 20 Jogini initiations.

In Gondyala Village of Hanvada Mandal, Mahbubnagar district, the members of Lakshmi Mahila Sangham established in 1999 have achieved good reputation by virtue of their numerous activities. The Sangham has 30 members. Earlier the village had a high incidence of atrocities on Women. It was common practice for the village elders to hold a panchayat as per tradition and impose a nominal fine on those determined

as the accused. Half of the fine so imposed went to the village elders, half of the remaining went for their entertainment expenses and only the remaining went to the Victim. After the Sangham was formed, the women folk decided to put an end to this practice.

In an incident concerning Mybamma, the daughter of Beemamma, a member of the Mahila Sangham of the Village, an attempt at molesting the girl was made by a married man, Tirupathaiah when she went out of the village to attend nature's call early in the morning. Hearing her screams, the Sangham Women went and rescued her and demanded justice in the presence of the villagers.

As usual, the elders imposed a fine of Rs.2,500/- on the accused. But the Sangham members refused to accept the decision. Since the accused did not feel such impositions of fine as punishment the atrocities on the Women continued unabated. So they insisted on a change in the trial method and harsh punishment.

To discuss the issue more elaborately, they organised a Grama Sabha by calling members of other thrift sanghams and Sanghams in the Cluster. After some discussion with these people, the village elders decided to ask Tirupataiah to Pay Rs.10,000/-. Tirupataiah responded by saying, "I can't pay so much money. Instead I'll marry her". To this the members of all Sanghams protested saying, "A second marriage is a crime according to law. If you don't pay the fine we will not hesitate to complain to the police". Tirupataiah had no option but to pay the fine.

Although the village elders asked for their traditional share out of this amount, the members did not pay to them, nor did they allow any part of the money to be spent on entertainment. Instead, the amount was put in a post office deposit in the name of the girl. Also, the girl was admitted to the Mahila Sikshana Kendram.

After this event, no such incidents were reported not only from that village but also from the entire cluster.

In various such matters the sanghams have been responding on the spot to find some solutions. One cannot say that these practices have been wiped out, but the frequency of them is less. To overcome this situation it has been decided that more awareness and create consciousness among the larger community to enable them to confront. Efforts are being made in this direction.

All the sanghams in Alladurg mandal of Medak district formed into a federation and applied for registration. From the time Samaadhana Mahila Samgham was started in Gadi Peddapur village of this mandal, attention has been more on women's social issues. As a result, they were able to control the Jogini system in their village, four years ago itself. But when they learnt at the federation general body meeting from the sangham that the practice has revived, they responded by deciding to nip it in the bud itself.

They discussed the matter in the same meeting, and prepared an action plan. Accordingly, 50 sangham members from Palvetla, Nagulapalli, Marvelli, Muslapur and Chilver villages of the mandal met on the planned day, and

along with MS team members, went to Gadi Peddapur village. They discussed the matter with the women who revived the practice and the villagers.

The women told the sangham members that they had to revive the practice owing to poverty and lack of any avenue to earn a living. They were told about the special Government Schemes for joginis. In the subsequent Jaanmabhoomi programmes, these women were helped to fill applications for the purpose.

As described above it is learnt that there has been a revival of child marriages and jogini system in some parts of the districts the practice of which were under control for some time.

Keeping this in view, the MS team, the federation members of Medak and Mahabubnagar districts, sangham members etc. who participated in the 'vision-mission' workshop held in 2001, decided to concentrate more on Gender Equality and socially evil practices. Accordingly at the annual planning workshop, programmes were devised not only for taking steps when issues cropped up but also for continuous analysis of the situation. This was a main point at the monthly meeting of federation societies last year where they resolved to take up activities at mandal level. They have been taking the help of officers to this end whenever required.

Awareness camps – At Fairs and Weekly Markets ...

Following the discussions, members thought of various jataras as good places to start their mission. Generally, in rural areas, people keep great faith in propitiating a god to fulfill their needs and wants. Marriage alliances are fixed for pre-pubescent girls, initiating girls as 'jogini's and offering the hair are strongly prevalent during the festival period.

During the discussions on these practices the idea that holding awareness camps at the venue of jataras would help in countering them, which lower the dignity of women. It was also felt that it gives an opportunity to reach a wide section of audience across a good number of villages in a short time.

Efforts were begun immediately to bring this plan into action in various mandals of Mahabubnagar district. At the Kurumurti Jatara held in November every year, in Chinna Chintakunta Mandal, Jogini and child marriages are performed mainly by the scheduled castes and Kurvas. The Kartavya Mahila Federation in Narva mandal discussed the issue thread bare during their monthly meeting held on October 19, 2001 and selected this Jataras as the platform for implementing their action plan.

Although Chinna Chintakunta Mandal in Mahubnagar district does not fall under the purview of MS, the Narva Federation Members decided on holding an awareness camp there keeping in view the large number of people who assemble there during the Jatara, a major one in the area. The members planned to create awareness about superstitions as also the AIDS disease.

Various sub-committees were formed for holding the Camp. The location of the Camp and meals for the

Sangham members were arranged with the help of Endowments department. Charts, books, banners, posters, etc., were procured and readied for imparting information. This Camp was held from 21 November to 2 December. The Federation and Sangham members took turns by 15 members every day till the end of the camp to perform the duties. They succeeded in preventing four attempts at initiation into Jogini & two Child Marriages. They also took slogan really to project that legal action would be taken against anybody indulging in the two practices.



A few members stayed in the Camp itself offering information to the visitors on AIDS disease, health problems, importance of nutritious food etc.

This has been dealt in greater detail in previous section.

The camp they had conducted for 15 days created a sensation within the community. The local people, officials and the local bodies responded positively. Similar camps were conducted at Makhtal village in Makhtal mandal, Lingampally, Gunmukla in Dhanwad mandal and Manyamkonda and Rajamur villages in Devarakadra mandal. Inspired by the effort, similar camps were conducted and stalls, set up at fairs and shandies - weekly marketplaces, in other project districts.

These becoming the different chennels of information, the sangham women grew more confident of their beliefs and work. They are firm now about eradicating socially unjust practices against women.

Through Convergence We Can Achieve ...

Mahila Samatha works with other organizations on social issues. It participated in a meeting presided over by the District Collector in April 2001 in Medak district on the 'sale of girls in thandas'. The practice is prevalent in Medak, Rangareddy and Nalgonda districts. From the meeting emerged a decision to survey all the hamlets and hold discussions with the thanda leaders. In a survey it was noted that the thandas under the purview of MS did not have such prevailing practices. All the girls from here are sent to school.

Several voluntary organizations and government bodies decided to carry out a mission to create awareness about bonded labour and strive for its eradication in Medak district. A boy who lived in Eesojipet village within the Mahila

Samatha purview was identified as a bonded labourer in a survey. The District Collector asked the officials to take immediate action.

The members of all the federations in Mahabubnagar met the District Collector, the police, medical and health officials at the time of the Kurumurthy jatara and requested their support and help in this matter. Similarly, members of Medak district federations participated in a district seminar on 'child marriages and public opinion' in February 2002 and expressed their opinions on the matter. The team said that if there is legal help to their actions at the field level in stopping the marriages, there would be a permanent solution to the problem.

The Police and the government started Mytri sanghams to include people and various organizations in the process of keeping law and order. Some of the MS sangham members are members in the Mytri sanghams.

Members in seven mandals of Karimnagar district actively participate in Mytri sangham work in preventing violence and atrocities against women.

Towards a lasting change

Domestic violence, atrocities against women, patriarchal practices, gender discrimination and obsolete conventions restrict women's decision-making power a great deal in all respects. Sangham women have been growing sensitive to various issues affecting their lives. They are trying to create space for themselves by responding to such issues and working towards gender equality.

It is not easy to achieve equality in a patriarchal society where freedom for women is a taboo. The whole process of socialization has to be questioned for this purpose. It is not enough if either women or men change. Any change in people's attitude should come by questioning fundamental beliefs; and this should be started right from a tender age. With this view, cheli / bala sanghams have become good grounds for increasing children's awareness of issues of inequality. Discrimination, rights, child labour, the workload on girl child, malnutrition and other issues are discussed vigorously with a good supply of information. Girls have responded extremely positively to such efforts identifying their own problems and seeking solutions. Trainings are conducted for them in order that they can solve their problems with increased skills levels.

As we said earlier, to bring about a complete and lasting change in thought processes and socialization processes, appropriate changes have to be brought in administrative policies and framing of laws. Keeping in view, discussions were held in the sanghams, emphasizing that women's participation should be ensured in all the committees at the village level, and that especially Rights protection committees for women and children should be established in each village. In addition, they are being encouraged to create pressure to bring about pro-women laws through policy initiatives, by further improving their direct participation in the administrative machinery.

Our efforts are also going in the direction of securing control for women over fixed properties and resources. Under the Samatha - Dharani programme, which is undertaken with the UNDP financial support, women have been cultivating fallow lands to raise food crops and achieve food security. In the process, the lands are on their names; they have

built grain storage bins and are managing them – the women are able to acquire the technical knowledge and skills pertaining to the agriculture sector hitherto being totally under male forte.

Sangham women have been able to get more information about the possibility of improving nutrition levels and food security due to traditional food crops. This in turn led to the discussions on the improved status of women vis a vis their control over natural resources, better health and social conditions. More details will be provided about this process in the next chapter.

The sangham members hold discussions on the physical, psychological and social problems faced by women in old age. A few members of the sanghams along with Mahila Samata Team participated in an international seminar on “women in old Age-Self Reliance” held under the auspices of Osmania University in Hyderabad.

The sangham Women attended the international seminar on “Women in Old Age – Self Reliance” organized by the Centre for Women’s Studies, Osmania University, Hyderabad on 6.2.2001. Later a workshop was conducted in Jogipet, Andole Mandal with sangham Members over the age of 50 visitors from Vientman and London, as also Ms. Fatima, the director of the center for Women’s Studies on behalf of the Osmania University participated in the workshop. At the workshop, aged women spoke of their physical, psychological & social problems and their experiences. They said that after starting the sangham, there has been considerable change at the family & social level and they have received recognition.

In the meeting of federation members held after the seminar, the Federations decided to implement their plan to establish an Old Age Home for aged women.

All the issues described above have greater influence on women. Infact, we cannot see social issues and the violence against women from a single point of view. It is related to various other aspects.

Women should be able to stop injustices and question the social conventions, which prevent them from exercising freedom. MS has been working in making women think of their rights to take independent decisions concerning their lives.

Towards An Alternative System of Justice...

Towards this end, analytical discussions were held in the sanghams about the family conflicts and their effect on the mental health of women. The sangham members are working towards recognising and solving these issues. *By solving such minor issues at their level, they are improving their successes, the sanghams are now moving ahead toward securing an alternative system of justice for achieving social justice.*

Because of the recognition they have received, the collective strength of women and their courage, the sanghams are being consulted for solving minor family disputes. The main among them are between husband and wife, the violence committed on the wife by family members, dowry, forced marriages on children, etc. when such incidents are brought to the notice of sanghams, they first meet both the parties, and make them sit face to face and try to solve the disputes. They are thus gaining good recognition as an alternative form of justice.

There are 30 members in the Sri Lakshmi Mahila Sangham of Achampally village of Gangadhar mandal of Karimnagar district. The sangham has good credibility in the village. Whenever there are any problems in the village, the sangham is consulted, the villagers & sangham members sit together, discuss and take ideas and address the problems.

The mother of a girl of this village complained to the sangham members that the girl's husband and in-laws were torturing her physically and mentally, and so came away to her mother's place. Immediately the sangham members called the husband and his parents to a Panchayat in the presence of village elders and mutually reconciled them. They also took an assurance from them not to create such problems in future and only then sent the girl to her husband's home.

When a sangham meeting was taking place at Mamdapur village in Alladurg mandal of Medak district, a Kumhari family visited and requested the sangham to intervene in bringing their daughter-in-law home who was refusing to live with the husband. The sangham women said they would also talk to the girl's family and take up the issue. In their investigation, the members came to know that the boy was at fault and arranged for the return of money and articles given as dowry by the girl's family.

Not only the old districts, but the sanghams of new districts, Warangal and Nalgonda (where the MS programme expansion was recent), women are being pro-active taking the issues forward. The older sanghams looked in the direction of social issues only after addressing other 'sangham-related' issues first. It took considerable time for them to look in that direction. When the older sangham women visited the new sanghams and shared their experiences, it was an enriching experience for the women in new sanghams. They did not take a lot of time to form as sanghams. As soon as the sanghams formed, they began to address issues like domestic violence, arrack problem and issues facing the girl child. The following incident is a good example to understand their spirit.

A new mahila sangham was established in Chityala village, Chityala Mandal of Warangal district. It is still to be named. All the members of the Sangham are already members of various self-help groups. They have learnt about the objectives of MS and started uniting themselves. They are taking the requisite training and receiving information necessary for the purpose.

A couple in the village got married without the consent of the elders. When the boy's family came to know of this, they immediately began to look for a fresh alliance for him. The girl approached the sangham members asking for justice. They called the family members of the boy to a meeting with the village elders. The elders declared that the marriage was invalid and as compensation for staying with the girl for so many days, the boy shall pay a fine of Rs.20,000/-. However, the sangham women refused to accept the verdict. They felt that a women's life cannot be evaluated with money and met officers, woman lawyer and the police and demanded justice from them. As a result, their marriage was solemnized in front of the elders at a panchayat meeting.

Women in Nampalli and Kanagal mandals of Nalgonda district have been working towards seeking a permanent solution to the arrack problem and have been successful. They are now discussing problems of inequality.

In this backdrop of sangham and federation women's active participation in resolving issues, trainings were given to them in matters related to law. The team members were also equipped with the information on legal issues in a phased training.



Becoming aware of our rights and the laws

Legal Aid Training Camps During Janmabhoomi

As in the previous year, this year too, the Project Director of DRDA, Medak requested the Mahila Samatha to conduct trainings from June 1st to 10th in legal matters, as part of the Janmabhoomi programme. Ramachandrapuram and Kulabgur are two villages in Sangareddy at which camps were held. However, due to poor scheduling, non-availability of DRDA's agenda, work pressure and lack of clear understanding among the officials the programme did not go as envisaged.

District Family Counselling Centres

When selling away girls and violence against women were becoming rampant, the State Women's Commission discussed favourably the idea of setting up district counseling centers with Department of Women & Child Welfare and other voluntary organizations. As members of sanghams participated in the proceedings, they were not only acquainted themselves with the officials but also developed an objective perspective on women's issues. Some women who participated in the counselling sessions opined that sparing more time for an in-depth analysis on women's problems could take one closer to a solution.

Future Directions

The federation members have decided on building upon these experiences by organizing a Mahila Court at the Mandal level. They have also decided to develop the necessary capabilities for this purpose.

For this purpose, we have already begun efforts to train the sanghams fully-fledgedly about various laws. Mahila Samakhya is already conducting very efficiently Nari Adalats and Mahila Panch in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat. To improve the understanding of the 'Team', sangham women and federation members on how to conduct such a fora, it was decided to visit them.

Health

HHealth is a prime issue the rural women have raised in the initial days of the programme. Sanitation, personal hygiene, food habits and the inherent medical knowledge of women were central to the discussion and analysis within the sanghams. Consequently, there were demands for health training. As women's health cannot be seen independent of social, economic and cultural factors, issues like mother and child mortality rates, women's role, position and gender discrimination were critically analysed within the sanghams.

Initially two women from each sangham were chosen for the training. With improved skills, women were able to access health and medical facilities better. As a result, we are happy to inform that the health situation has improved considerably. At the family level gender discrimination in the matters of food intake, workload, health amenities and family planning has come down. Because of the vaccination arranged for pregnant women and children mother and child mortality has shown considerable decline in our project area.

The sanghams have taken up initiatives of preparing herbal medicines for boils, skin diseases like scabies and other minor ailments. Over the years such education on health issues and IEC programmes at the mandal, district and state levels a comprehensive awareness has been created among sangham women about the various health issues in a woman's life cycle.

Last year the sangham women, who were trained as women health leaders in Karimnagar and Medak districts in collaboration with WHO, started giving trainings to members of the other sanghams. As a result, the sangham women have received appreciation from all quarters. The invitation by Karimnagar District Health Department to sangham members as trainers for their training programmes for Mahila Sanghams delighted us. It also raised the morale and enthusiasm among the sangham members. With this inspiration, the sangham women are carrying forward the health issue by incorporating new ideas from time to time. They have shown interest in observing special days like World Health Day, Food Day, Breast-Feeding Week, AIDS Week, etc., learning about their importance and accordingly taking up programmes. Apart from establishing good liaison with health officials at village and mandal levels, they have been demanding accountability from officers, by bringing into access health facilities and schemes at village and mandal levels. In programmes like Pulse Polio, not only the sangham members but also federation members are participating actively. By observing all this, we understand how sanghams have been moving toward self-reliance in Health.

Keeping these experiences in view, in this annual plan, we have devised village-level programmes in order to provide awareness not only at the sangham level but also at the village level. Among these, the chief ones are Grama Arogya Sabhas (Village Health Meetings), Samatha stalls at local religious festivals and kala jathas. We are happy to inform, the federation members have played an important role in implementing the programme.

The WHO training was initiated in Medak and Karimnagar districts, last year. Based on the feed-back and the value addition of the training, this year, MS has up scaled the intervention. Training was given phase-wise to all the team

members and sanghams in the remaining districts based on the modules prepared by 'Chetana' for WHO.

In these training programmes, not only on issues like "Common Health Problems-Their Effect on Women's Health" and "Women-Reproductive Health" but discussions were prominently organized to enable recognizing anaemia as a primary health problem. The response of Sangham members toward these training programmes has been enthusing.



Building capacities to be trainers

A Sangham was formed in 1999 in Devudupalli village, Sirpur Mandal, Adilabad district. The members who attended the Health training Programme from this Sangham, are imparting their knowledge to everyone in the village by going around and ensuring they follow it. The unique customs and food habits of the tribals here are subjecting their women to anaemia.

When the 13 year old daughter of a Sangham member, Leela was taken to Government Hospital at Adilabad due to ill-health, the Doctors said she was anaemic and had to be given blood. But since she did not have that kind of money, Leela came back to the village along with her mother. On learning this, the Sangham members took Leela to the ITDA Project Director. After hearing about Leela's ill-health and her family's economic situation, he gave them Rs.500/- and sent her in his vehicle to Adilabad Government Hospital and got her the necessary medicines. After 10 days stay in the hospital, Leela returned in good health to the village.

From this experience, the women folk realized that their health problems were because they only prayed to the God and did not go for proper medical attention when sick. Now they are consuming all types of leafy vegetables and vegetables. Sangham members are ensuring that when the ANM visits the village, all the pregnant women receive TT injections and iron tablets.

One key aspect of these training programmes is the sangham members, who received training under WHO project, going as trainers from the training programmes meant for other associations. The Government has also recognized the skills of sangham members and have been inviting them as trainers. This is an issue of great pride and joy for us.

Sangham women also increased their skill levels and got a multi-perspectival insight in matters related to women's health after their participation in trainings such as 'Women and Mental Health' and 'The Influence of Violence on Women's health. Domestic violence was taken up for discussion very widely when it was identified as a commonly affecting hazard impacting woman's life.

At a time when the value and practice of traditional medicines is diminishing the sangham women are reviving these. Building on their knowledge base they started making herbal medicines and using them for improved health status. The team and the sanghams are being trained in this.



Nature's gift for improving our health

Lakshamma, a sangham member of Dharma Reddy village in Nagireddypet mandal of Nizamabad district, has developed her skills in preparing herbal medicines by attending health training program combining her own period experience with what she learnt at the training programmes, she has been preparing herbal medicines for not only sangham members but also the people of her village and the neighbouring villages. In this way, not only has she been economically benefited, but also received good reputation as a herbal doctor, she says happily.

Dai Training



Sharpening expertise as mid-wives

Though the Government is making all efforts for institutional safe deliveries yet there are reported deaths of women during deliveries as the medical facilities are not effective in some cases and in others due to lack of skilled traditional mid-wives. This has created a demanding situation for village-based midwives. Responding to this MS has organized Dai training in Mahabubnagar for 23 women through a voluntary organization. The course content not only dealt with practices of safe delivery and post-natal care but also reiterated the importance of the accessing Government facilities. The response of the

sangham women has been encouraging. Now they are performing safe deliveries, identifying critical cases and facilitating access to medical services and also to Government schemes like 'Sukheebhava' and 'Arogya raksha'.

The positive feed back of this training and to address the needs of the women across other districts similar training programmes are planned.

Adolescence - Health

Health in adolescent years is fragile and important to take special care of. Hence it is specially discussed at Cheli



and Bala sanghams and training and is included as a curriculum subject at MSK. The physical and psychological changes coming about in adolescent children, anemia and nutrition are some issues, which are focal to the discussions. Personality development, discrimination of girl child and other concerns were extensively discussed. Discussions are also being held about all kinds of domestic as well as external violence perpetrated on adolescent girls.

Training programmes are being conducted for the children of Cheli/Bala sanghams as well as MSKs in

preparing medicines using available plants and trees. In some districts, the MSKs are using only herbal medicines for cold, cough, headache and dysentery.

15 girls of Tenkati village (Sankarampeta Mandal, Medak District) formed Gulabicheli Sangham. They received training in herbal medicine for health problems during adolescence and precautions. Because of the training, their understanding of health problems and gender disparities has gone up. A girl member of this cheli Sangham prepared a medicine using Kalabanda (aloe) plant when she learnt her mother was suffering from infection of the uterine tube. The woman was cured of infection. The Children of Gulabi Cheli Sangham are also considering their own health problems and taking proper precautions and care. This is an excellent example to show that if proper help, skills and information are provided during adolescence itself, 'swasakthi' or empowerment could begin from a very early stage.

Health - A Responsibility Of All

Village environs influence the general health scene in a village, therefore, efforts are being made to increase every one's awareness about many issues not only at sangham level but at village level as well. More programme are designed to reach out to the entire village community. It was decided to utilize situations and specific days convenient for information dissemination. Accordingly the sangham women are organizing camps and samatha stalls during grama sabhas, and meetings and rallies during special days at the village level.

Water-borne diseases like malaria and filarial, deadly diseases like AIDS, village sanitation, precaution and cure, do's and don'ts are conveyed through songs and other folk art forms - Palle suddulu, kalajathas, songs and banners.

In Medak district, kalajathas are being conducted by groups formed by federation members, sangham members, cheli and bala sangham children, BMK teachers and MS team members, traveling through all the mandals. Field reports indicate these kalajatha performances are receiving good response.

Village Health Meetings and Rallies held in various districts.

S.No.	District	No. of Grama Sabhas	No. of Rallies
1.	Medak	26	59
2.	Mahboobnagar	237	10
3.	Karimnagar	54	25
4.	Nizamabad	15	10
5.	Adilabad	77	-
6.	Warangal	10	-
7.	Nalgonda	-	5
	Total	419	109

In these grama sabhas or village meetings, sarpanches, ward members, MPTC, ZPTCs, officials of health department, school children, other committee members of village level, sangham members, children of cheli/bala sanghams and school children are participating. Thereby, they are taking preventive measures to avoid pollution of wells, bores and tanks. They are also following personal hygiene and cleanliness of surroundings.

Sangham members are ensuring to prevent seasonal infections diseases the funds of grama panchayat are used for village sanitation. Because of the awareness created on village sanitation, people are coming forward to have latrines constructed. During the Janmabhoomi programmes, sangham members as well as other villagers give affictions for latrines. The villagers are also actively participating in government programmes concerning village sanitation like 'Clean & Green'. We are happy to state that drawing inspiration from samatha sanghams, other DWACRA and Mahalakshmi groups too are coming forward to participate in such programmes.

Fairs have a great importance in the tribal district of Adilabad. People come to these fairs held once a week in large numbers to procure their needs. Samata stalls have been set up in there fairs not only to popularize the aims of MS information to more number of people. Sangham women demonstrate methods of cooking food without nutrition loss. Also they explain precautions to be taken by pregnant women, and information regarding nutrition and AIDS with the help of books, pictures, charts and banners. Observing people's response to these stalls, similar ones were organized in Nalgonda district. This also proved successful and now the sanghams and teams have decided to extend them to all the districts as a systematic programme.



During the Kurumurthy Jatara held every November in Narva mandal of Mahabubnagar district, in the camp run by the Narva federation members from 21.11.2001 to 02.12.2001, devotees and visitors were told at length about AIDS and ways of preventing it.

On world AIDS day (01.12.2001), condoms and pamphlets on AIDS, were distributed among the visitors. Pregnant women were given a weight check and offered advice on the need for nutrition. A polio vaccination programme

was also organized on the occasion. Polio drops were given to 150 children. Also the ill effects on the health of girls due to child marriages and initiation as Joginis was also explained in detail to the people.



Breaking The Silence

The very sangham women who at one time felt shy of discussing women's health problems during sangham meetings are today to enthusiastically taking up programmes to create awareness among people about even issues like how AIDS spreads. They are campaigning on a large scale by holding rallies and meetings in villages on AIDS day and during AIDS week and warning people that if appropriate precautions are not taken, the disease could spread like wild fire. They are distributing condoms in the villages and during jatara, and telling people the care to be taken while taking injections.

Sanghams believe ...



... Awareness on AIDS is key to its prevention

The way they have been celebrating health related days like festivals is an instance of their high level of awareness. World Food Day was celebrated like a festival in Karimnagar and Mahabubnagar districts to remember old food habits and to make everyone understand their necessity. In this programme organized at mandal level, mandal officers participated along with sangham women. The women understood that by not including old dishes like bajra porridge, raagi gruel and millet porridge in their food they have been facing anaemia and ill health. They decided to use them in their diet and have already implemented it. Similar meetings and rallies on world Health Day were conducted in all the districts.



On World Health Day, cluster level meetings and rallies were conducted in three mandals of Nizamabad district. Officials of the health department, Bala Mithra teachers and sangham teachers participated in the cluster meeting held in Bikkanur village of Yellareddy mandal.

The ANM at Bikkanur was not attending her duties regularly. Sangham members learnt about the responsibilities of ANM at this meeting, and later met the ANM and demanded that she should come to the village every day. Since the ANM has been regularly visiting not only Bikkanur, but also other villages under her jurisdiction.



RCH Project



Sangham women as health workers

As part of its continued efforts to coordinate with the government bodies, the MS joined hands with the government for the implementation of RCH project in seven mandals of Mahabubnagar. Community health workers were identified in each village from the health committees. They were given training at mandal health centers at Nawabpet, Kothapet and Jadcherla. They are work for women and child improved health status, less mortality rate and for creating awareness about balanced diet for pregnant women. Nearly 18 unused health centers have been brought under use, which had its positive impact on local's health. Members of the

sanghams have got recognition by working as health workers and are also by being members of village health committees, which is a step forward.

Workshop With RMPs

Though the medical facilities are available traditionally villagers have been approaching Registered Medical Practitioners (RMPs). As RMPs live in the villages they are sought out and accessed whenever they are needed. Over the years many of these RMPs are found not to be qualified or trained to handle deliveries or advising and administering medicines. To address this issue in Mahabubnagar a workshop was held with 38 RMPs from 7 mandals. In this workshop discussions were held on their roles and responsibilities, their attitude and knowledge towards women's health issues. The RMPs present had



expressed that such a forum or space was never created for them for learning. They have also requested MS to organize more such interactive forums. The feedback from sangham women has been very encouraging as these RMPs are now more responsible - give the needed advises and guide the women to approach proper medical facilities. At some place RMPs are charging minimum or low fees from sangham women.

Women's Participation In Local Self Governance

Women wanted to be in decision-making processes to bring in a change in the quality of their lives. Many were elected as sarpanches and ward members in the last panchayat elections. Since they wanted a greater participation of women at the village level administration, the sangham women had eagerly looked forward to these elections. Extensive discussions during sangham meetings, kalajathas and grama sabhas had helped to raise their information level and understanding of local administration or panchayat. At a time when the Federation process was taking a momentum, when micro-panning became imperative and when subsequent realization that women should take an active part in them had resulted in many of the women contesting in the elections and won at different levels across the villages.

A large number of sangham women participated in the elections with the belief "we too can succeed in administration". They were supported by their family members, villagers and other sangham members. But most of the places, they had to face threats, pressures, terror and psychological conflict. Yet they participated in the elections with confidence, determination and mutual cooperation. Despite such pressures and conflicts, women fought against political parties and entered the political mainstream.

District and Mandal elections are held on the basis of main political parties and their participation. It was difficult for women to face them. Members of some sanghams did not want to be associated with any political party. As a result, they preferred to contest as independent candidates and secured full support from the sanghams. But some were defeated unable to face the might of the major political parties. In some cases, women were given tickets from the parties and the party members worked vigorously for their victory. This helped the participation of women in mainstream politics at grassroots level. Similarly, number of women contested and won as ward members and sarpanches in good number. We provided them with information about their role and responsibilities in their elected capacities. With the idea that women should celebrate their victories like a festival, a state level mela – "Panchayatilalo Mahilala Vijaya Bheri" (Women's victory Run in the panchayats) not only the winners, but also who lost, as well as sangham members and other women participated in this mela. It can be said the mela provided them with new enthusiasm and inspiration.

The details of whole process described above are as under.

Before Elections

There were extensive deliberations on the process of elections. The current political scene and the governance were the major topics for critical analyses. Women were made to know the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and reservations through cultural programmes like kala jathas and grama sabhas. We gave the necessary information through cluster meetings to women wanting to contest for mandal parishat territorial constituency posts.

During Elections...

There was a lot of excitement and action after the notification was issued. Women helped each other in matters of submitting nominations as per the scheduled time in each separate constituency. Women from other sanghams stood as support when nominations were being filed. They proved the assumption 'politics is a distant scene for women' wrong and participated in huge numbers. This surprised the officials and other a great deal some of whom encouraged and some tried to discourage.

Women had to face humiliation, mockery, pressures and difficulties from family members, politicians and village elders in course of this victory.



Savaramma - filing nomination with sangham support



'Lakshmi Mahila Sangham' was formed with 42 members in the year 1994 in Kollur village of Utkoor mandal of Mahboobnagar district. Since that time, the Sangham members have unitedly organised many programmes. Sangham women have been taking the lead in village development activities. Right now, they are performing the main role in Utkoor mandal federation.

When the notification for Panchayat elections was released in 2001, the Mandal Federation members held a meeting and decided to field maximum number of Sangham women in Mandal and District Panchayat elections. For this purpose, they collected details of villages coming under various MPTCs (Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituencies) and discussions at appropriate clusters level.

They learnt that Kollur MPTC constituency had four villages under it, and it was reserved for scheduled castes. All the members of the cluster decided to field Janardanamma as an independent candidate there. The members of Kollur Sangham and the adjoining Samisthanpur village Sangham together organised a Grama Sabha in Kollur Mandal and sought the cooperation of the villagers for the candidature of Janardanamma.

Upto this point, every thing went off peacefully. At this very juncture, the political parties entered. Each party offered its support to her if she were to stand on their ticket, else it threatened to field its own candidate. All the parties also warned her that she would lose. They also said that for the Mandal Parishad Presidential election she will have to vote on behalf of some or the other party since is conducted on party basis, and so it would be better if she chose one or the other political party.

But Sangham members did not accept this. A number of discussions were held on the matter. Some people also raised the objection that Janardanamma did not belong to the scheduled castes at all. But Janardanamma possessed a caste verification certificate from the VAO. So the members decided to field Janardanamma as an independent candidate and to conduct their campaign with the help of Sangham members.

However Sangham members were unable to anticipate the difficulties ahead. When Janardanamma went to role her nomination, she was asked to bring a caste certificate verified by either the Mandal Revenue officer (MRO) or Revenue Inspector (RI). When Sangham members went to the MRO for verification, he asked for an endorsement from the RI. When they went to the RI, he had just left for his village by bus to avoid signing the certificate. So a jeep was hired to overtake the bus. The signature of RI was obtained. The scene shifted to MRO's office now The MRO delayed signing the certificate and in the process the time for filing the nomination was over. In the meanwhile, a political party arranged for filing the nomination of another Sangham Woman Savaramma of Samisthanpur Village. She won the MPTC seat.

This was a bitter experience for the sangham women. It taught them several lessons including knowledge of the required material, the papers and certificates, for filing nominations and to keep all other necessary documents ready in advance.

The experiences were varied. In some instances, political leaders and villagers wanted the sangham members to be elected because the sangham always worked well and are well informed.

From MSK to MPTC

The President of Mandal Parishat is elected indirectly by virtue of the MPTC votes. The Alladurg mandal constituency is reserved for a Scheduled Caste woman candidate. Two SC women were elected from the mandal as MPTC members. One of them was Anasuya and the other was a woman from Chilver village. However, the local MLA and others preferred Anasuya because she was little educated, efficient and demonstrated an understanding of issues.

It is noteworthy here to mention that Anasuya was a first batch student of MSK at Medak and in a way MSK was a stepping-stone – the things she learned at MSK has brought her this recognition, says Anasuya humbly. She maintains good relations with the sangham and often participates in sangham and federation meetings. She is an inspiration to all the girls studying at MSK. It is a proud achievement for Mahila Samatha.

Sangham Women In Mainstream Politics

Women locked horns with the major parties to be a part of the process of governance about which they did not have any information earlier. Sometimes they did not win for want of money and power, which the political parties had in abundance. However, it should be noted that the sangham women's presence in the fray frightened many political parties! Sangham women faced threats and deceit from village elders due to their fear. Some stood by the sangham women because of their good will and reputation in the village. It should be said that all the women who contested elections as independent members for mandal and zilla level did not win the elections. Almost all those who contested on behalf of the political parties won the election.



Even during the campaign there was a lot of difference that one perceived between sangham women and political parties. Sangham women had a much better support of other sanghams. Also, sangham women clearly stated about their interest in women's issues during the campaigning. They also talked about what they would do if they were elected.

Although it was their first experience to be proactive in the political process, in the sweet bitter experiences of this process. **The women emerged victorious in more than one sense... they are more confident, more knowledgeable and courageous now.**

Elected Sangham Women

District	MPTC	ZPTC	Sarpanchs	Ward Members	Upa-Sarpanchs
Medal	2	0	7	71	6
Mahboobnagar	15	0	13	101	9
Karimnagar	14	0	25	93	1
Nazamabad	3	1	5	32	-
Adilabad	4	3	7	31	5
Nalgonda	6	1	5	42	2
Warangal	2	0	10	67	2
Total	46	5	72	437	25

Women participated with renewed interest in panchayat elections garnering strength from their MPTC and ZPTC election experiences. Sangham members were elected unanimously in some cases as ward members and sarpanches. This time they did not wait for the other members's support at the time of filing nominations. When some people tried to mislead the sangham women about nominating process, they did not believe and arrived at their own conclusions and completed the process effectively.

In the 7 districts where MS is active, in all 437 of sangham women got elected as ward members and 72 as sarpanches.

All Women's Panchayat

In Adilabad district where the Panchayat Raj system is not strong, Mahila Samata through its programmes and the critical discussions held with the Sanghams, has provided them awareness about the facilities denied to them. In the meetings held with Sanghams, they have been told about the need for women to participate in panchayat system, and provided information about the system and the 73rd Constitutional amendment. As a result, a greater number of women contested and won in the 2001 elections. A special mention has to be made of Mahagaon and Chorpally villages in sirpur (U) Mandal.



All women panchayat - Mahagaon

After the election notification, when they were being provided with information about reservations, it was noticed that the 4 seats of Mahagaon panchayat were allotted to women. The possibility of Sangham women contesting these and all other seats was discussed. Following combined discussions with all 'gudems'(hamlets), the villagers and Sanghams agreed to field only women all seats.

Moving a step ahead when it was proposed that all these elections should be unanimous, people of all villages agreed to do so for ward members, but for the part of Sarpanch, a tough contest between few candidates became inevitable.

Finally members were elected unanimously for eight wards and the Sarpanch through contest, but an all women panchayat was established.

All Women Panchayat Members

Mahagaon village, Sirpur (U) Mandal, Adilabad district

S.No.	Names of Members	Name of Village	Position
1.	Pendor Bheem bai	Dhanora P.	Sarpanch
2.	Madavi Godabai	Mahagaon	Upasarpanch-7th ward
3.	Gedam Radhabai	Mahagaon	Ward Member-1st ward
4.	Pendror Gandhari bai	alliguda-P	Ward Member-2nd ward
5.	Atram Gandharibai	Bottijala-M	Ward member-3rd ward
6.	Aade Rajlibai	Dhanora Lambadi Tanda	Ward Member-4th ward
7.	Nedmaki Rattubai	Dhanora P.	Ward Member-5th ward
8.	Rajole Munnabai	Sevdasnagar M.	Ward Member-8th ward

The Sarpanch and ward members are unitedly organising the Panchayat meetings. Mahila Samata has conducted training sessions for them and also provided information about their respective roles and duties and the activities of Panchayats. During the training programme the ward members discussed with the Sarpanch some of the problems they have been facing. The main among them were: No advance information about the agenda of the meeting and, lack of full information about the Panchayat.

Since then, the Sarpanch has been providing the agenda in advance. And the meetings are being held properly.

It can be claimed that by virtue of the awareness provided to the Sangham women and the efforts of Mahila Samata Team, the Adivasi women have confidently participated and won victories in the elections and a new chapter in empowerment has begun.

Panchayat Raj Mela

We planned a panchayatiraj Mela to celebrate in a grand way the entry of women into politics and their triumphant victories. The programmes were held on the occasion of International Women's Day from 6th to 8th March 2002 as "Women's March To Victory In The Panchayats". About 1000 women from 7 districts participated in it.

To facilitate critical analyses and discussions on issues with all of them, the women were divided into four groups. Their role in their respective elected capacities and responsibilities were brought up for discussion and the much needed information was disseminated.

Mr Narasimharao, Director of Andhra Pradesh Akademi for Rural Development (APARD), participated as chief guest

on March 7, he emphasized that women should participate actively in development programmes and having won the positions of power through elections they should utilize opportunity to solve their own problems.

Women shared their experiences in the first session. They discussed the money spent on elections and the experience of winning and losing and the work undertaken since election to various posts.

Women said that they spent from Rs 10,000 to Rs. one lakh in elections. Some of the money came from the parties for the party candidates. However, women from Mahagaon village panchayat in Sirpur mandal of Adilabad district said that they did not spend a single paisa beyond the nomination fee of Rs 60.



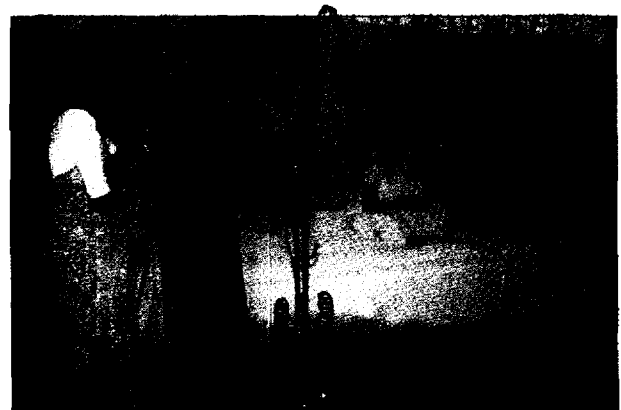
Expanding knowledge base on Local Governance

In the second session, the functioning of Panchayat Raj System was presented to the gathering. The need for women's participation in governance was underlined. The role of women in village committees was discussed. The information was given to them after sub-dividing them into smaller groups.

In the third session, women were questioned about their understanding of their role and responsibilities in the elected post. The problems they were facing since election were also discussed.

Plays were put up to depict the experiences of women. Various pressures women experienced from the family, political leaders and others were presented. All sangham women spoke of pressures as a 'natural and common' challenge they face. They said the sarpanches should be brave and confident delivering their duties. They asked the elected members to be accountable. Asamma of Mahabubnagar district said even 'we, as common people, have a right to question sarpanches if they did not function properly.'

In the Fourth session, women discussed what work the members (winners and losers) should take up and what support they could try to garner from the villagers. Writing on a poster, the duties of winning members, sangham members and the losing candidates were categorized for effective functioning. Women wanted to become catalyst groups that could put pressure on functioning bodies for better results at community levels. Women participated in this session enthusiastically analyzing their experiences critically.



Elected women rep's expressing eagerness to join Sanghams

The Minister for Education, representatives of various organizations, the press and others participated in the programme. Women presented to the Minister the essence of their discussions. The Minister expressed joy over participating at

a meeting where so many women won the election. He said, 'only by honestly serving the community can a person win people's confidence and an election next time.' He also asked them to improve their understanding by participating in the training programme and requested women to work for a better educational scene in villages.

Mr Yalamanchili Rajendraprasad, president of AP sarpanches sangham, Mr Sankar Yadav, Joint Secretary, Mr Venkata Krishna of APARD and Mrs Sara Kamala from the Home Science College participated in the programme. They expressed happiness over seeing so many elected women members at one place and their interest in discussing matters pertaining to their life. They asked the members to be united and to do good work for the community. They promised to extend all the support possible from their side.

Mr Jayaprakash Narayan, President of the Lok Satta, said he was happy to see so many women forthrightly speaking about their interest in governance and solving their own problems. He said, "the local bodies are meant for solving people's problems. But the plans are evolved in the State and Country capital cities. Funds are released but developmental work remains to be done. As a result the condition of villages does not show improvement. If that should change, governments should stay at villages and be accountable to the people."

The three-day programme was a pleasant experience. Not only the team members, the women of the sanghams, the elected women participated enthusiastically in group discussions and the plenary, they also improved their understanding of the electoral system and the role of women in panchayatraj system. We observed that they wanted to take up development programmes on their return to their villages by drawing on this awareness. For team this is an encouraging development.

The Impact - From Learning to Action

Ryalapalli

Sri Lakshmi Mahila Sangham came into being in 1999 at Ryalapalli village in Gangadhara mandal of Karimnagar district. They participated unitedly and enthusiastically in various development programmes such as getting them selves educated, educating their children, getting a road laid between the SC colony and the village and also water facility to the SC colony.

In 2001 election, Bejjanki Pushpalatha, a sangham member, was elected from the SC colony as a ward member. Although she was the elected member, her father took care of her responsibilities and did her work. She participated in the Mela and learnt a good deal about the responsibilities of the ward members, the Panchayat and the funds there. After returning to the village, she began to actively attend all the panchayat meetings and take keen interest in the village development programmes.

She boldly asked the sarpanch what happened to the money earned on the auctioning of two tamarind trees. The sarpanch said he spent it on gate valves. At the sangham meeting, the women decided to know more about how much it costs to buy valves and where they get them etc. When all of them went to the MDO office and asked, they learnt that the valves were supplied free of cost! They got it in writing and presented it back to the meeting, providing

more evidence to the corrupt practices of the sarpanch. The sarpanch did not admit to his mistake first, but Pushpalatha did not leave it midway and boldly questioned him. He relented and paid back the money. This sangham and Pushpalatha became every one's favourite in the village.

Korkisala

Adarsha Mahila Sangham was formed in 2001 at Korkisala village of Mogullapalli mandal in Warangal district. Many women joined the sangham as they liked the way the sangham looked into basic amenities and education needs in the village. There are 60 members now in the sangham. The woman sarpanch, ward members and sangham members participated in the mela in Hyderabad. They learnt about improving village conditions as panchayat members.

The Mahila Sarpanch and ward members, who are also members of the Sangham, of this village attended the Panchayat mela in Hyderabad. They learnt there how Panchayat members and Sangham members through mutual cooperation only can facilitate village development. The villagers of the neighbouring Mulakalapally had been ploughing and planting crops on the Government road between the two villages. A road work was sanctioned by the government on an application given earlier by the people of Korkisala. However, when the people of Mulakalapalli objected to the laying of the road, the contractor reported the matter to the Sarpanch of Korkisala. The Sarpanch sought the help of everyone at the Sangham meeting in sorting out the problem. Korkisala Sangham members then went and discussed the matter with the members of Mulakalapally Mahila Sangham and male elders of the village. They convinced them by explaining that the road was the only link connecting their village and other villages. Even there some people picked up a quarrel with the proclain driver who had come to lay the road. The Sarpanch and Sangham members along with villagers stayed at the spot of work until the work was completed. The successful construction of the road gave the Sangham a good standing in the village. The work of the Sangham was also appreciated by even the villagers of Mulakalapalli. "The way the Korkisala sangham members articulated and dealt with the issue had stunned us. The way they handled the entire thing even men would not have done so" was said by the villagers of Mulakalapalli. This has inspired and taken the confidence of the sangham to a greater level.

Let us hope that all elected women members will similarly take the cooperation of villagers, and members of committees and sanghams and help in the process of village development and thus social development.

Natural Resources Management and Development

The strength of natural resources is an indicator of a country's progress. If we make use of the resources available in nature by protecting them, human life can be made comfortable. There is close relationship between nature and women, in daily life. Natural resources like water, land and forests are becoming scarce. Because of the loss of forests, rains are not occurring in the proper season. Because of drought, people have been migrating to other areas. Keeping this in view, MS has been providing awareness and helping in improving skills through discussions, meetings, workshops, training programmes and study tours aimed at gaining access and developing natural resources, in the seven districts where it is operative.

The villagers took up collective agriculture and selling of vegetables. By thus gaining access to resources and saving natural resources, they have been influencing others on this subject even at the cluster and mandal levels.

Sangham women also took up collectively some economic programmes to develop natural resources. For this purpose the Sanghams have been saving small amounts. Some amount is given by MS to the Sanghams in the form of sangham fund. They are able to do some of economic activities with this money, even small profits and improve their economic situation. The Sanghams have planned a number of other similar activities in the future. The Sangham Fund is also utilized to help members during emergencies like ill-health and the money is paid-back later.

Programmes undertaken with Sangham Fund

- ◆ Taking land on lease and cultivating it
- ◆ Vegetable cultivation and vending
- ◆ Running grocery stores
- ◆ Selling neem and tamarind seeds
- ◆ Running ration shop
- ◆ Selling clothes
- ◆ Preparing vermi compost
- ◆ Running a tent house business; and
- ◆ Setting up small tea-shop

Watershed Programme

The Government Watershed programs in Mahbubnagar district started for the purpose of developing natural resources like soil and water has completed five years. In this period, the members of MS and Sangham women have gained experience of a lot of aspects. This programme has been implemented in 13 villages of Maktal and Utkur Mandals. The two women in the watershed committees of these villages are Sangham women. They have been helping other

Sangham women on watershed related issues. Despite many problems in the area, Sangham women have been offering their cooperation for collective good.

Two Sangham women are members of the Watershed Committee of Madwar village in Maktal Mandal. From the beginning they have been working hard for more watershed works. The male members used to nip their proposals in the Committee, in the bud itself. Yet, Sangham members took up a number of works by convincing the committee. The important ones among these are the technical works-such as bunding, building checkdams and gully control. Sangham women have been able to achieve a water storage structure called 'Farm Pond' despite the initial opposition of committee members. This has been appreciated by all.

Watershed Study

On the occasion of completion of five years of watershed programmes, we conducted a study to understand in depth the experiences of the Sanghams as well as our own. In this, issues like programme implementation, participation of women and villagers, the difficulties encountered, the successes achieved & shortcomings were examined.

Main Conclusions of the study...

- ❖ Sangham women have been able to acquire new technological knowledge not within their reach earlier because of this scheme.
- ❖ The participation of women was much better and clearer in the villages in which Sanghams took up watershed programmes
- ❖ The percentage of land under agricultural use has gone up in the villages due to watershed projects. Also by taking up additional activities like nurseries and fruit orchards, Sangham women have been able to improve their economic situation. Migration to other places has also come down.

Joint Forest Management - Vana Samrakshana Samiti

There are Vana Samrakshana Samithis (VSS) in Adilabad, Mahabubnagar and Nizamabad districts. But when we tried to emphasize the importance of women's participation in these, we noticed they did not have proper understanding and power to do so. And for this purpose we organized necessary training for them. In the training programme, methods of common forest management and the role of sanghams in protecting forest wealth were discussed in detail. Some of the sangham members who received the training were also committee members. After the training, they have been taking much more active interest in implementing the programme in their villages and have been taking up activities like gully control, slant bunds, check dams, nurseries and fruit orchards.

Sanghams in Adilabad : Valiant Protectors of the Forest

As part of the training of JFM - Joint Forest Management, sangham members were taken on study tour to Mamidiguda and Behranguda villages.

The members of "Nagakanya Mahila Sangham" of Kohinoor village in Sirpur(U) Mandal participated in this training programme. It is a practice in the village to obtain firewood by cutting the forest. When the women realized it was a harmful practice they stopped it immediately. They were also able to explain to

others how harmful cutting down forests was and make them stop the practice. We are proud to declare that in this way they took full responsibility of forest protection. They continue to tell their neighbours that 'we should protect forests the way we protect our children'.



We Are Around – Adivasi Sangham Women

Adilabad district is known for traditions and customs. In such an area, the very act of sangham women going beyond the pale of their village itself is a great revolution. Forming as sanghams, attending meetings and trainings at mandal level brought great awareness to them. At the mandal level officers convergence meeting in the mandals where MS is operating held on September 15, 2001, sangham women got an opportunity to meet officials face to face to discuss their problems. It also served as a useful forum for establishing harmonious relations between them. As a result, they have been able to receive many facilities from ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency). Although only sangham women had attended the workshop, the benefits from ITDA are reaching all the villagers. As a result the stature and credibility of sangham women has gone up. They have been receiving kudos from villagers and the youth.



Our contribution to village development

Accessing Resources from ITDA

S.No.	Mandal	No. of Villages benefited	Details of Benefit
1.	Sirpur (U)	3	Tractor
2.		2	Mike Set
3.		16	Bullocks
4.		4	Wells
5.		3	Sewarage Channels
6.	Asifabad	9	Stone & Soil bunds
7.		2	Tractor
8.		1	Oil Engine
9.	Keramiri	4	Bullocks
10.		3	Bullocks

Bio-Diversity Registers

In addition to protection of resources, the question of control on resources is also being discussed in the sanghams for the last few years. Toward this end we have conducted discussions, training programmes on bio-diversity, patent rights, their effect on agriculture, etc. since then, bio-diversity registers have been started in some villages with the partnership of the villagers. People of other villages too recognized their necessity; have come forward this year to manage such registers in their villages also. The registers were initiated by conducting grama sabhas in those villages. The members of Bala Sanghams are playing an important role in the management of these registers.

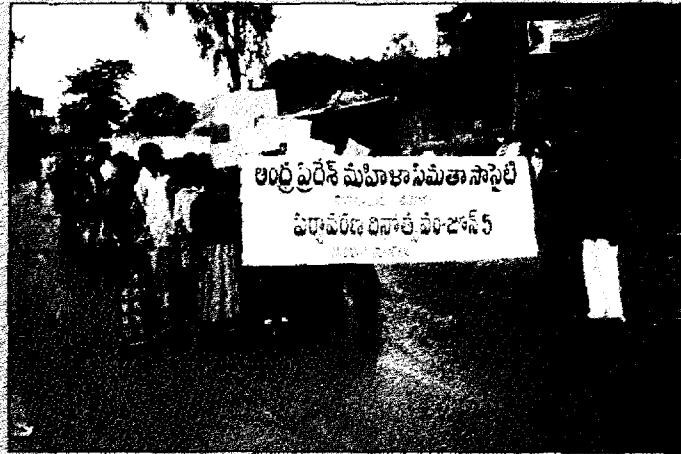
Villages Maintaining Registers

S.No.	District	Mandal	Village
1.	Karimnagar	Chiguru Mamidi	Sundaragiri
2.		Gangadhara	Kondannapalli
3.	Nizamabad	Gandhari	Potangal
4.			Gujjala Tanda
5.			Ganraram
6.			Sarvapur
7.			Yella Reddy
8.	Nagireddypet	Nagireddypet	Timmapur
9.			Adavi Lingala
10.			Venkatapur
11.			Raghavapalli
12.			Masanpalli

Environment Day

Having recognized the importance of environment, the sangham women have been celebrating World Environment Day on June 5 for the past two years. We have conducted rallies, grama sabhas and meetings at village, cluster and mandal levels with sangham women, children of Cheli/Bala sanghams, school children, MSK children and BMK children in all the districts. The importance of environment protection was highlighted and their role in preserving it, pointed out. Sangham members planted plants brought from various nurseries. It was a great achievement that not only the sangham women but also the rest of the villagers participated in the entire process.

This year, in Nizamabad, on the occasion of Environment Day, Balamitra children, teachers, Children of Cheli/Bala Sanghams & Sangham women all participated in collection of information related to the villages and started bio-diversity registers. Also they organised a "Environment Day Mela" in Yellareddy Mandal on this occasion. In this mela, they exhibited the information collected from the villages and samples of crops cultivated. The Sangham women were surprised by the number of crops being cultivated in the villages. They took out a rally together and also spoke about forests, trees, protection of old traditional crops and patent rights while discussing about Environment Day. The women said this about food grains, which were becoming extinct: "At least from now onward we will cultivate traditional crops and plant trees."



They are protecting the natural resources in the villages and starting bio-diversity registers. While collecting the information about the village to record in the register, the children of BMK and Cheli/Bala sanghams have been enthusiastic and diligent in collecting details of forests, crops and fauna.

Mandal officers who attended the mela expressed surprise at the various food grains displayed in the exhibition. They enquired about and appreciated the activities of

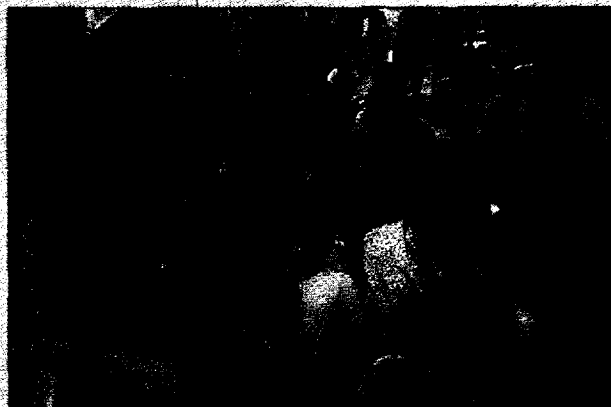
Sangham women. The Sangham women who are also members of Vana Samrakshana Samities (Forest Protection Committees) said, "From now on we will protect the forests to save the depleting natural resources, grow trees and also see that they are not cut."

Food For Work

The sangham women organized various programme under the 'Food for Work' programme taken up by the government of Andhra Pradesh. They also received rice for the work done. The sangham women in all districts participated in the programme on par with men folk. Although they have a number of political and social problems, they came forward unitedly and determinedly to take up this programme. The works they completed under this are:

- Laying roads
- Growing Nurseries
- Canal Bunds
- Whitewashing government offices
- Desilting tanks and wells
- Constructing a bund for the tank
- Constructing sewage canals.

A convergence meeting was arranged with government officials at the district level on 26 September 2001, in Medak. While describing the problems faced by them to the District Collector, the sangham women expressed anguish that agriculture was in dire straits due to lack of rains and no employment was available. The collector responded to this by saying that if they identified and informed the works required in the villages with all details to the mandal officers he would see to it that sangham women were given preference in providing work under 'Food for Work' scheme. The Sangham women identified the works in their villages and got them sanctioned from Mandal Officers. They also became instrumental in providing work to other villagers. They received appreciation from the villagers for this.



In these activities, the responsibility of executing the works, supplying rice and issuing coupons was fully taken by the Sangham members. By executing them successfully they received appreciation from villagers and officials. This special recognition has given impetus and is a step forward towards the sustainability of sangham.

The sangham members had expressed their satisfaction that with this activity the number of working days (wage days) has gone up and migration too has come down to certain extent.

Jala Yagnam

The state government undertook 'Neeru-Meeru' programme with the realization that 80 per cent of rain water goes waste every year. Under this programme desilting of tanks was undertaken very widely. The villagers played an active role in contributing their mite to the preservation of water.

Sangham women took an active part in the Jala Yagnam activities undertaken as part of this. They participated with great enthusiasm along with co-villagers in the work of desilting wells and tanks in their villages and thus contributed to the preservation of natural resources in the villages.

The manner in which sangham women came forward for these activities in Nalgonda and Warangal districts inspired other sanghams also.

Agriculture is the prime employment generation activity in Jadalapeta Village of Chityala Mandal, Warangal district. Whenever a meeting of women workers was held, they would mainly talk of the water problem. They informed us that the problem of water scarcity existed in the neighboring villages also. So it was decided to hold a cluster meeting of the concerned villages to discuss the problem in details.

A cluster meeting of five villages was held. Everybody could see the reason behind the severe water scarcity when the existing water bodies and resources were identified through resource mapping. The effect of depletion of natural resources like tanks, ponds and forest wealth on women was analysed and the strategies for protecting them were discussed.



The Government had at the same time launched the work of desilting tanks on a large scale under 'Neeru-Meeru' Scheme. The Sangham members seized upon this as an opportunity to solve their own water problem. They decided to desilt the old tank in the village. Although there was a little friction between the villagers and the Sangham members before these works began, the desilting work was completed successfully. They are hopeful of greater storage of water in the tank in the coming

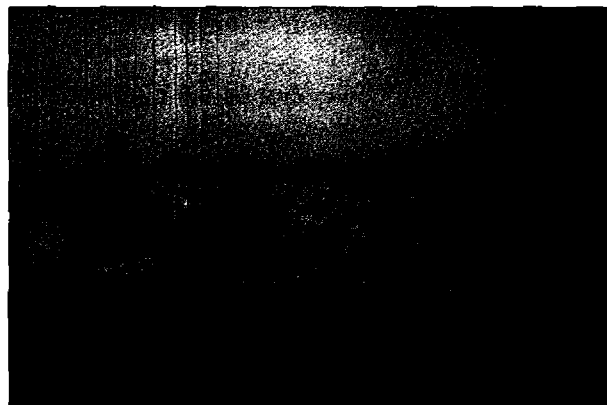
year. With this the Sangham members gained recognition. Now the villagers are inviting them to solve the conflicts between husbands and wives.

Towards Capacity Building...

Masonry

It is commonly seen that men are the masons and women work as labourers. Women labourers and male labourers receive different wages too. Some women in Mahabubnagar district were given mason training four years ago. Women used these skills and constructed houses. Members of other sanghams wanted similar trainings. The training was given with the Mahabubnagar Housing Development Board staff for seven days.

As part of samatha – dharani project there is a provision of construction of grain storage bins. Sangham women were trained on this in collaboration with IGMRI (Indian Grain Management and Research Institute) in Nizamabad. Across all the 5 districts where this project is initiated women are taking active role in construction of grain storage bins.



Managing bricks ...

... Building our confidence

There are 25 members in Maruti Mahila Sangham of Krishna village in Magahoor mandal. One of them, Giremma, used to go for the work of lifting the materials in a basket. One day a person by name Urukundappa came to the village from Raichur in search of a mason for building a house. Giremma went to him and told him, "I have taken mason's training last month at Palamur. I will come for building your house." "You are woman, how could you be a mason? And what is this training?" he asked her. She told him "I will work for you for a day, only after you like my job you can hire me" and went for the work the next day. A single wall was built with a male mason working from one end and Giremma from another. In the evening, the owner of the house was astonished by the skill with which Giremma did her work. He appreciated her and asked her to come for work from the next day. Giremma was elated.

She worked for 15 days on the house. The client gave her Rs. 1,500 at the rate of Rs. 100 per day as paid to male masons. Giremma was immensely pleased "I was only a labourer under a mason earlier. I could improve my skills because of being a member of the sangham. I got the opportunity to build a house because I received training. I wouldn't earn even Rs. 100 after four days of work earlier. Now I am earning Rs. 100 everyday", she declared in a meeting of the sangham. The sangham members also felt very happy and have been encouraging her.

Vocational training

We requested Jana Sikshana Samsthan to conduct vocational training for sangham women and Balika sanghams to improve their skills and help their economic progress. They conducted a 6 day training for 29 members at DIU, Mahabubnagar. They were trained in the manufacture of agarbatti, white phenyle, cleaning powder, vaseline, washing



powder, candles and chalk pieces. After the training, they returned to their villages and have been manufacturing these products and selling them in the fairs in their mandals. However they sell these products at a reduced price to sangham members. The sanghams have now decided to take it up as regular enterprise for their economic development.

Sangham and Cluster Huts

At several places sangham women completed the construction of sangham huts using the funds thus sanctioned. These huts are being used for their meetings as well as BMK centers, adult literacy centers and as libraries. Seeing their enthusiasm the Government sanctioned amount

under community hall construction fund to some sanghams. Jakkannapalli village in Narva mandal of Mahabubnagar is an example for that. The huts built thus are a little larger than the ones made with only sangham fund.



However, some huts had to be stopped midway due to inadequacy of funds in the wake of increased prices. They were given Rs 5,000 for the completion work. In some other villages all efforts to secure a place remained futile and there was no progress on that front.

*Our place ...
... for ourselves*

Sangham Huts in various districts

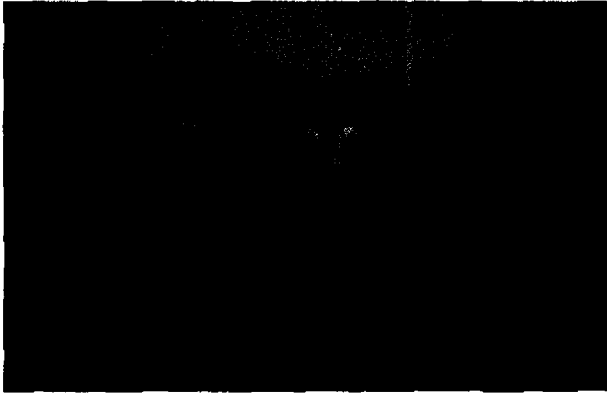
District	Villages which received funds	Completed	Under construction	Yet to start
Medak	28	16	5	7
Mahboobnagar	20	11	5	4
Nizamabad	2	1	1	--

★ (Cluster Huts)

As clusters were emerging in the process of federations, several sangham members thought in stead of constructing separate village huts, it is better to construct a cluster hut which can be used by three or four village sanghams and their activities too can be undertaken from there. This would be cost-effective, too. In Nizamabad, cluster based sangham hut is constructed at Atmakur village.

Samatha Dharani Programme

For the last two years, cultivation of fallow lands project is being implemented through Mahila Sanghams with the aim of achieving food security. In MS this programme – Samatha - Dharani is being implemented in cooperation with the agriculture department and with financial support from UNDP.



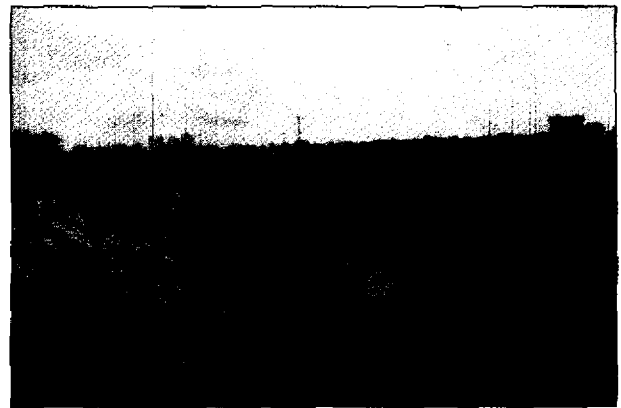
Greening the fallows

This is operative in 500 villages in Medak, Mahabubnagar, Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Adilabad districts. Women are recognized as farmers by undertaking this programme. Fallow lands are under cultivation. Improving their skills women are actively in the empowerment process. However, sangham women are able to ensure food security when there is adequate rainfall or good water supply. The past three seasons has been a drought situation in many districts. Women have experienced severe

losses. In places where they are raising a crop, food security was achieved only marginally.

Grain storages were constructed as part of this programme. Vermi compost pits were also established and with improved knowledge of organic farming it is being used in the sangham members' fields and also being supplied to others. Women are able to access more technical information and implements now. They are also improving their knowledge base by visiting other places too.

The women are striving for improved skills and efficiency and more information structures, in this journey. Let's hope they reach their goal.



We are the proud owners !!

Looking Ahead

Though the delight and determination has always inspired us to do our bit with greater commitment in facilitating the programme and facing the challenges, sometimes the progress and the pace was not as expected. Considering that the programme direction is largely determined by women themselves and they in turn were influenced by many factors of the larger environment this was inevitable. Apart from the facilitation of such a large programme with intense and diversified activities with limited trained team members has also been one of the major factor in influencing the programme progress.

The concurrent introspection and reflection, which is integral in our process, has led to the idea of organization a workshop to analyse and look at the emerging trends and future directions' in relation to the above concerns. This intense three-day workshop has resulted in identifying our strengths, weaknesses and gaps in all the processes of the programme – administrative and programmatic. The outcomes of this workshop and the earlier vision – mission workshop had informed the coming year's plan. The major focus is on training and capacity building of the team, strengthening the federations, Samatha Gender Resource Centre and facilitate the on going interventions with greater commitment.

Various studies and the recently concluded Indo-Dutch Evaluation's positive comments has inspired us to march into our decennial year with new zeal.

We were at...

- ❖ Team members of Medak district attended the meeting held at Sangareddy in the office of the District Collector on 23rd of June, 2001 on the issue "Review of Bonded and Child Labour in Medak District" presided by the Chief Justice of Supreme Court Sri Ramaswamy.
- ❖ A Consultant and an R.P. from the state office participated in the Regional level meeting held in July 2001 on the topic "Gender and Environment".
- ❖ A Resource Person and a Consultant participated in preparation of a training module on "Training Strategies for Panchayat Raj Functionaries," conducted by Andhra Pradesh Academy for Rural Development, Hyderabad from 27th to 29th August, 2001.
- ❖ The SPD attended a one day consultation held on 29th August, 2001 in Bangalore on "National Commission for Children, 2000 and the Policy and Charter for Children, 2001.
- ❖ Two members from the State Office participated in the conference organized for formulating an action plan for child rights protection on 8th and 9th September, 2001 at Satyodayam, Secunderabad by the A.P. Forum for Child Rights.
- ❖ The SPD and one Resource Person from State Office participated in the workshop organized by Jagori on the theme "Surviving Crisis, Rebuilding Resistance: Women's Struggle for Sustainable Development in South Asia" and presented a paper. The workshop was held from 11th to 14th of September 2001 at Khatmandu, Nepal.
- ❖ Two RPs of Samata - Dharani attended the workshop on "Skill upgradation of Human Resource Management" organised by SAMETI, from 12th to 14th September 2001 at Hyderabad.
- ❖ An RP from State Office, a JRP and one Mahila Karyakarta attended and shared their experiences at the workshop on "Formation and Sustainability of Maha Sangha" organised by the Mahila Samakhya of Uttar Pradesh at Saharanpur on 20th and 21st September, 2001.
- ❖ An RP from State Office, a JRP, two Sangham women along with the SPD participated and shared their experiences on "Education - Empowerment" at the workshop on "Listening Together, Talking Differences, South Indian Young Feminist Conference" Conducted by Anveshi from September 29th to October 1st, 2001 at Indo-American Centre for International Studies, Hyderabad.
- ❖ The SPD attended a workshop conducted by Campaign for Child Rights, Bangalore on 21st and 22nd October on the theme "National Consultation on 93rd Amendment Bill, 2001".

- ❖ A Resource Person from State Office attended "State Level Workshop on Adoption" organised by Women and Child Welfare Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh on 27th January 2002 at Hyderabad.
- ❖ A Resource Person from State Office and a Junior Resource person from Mahbubnagar attended and participated in the preparation of training module at the workshop – "State Level Workshop on Gender" conducted from January 28th to 30th 2002 in Vijayanagaram by Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty.
- ❖ The children of Mahila Sikshana Kendrams from Nizamabad and Medak districts and a DPC participated and shared their experiences at the "State Level Women Convention on Sensitisation/Development of Girl Child Education" organized by DPEP, Hyderabad from 12th to 14th February, 2002.
- ❖ Sangham women, two Mahila Karyakartas, a Junior Resource Person and a Consultant attended and shared their experiences for publication into a case study at the workshop on "Documentation of Experiences in Natural Resource Management (NRM)" organised by WASSAN at Sivarampally, Hyderabad from 25th to 28th February 2002.
- ❖ A Resource Person from State Office, a Resource Person from Medak DIU, a Mahila Karyakarta and three sangham women participated in the workshop, "State Level Consultation of Village Education Committees", held at Satyodayam, Secunderabad on 27th & 28th March 2002 organised by CRY, National Education Group and CAFRD.

Visitors to MS

Mahila Samatha is always keen to share its experiences, learnings and knowledge with others as also learning from them. This helps in spreading the philosophy of Mahila Samakhya. In this process, during this year too we had a few visitors to our project area. Also some research scholars working on different subjects have utilized Mahila Samatha processes as their study.

- ❖ UNDP Programme officer, Smt. Saraswati, Director of Extension, New Delhi visited Goorakonda village, Devarakadra mandal, Mahbubnagar district to see the millet crop being grown under Samatha Dharani programme, on 22nd September
- ❖ A 25 member team from Mahila Smakhya, Uttar Pradesh and U.P. Southern Nigam visited the project area during October 2001 and participated in the Mandal workshop at Devarakadra Mandal. They also had discussions with sangham women.
- ❖ A 12 member team from Mahila Samakhya, Bihar visited Mahila Samatha on November 1&2, 2001 to gain an understanding of the Federation process. They held discussions with the Federation members of Medak and Mahbubnagar districts along with visiting other programmes.
- ❖ Ms. Paro, Consultant, Delhi visited Mahila Samatha on March 12, 2002 as part of a study – 'Different Approaches to Education for Working Children', conducted by 'Save the Children' on programmes meant for child labourers. She spoke to the girls of Mahila Sikshana Kendram children who had joined the hostels, Balamitra teachers and Balamitra children of Mahbubnagar district.
- ❖ Sri Sumit Bose, Joint Secretary, Department of Education, Government of India and Sri Nagarjuna, State Programme Director, DPEP, Andhra Pradesh visited the Mandal Mahila Sikshana Kendram of Nizamabad and spent time with the girls and sangham women discussing on the issues of school, quality education, School Education Committees and MSK.
- ❖ Two representatives from the Embassy of Netherlands visited the programme of Mahila Samatha. They spoke to the Federation members and girls of Mahila Sikshana Kendram, Medak.
- ❖ Chitra Jayant, David Solman and Apollina from CRS visited the programme at Mahbubnagar district and the team shared their experiences of RCH programme.

Documentation

- ❖ Ministry of Social Justice, Delhi recorded the life experiences of Asamma, recipient of Neerja Bhanot award in connection with their documentary on Jogini practice and the role of sanghams in eradicating it.
- ❖ Two audio Cassettes, "Mahila Samatha Chaitanya Geetaalu," a collection of songs sung at the sanghams were released by the Minister for School Education Sri Mandava Venkateswara Rao on March 8th.
- ❖ The experiences of women who contested in the elections, and the happenings at Panchayati Raj Mela were documented under the title "Panchayateelalo Mahilala Vijayabheri" - Victory of Women in Panchayats.
- ❖ The experiences of sanghams were included in "Anubhavaala Pandiri," a document prepared by WASAN incorporating the experiences of various organizations working for the protection of natural resources.

Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha Society

List of Executive Committee Members

S.No.	Name & Designation	Level of Membership
1.	Dr. I.V. Subba Rao, IAS, Secretary, Dept. of Education, Government of AP	Chair Person
2.	Ms. Shalini Prasad, IAS, National Project Director, Mahila Samakhya	Nominee of Department of Education
3.	Dr. Manmohan Singh, IAS, Director, School Education, Government of AP	Member
4.	Sri M. Nagarjuna, IAS, Director, FAC, Adult Education, Government of AP	Member
5.	Sri N. Srinivasa Rao, IES, OSD, Dept. of Finance, Government of AP	Member
6.	Sri P.K. Jha, IFS, Jt. Secretary, Panchayati raj, Dept. of Rural Development, Government of AP	Member
7.	Ms. Shalini Mishra, IAS, Director, Dept of Women Development & Child Welfare, Government of AP	Member

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------------|
| 8. | Sri Sanjay Narayan, IAS,
Dy. Finance Advisor,
Dept of Education, New Delhi | Member |
| 9. | Sri Ashok Ogra,
Vice.President (South Asia)
Discovery Commication India
A/1 B, Qutub Institutional Area,
Aruna Asaf Ali Marg,
New Delhi - 110007 | Member

Member |
| 10. | Ms.Vimala Ramachandran,
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| 11. | Dr. Kalyani Menon Sen,
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| 12. | Ms. Kalamani,
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Secunderabad-500017 | Member |
| 13. | Sri Jawahar,
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| 14. | Ms. Mridula,
DPC, APMSS,
DIU, Medak | Member |
| 15. | Ms. R. Jhansi Rani
DPC, APMSS,
DIU, Mahbubnagar | Member |

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| 16. | Ms. E. Anita
DPC, APMSS,
DIU, Karimnagar | Member |
| 17. | Ms. V. Prabhavati
DPC, APMSS,
DIU, Nizamabad | Member |
| 18. | Ms. M. Uma Devi
DPC, APMSS,
DIU, Adilabad | Member |
| 19. | Ms. Jyotsna,
DPC, APMSS,
DIU, Warangal | Member |
| 20. | Ms. K. Tanuja,
RP, APMSS,
DIU, Nalgonda | Member |
| 21. | Ms. Susila,
Mahila Karyakarta, APMSS,
DIU, Adilabad | Member |
| 22. | Ms. Bhagyalakshmi,
Mahila Karyakartha, APMSS,
DIU, Warangal | Member |
| 23. | Ms. Nandini Prasad
State Programme Director, APMSS
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