



Sitting on the heap of garbage next  
to my slum  
I could see the tall buildings  
Buildings, which they call,  
sky scrapper  
My eyes sparkled  
I decided to ask my mother  
"Which one among them she  
constructed?"  
She gave a sigh of despair  
Asked me "how does that matter?"

**SPANDHANA MOVEMENT, RAMANAGARAM**

# Annual Report 2015

From being just small women's group raising voice against violence on women, today SPANDHANA has grown to a women's movement which has unified more than 4000 women labourers under its aegis. SPANDHANA incepted with the focus to fight against violence on women with a humble beginning as a counselling centre. Later SPANDHANA broadened its ideology and focus to fight for the larger cause, thus arrived and streamlined the objective of 'gender equality and social justice'. After a decade of struggle now SPANDHANA has branched out to 4 Taluks and formed unions among mid-day meal workers, construction labourers, beedi rollers and agricultural labourers. The success of each effort has always been our inspiration to strive for more in each consecutive year. Increased awareness among the public about women's rights and activities of SPANDHANA, cases of violence coming to light and getting recorded in police station, enhanced social security provision for the labourers, increased wages, equal wage for equal work and such other positive changes will always encourage us to keep our spirits high and fight for the rights.

Over the decade there have been major social, economic and cultural changes which have influenced Indian society in many contradictory ways. Many policies pertaining to wages, social security, marital and property rights of women, rights of transgender community etc... have been encouraging, however many policies which have brought structural changes in the Indian economy are working as contradictory to the labour rights. The strong efforts of the government to attract the foreign investment through relaxed labour laws and environment laws is glare in many policies which have come in the recent years.

As we share our experience and learning of the previous year it is important to mention that 2015 witnessed a major shift in our approach. Along with organising unorganised sector women labourers and fighting for their rights we also thought of sourcing alternative livelihood for the workers whose livelihood options are under threat, such as agricultural labourers. We started with identifying agricultural women labourers and formed in collectives. Promotion of organic kitchen garden was an initial effort to ensure food security and to bring women in the path of organic farming. SPANDHANA is also looking at long term sustainable co-operative models in the long run.

# Introduction



### **More bees in the hive!**

The membership in the mid-day me workers union, construction workers union, in beedi rollers union have been enhanced with the expansion of work to other villages, slums and taluks. The total numbers of mid-day meal workers have risen to 1458, in construction union it is 2382 and in beedi rollers it is 850. The agricultural union which is a recent initiative in 2013 has been successful in organising more than 1540 labourers.

### **Encouraging enrolment to welfare measures!**

After the intervention of SPANDHANA more than 50% of the workers enrolled to the union have been linked to various welfare measures under several social security schemes such as Aam admi Bhima Yojana, Swarn Jayanti Shahari Rojgar Yogana, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, Sandhya Surksha Yojana, Ashraya Scheme, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana, National Family Benefits Scheme, Janshree Bima Yojana, Annapurna, Janani Surkasha Yojana, New Pension Schemes (Swavalamban scheme).

### **Efforts to strengthen the movement**

Monthly once an awareness programme was organised to awaken the labourers on their labour and human rights. The awareness programmes include capacity building programmes and workshops. Workshop included subjects such as feudalism, role of women in agriculture, root causes of wage disparity and role of patriarchy in agriculture. The awareness on different schemes have also helped workers to file application to receive their meaningful due and also discussion around wage disparity have made the workers raise their voice demanding equal wages. SPANDHANA conducted 12 programmes in which 3 programmes on ideological issues and 6 programmes on benefits, welfare measures, social security schemes and legal entitlements to labourers. Another 3 were imparted for the selected cadres on unification and strengthening the union to convert it as a larger women's movement beyond just a union of labourers.

## Achievements and Learning:



Kamamma says, ***“My kitchen garden is in a way threat to these big businesses. If all women farmers like us own our own kitchen gardens who will buy vegetables from them?”*** 26 such kitchen gardens have been formed. by



***Filing RTI applications at the village level to ensure the enrolment of workers to the MGNREGA Scheme and proactive steps to identify employment!***

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural employment Guarantee Act was launched by the government to arrest rural migration by providing jobs in their own vicinity. As per the Act once the applicant shows interest and applies seeking employment the local authority should ensure to provide job or at least the wages. However in many villages neither they accepted the application nor allocated with proper employment. Therefore SPANDHANA took an initiative to bring the attention of the authority on several works to be finished in the villages and demanded to undertake them under the MGNREGA scheme. After constant visits, repeated negotiation and protests in some villages many accepted and many women were given with employment for more than 6 months at a stretch.

***Promotion of kitchen garden among the agricultural women labourers.***

SPANDHANA initiated the union among agricultural labourers in 2013 and organised 1540 women farmers as union members. Backed with the experience of working for the women labourers in unorganised sector fighting for their labour rights and human rights, the process to start a union among agricultural labourers was initiated aiming at eradicating the wage disparity among men and women farmers, ensure their labour rights and also to fight against the sexual exploitation of agricultural women labourers. At present after continuous struggle and advocacy not only the wages of women has been hiked but also union is venturing into experimenting several unconventional approaches to strengthen the farming sector and specially the organic farming and food security issues, which matter the women and children of the Indian families the most. As part of these unique experiments, the union members were encouraged to grow organic gardens in their home vicinity which will cater to their household food security and consuming fresh organic vegetables and fruits. The support from Unicorn Grocery specially helped SPANDHANA in implementing this initiative as a successful model along with the regular work unification and awareness building of the agricultural women labourers.

## Strategies and innovations!



### **Labour rights and human rights awareness among children**

With the fellowship support from 'Plus Trust' SPANDHANA intervened among the new generation to orient them to be conscious of human rights and especially labour rights.

Children were also encouraged to grow organic vegetables and flower in the vicinity of the schools and homes. Special classes were conducted to educate children on the hazards of using pesticide and health impacts of change farming patterns and its impact on sustainability of the environment and our own existence. Excursions, trekking and nature park visits were also organised as part of this intervention.

### **Theatre to spread the word!**

Five days theatre training was conducted in the office of SPANDHANA from 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015. Indirect beneficiary of this activity being the community, the direct beneficiaries of this programme were the 20 youth from various villages of Channapatna and Ramanagaram taluks.

The training was imparted by Mr. Prasanna Kumar, who is a theatre trainer from Davanagere. A play was designed to be performed in the community. The objective of this play is to sensitize the community about the violence against women and various atrocities committed on women.

Along with the play, few songs were also composed. The staff of SPANDHANA also took benefit of this programme by participating and learning the activities that were thought. All the participants of the training took deep interested and accumulated learning from this five day event. SPANDHANA has launched a state level women theatre group and an all women *tamate* group. *Tamate* is a traditional instrument that is generally identified as a folk art. However it is being played only by *Dalit* communities and specially by men. Therefore, to make this local *Dalit* art famous by taking it to different places and also to break the gender stereotyping involved in playing this instrument SPANDHANA initiated an all women *Tamate* Group.

## Strategies and innovations!



## **Numbers says it all!**

- **Total membership of the workers including all unions has grown to 5238.**
- **Almost 50% of the workers who are members of the union have been enrolled to different welfare measures and social security schemes.**
- **35 members strong cadre committee has been formed at district level selecting cadres from each union who will be trained as future leader. This initiative was taken to create the secondary leadership and to promote the sustenance of the movement.**
- **84 different cases related to violence against women were handled by the counseling center of SPANDHANA 'Bembala' - The Support'. Among them majority cases were settled through counseling and 23 women have been given legal aid and 8 of them have been able to get justice.**
- **26 kitchen gardens have been initiated by women farmers in and around their houses to promote organic farming and to secure food security.**
- **6 theatre performances have been conducted in different places taking the message of gender rights and social justice to the masses.**
- **Filed more than 50 complaints under RTI and other laws to demand information and justice.**

## **Statistics**



### **Monthly Sensitization Meets**

The event was organized on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2015 with the objective to organize and empower 'Women engaged in preparation of Mid-Day Meals'. Such programme to all union members were organised once in a month on rotatory basis.

Around 40 women participated in the event. And Mr. Surya Prakash, District Education Officer of Ramanagaram district came as resource and informed women about various facilities available to mid-day meal workers from department of education. He said, " due to your continuous struggle government has hiked the remuneration to Rs 1100/- . Moreover, since cooking involves dangers, one lakh rupees will be paid to the family members upon any hazards". He instructed the workers to maintain a notice board for the display of items being prepared in the school on day to day basis. He also called on the gathering to come ahead in addressing the corruption while procuring items for cooking.

### **International Working Women's Day!**

The celebration was organised in front of the district commissioners office supporting and demanding following causes;

- Compulsory education to the girl children. And their rights.
- Labour and human rights o women labourers

Around 1200 women and activists participated in the event. Ms. Kiran Kumari from Samvada institution participated as the Chief Guest, Ms. N. Prabha from B. G. V. S and Ms. C. Kumari, District Principal Secretary of Beedi Workers' Association took active part in the programme as Guests.

Ms. C. Kumari explained the purpose of organizing International Women's Day, which is to empower the women and make them equal with the men in all spheres of life. She also explained about the need to fight and defeat the patriarchy and inequity to achieve this goal. Ms. N. Prabha stressed that the women should be psychologically stronger in order to fight the evils in the society. Ms. Kiran Kumari said that by getting educated, the women should get empowered with legal knowledge also in order to raise their voice and get organized to fight against female feoticide, practice of child labour, child marriage and other such ill-practices in the society.

## Major Activities



### **Income Generative Activity for Economic Empowerment and social Strengthening**

We have planned to extend our unification process to agricultural sector workers. Hence along with policy level work SPANDHANA is also aiming at providing an alternative employment to women through an income generative program in the model of collective farming and cooperatives.

### **Empowerment of young Muslim girls' who are victims of Child Marriage**

The work among Beedi rollers has exposed us to grave reality of child marriages prevalent massively among this community. Hence SPANDHANA is planning to launch a project to eradicate early marriage and promote education among young Muslim women.



## **Future Plans**

