

Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan – Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

Nishtha Single Women's Group

Annual Report - April 2012-March 2013



Nishtha single Women's group (Sangathan) works in 3 Blocks in Kangra District, – Kangra, Nagrota and Rait. We have three teams of activists and assistant activists.

Radha works in 15 villages in Kangra district. She has been active in the Sangathan since its establishment in 2006 after separating from her husband who was treating her badly. She was disappointed with life and together with her son left her husband and started her social engagement. In the beginning it was very difficult to start the Sangathan and to learn how to approach single women. However now the Sangathan has grown and become so strong that it has become a powerful force even at the national level.

Sunita works in 27 villages in Nagrota block. She joined the Sangathan in 2012 as a widow living in difficult circumstances with three sons. Nagrota Block was covered by Deepa until she left in 2012 and Sunita took over. She is mentored by Radha and is gradually becoming more active and is now a precious and good single women activist.

Kummo Devi covers 15 villages in Rait block. Her husband abandoned her and her 4 children before 2006. The court case for her maintenance has been going on for 18 years. In the same year as Radha she started her Sangathan activism. She is an indispensable and powerful member of the organization.

Radha, Sumo and Sunita are assisted by 4 assistant activists who joined the programme in 2008. They include Shilpa, a divorcee who works in Kangra block, Vandana, an abandoned wife who works in Kangra block, Pammi who works in Rait Block and Gyani Devi, an older widow who cannot work full time any more but assists in mobilizing women for programmes.

Pratibha who works in Nagrota block joined the Single Women's group in September 2012. Her husband died after three years of marriage and left her with two children to bring up. She was sad and depressed before becoming a single women's activist but now she is very happy and listens the problem of others and is able to share her experience with other single women. She organizes 3 Health Education camps every month in her area.

Just as we have lost Ravindra and Deepa as single women activists when they got married, so Vandhana will leave the programme because after many years of difficulty because her husband abandoned her, in 2012 year she had a reconciliation with him and she is no longer 'single'. Nishtha plans to offer her alternative work in the Community Centre because she is a valuable worker.



Nishtha Single Women's Programme Reach

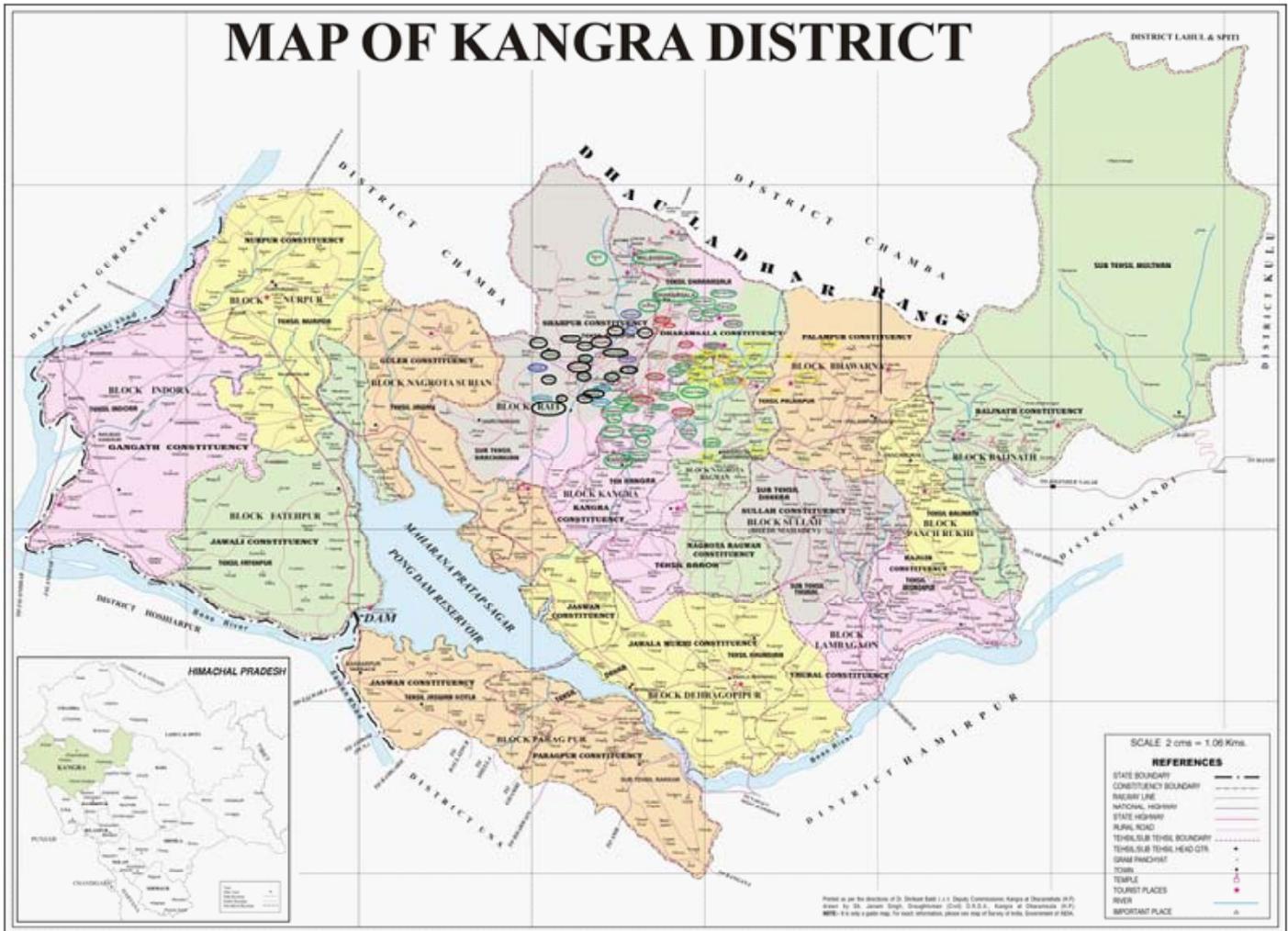
No of Panchayats Covered: 89

No of Women who have attended Meetings: 2102

Registered Members: 1731

| Widows | Separated | Unmarried | Divorced | Husband missing |
|---------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1997 | 58 | 10 | 25 | 6 |

Map showing the villages in which the Nishtha Single Women's Programme works in Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh



Single Women's Programme Activities

Every month we hold "Maasik Baithak" (Monthly Meetings) in which The Block Leader meets with all the 15 village area (panchayat) Single Women groups under her jurisdiction. In these meetings upcoming events and activities of the Sangathan are planned. We present and encourage discussion on government schemes and problems which arise when single women try to access these schemes. Personal issues are also talked about: family situations and the public response to their situation. The meetings explain and discuss the Sangathan's role and aims and discuss future action. If there are new members to be registered then this work is also done during the Monthly Meeting. These meetings are an essential way to bind the group together and create a social forum for isolated women in the wider village area.

"Block Meetings" are held once every 6 months in each block. Leaders from all 15 villages (panchayats) gather. Very often representatives from Sutra (the Himachal Pradesh nodal agency for the single women's movement in the state) attend. These meetings have a very important role to play in passing information from centre to grass roots, and the other way round, in keeping the central agency aware of the issues and concerns of the people in the villages.



Calendar of Events this year.

April 2012

During the meetings with the various single women groups it was discussed that information has to be provided to those women who do not know about their rights and that the women's concerns have to be conveyed to the government with the help of Sanghathan. The latter provides government scheme forms to the women so that they can write down their problems.

This month the membership of all single women under the Nishtha programme was renewed.

On 25th April Radha participated in the international meeting on of "Pension Parishad", held in the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai. This two day meeting in which 120 NGO's took part, was conducted by Baba Adab and Aruna Ray. The assembly concluded that the application for pensions has to be simpler and that everyone who is eligible for pensions such as the handicapped, the elderly, single women and widows should get at least 2,000 rupees per month. It was agreed on that all the participating organizations will agitate for this in a six-day protest in June at Jantar Mantar in Delhi.

On 15th April 2012, The three-month report of the Sanghathan was handed in at Sutra during a three-day meeting. This was attended by all the 24 Single Women District Leaders who were able to get together and plan the future policies in their districts. Himachal Pradesh is covered by Single Women Workers in eight districts, twenty blocks and 382 Panchayats.



May 2012

In District Una a new Single Women's House has been acquired. To celebrate and support this groundbreaking achievement of the Una group, ten women from each of our 3 blocks - 30 Single Women visited the house and formed a small rally with the Una group which marched to the local police station to inform them about their newly acquired house and to highlight the issues the single women's organizations are fighting for. The police station was chosen as the particular target because the women are afraid to go there themselves to complain about violations of their personal security and rights.



On 16th May 2012, 18 single women visited the DC's Office, Dharamshala to inform the officials about the work of the Sanghathan. The DC KR Bharati responded that whenever needed, his office will be ready support the Single Women.

June 2012

During the monthly Meetings with the various single women groups the annual rally to be held in Dharamshala on International Widow's Day, June 23rd, was prepared.



On the 7th, 8th and 9th a Rashtriya Ekal Nari Adhikaar Manch ki Baithak (National Women's Rights Forum) was held at Nishtha. This was hosted by Jinni Shri Vasthav from Udaipur, Rajasthan. 23 participants from various states took part. In this meeting the National Committee Board was voted for and Radha was elected into the Board.

On the 23rd June, International Widow's Day, (a day appointed to raise awareness of the estimated 245 million widows worldwide, 115 million of whom live in poverty and suffer from social stigmatization and economic deprivation purely because they have lost their husbands), 200 of our Single Women came together to form a rally which marched from the Dharamshala Post Office to the DC's Office singing songs and chanting slogans. The women met with the DC and spoke about their worries and needs.



The DC supported them in approaching the Chief Minister.
July 2012

On the 2nd and 3rd of July the H.P. State Level meeting took place in Shimla. Two women from each of the twenty blocks in Himachal attended the meeting. Madhuvala Sharma from the Mahila Ayog Baal Vikaas Mantralya (Ministry of Women's Development), Sumitra from the Tahsil Kalyaan (District Welfare) Board, President Dhaneshvari from the Rajy Mahila Ayog (State Women's Commission) and Shashi Sharma, and officer from the Samaaj Kalyaan (Social Welfare) all attended and delivered speeches on women's issues and government schemes.

On 18th -19th July 2012 the three-month report of the Kangra Ekal Nari Shakti Sanghathan was handed in at Sutra in a three-day meeting. There all the 24 Himachal Single Women District Leaders met and planned about the registration, accounts training, public hearing, how to increase the number of single women, selection for the state level meeting, camp in village regarding domestic violence, leadership training in their districts.

At Nishtha a Wenlido Self-Defense Training with 20 young female participants, all daughters of single women and therefore very vulnerable in society, was held.

August 2012

A Single Women Leadership Training took place In Sutra a on 15th to 18th August 2012. The facilitator of this training was a single women's activist. On their return to the villages, the participants told the women about the training during the monthly meetings. This raises awareness of how the Sanghathan is run and how to strengthen it in future. Discussions and games were conducted.

The Lions Club Dharamshala gave sewing machines to six girls of single women's from different blocks for their weddings. At the request of the Ekal Nari Shakti Sanghathan, the Lions Club also gives loans to single women up to the amount of 15 000 rupees without interest. 25 single women benefited from this scheme. With the money they purchased cows from which they can generate a steady income. A lot of single women took the loan twice because they were so happy that they get money without interest. This enables the women to plan their future.

On September 4th the Sanghathan met to preparare for the public hearing in the Lions Club Hall, Dharamshala,. The National Forum Meeting was held in ISI, Delhi on 28th- 30th of August. This was a follow-up of the Pension Parishad agitation in April for an increase in pensions. A debate was held on whether or not the National Forum should become a re gistered body and the consensus was that it is necessary to officially register it. The debate also discussed the new pilot plan of the government to provide quick cash transfer to families in place of the Ration Book Program. The consensus was that the old system should be maintained. People do not need money, they need the monthly food supply distributed at the government stores as it used to be.

On 30th August the National forum of Ekal Nari shakti Sangathan Met with Mantri Jay Ram Ramesh of the Graamin Vikaas Mantralya (Ministry of Rural Development) in Delhi. The minister promised his support in approaching the various State Governments with the women's complaint about the pilot plan of the government concerning the ration cards and depos.

September 2012

On 4th Sept 2012 The public hearing with ADM and Welfare Officer in Lions Club Hall, Dharamshala, took place. 360 single women from all over the District came and talked about their problems. Questions relating to Pensions, land, ration cards and law violation issues were all presented and discussed. The ADM assured the women that he will take care of all papers given to him and will try to reach solutions to the problems they had told him about.





There are lots of cases where widows do not inherit the husband's land; instead it is given to the sons. The Patwaris in many cases anyway register these women as employed or having an income source, whereas in fact their sons cultivate the land and take all the profit from it. The Sangathan is very concerned about this situation.

Another concern is for women, who live for a long time separate from their husbands. While the court case for the divorce is running, neither receive ration cards nor do their children benefit from government. Therefore the Sangathan is pressuring the government and society to regard women as human beings with equal financial and social rights

to their husbands. Within the Sangathan a discussion on the State Level registration of the organization started.

October 2012

Twenty women from four blocks of District Kangra and Baijnath were called for a meeting at Nishtha on 23rd Oct about the registration of the Sangathan on State Level.

In first week of the month a one-week yoga class with guruanimously asked for another Yoga Course next year.

From 7th Oct to 10th Oct the Sangathan gathered for a preparation workshop for the Aam Sabha of the National Forum in Delhi. The women worked on a plan for controlling social violence. The sangathan supported the Court Case of Rita Devi from Rait, whose claim for her children's maintenance has been running for nine years, and asked the court for a quick settlement.

November 2012

An Aam Sabha Meeting was held on November 1st and 2nd in Delhi: Ten members from each of the seven registered states attended as well as some additional Committee members. The meeting discussed how to bring State Level issues to a National Level platform. An appeal was raised for a strict law against the use of the derogatory term "Daakan Daayan" which is used against women, mostly in Jharkand, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Bihar and Gujarat. Linked to this verbal abuse is also a lot of physical violence and social pressure. In Jharkhand the situation is especially drastic.

One success story from Jharkhand is of a single woman's nephew who became violent to his aunt after her husband's death; hitting her and feeding her excrement. A Single Women's Meeting was held in the village and support for the abused woman was raised. After some time the nephew was brought to court and sentenced to jail.

The educational book "Fun Learning" ("Mazedaar Parhai") for kindergartens was released and Radha and Kummo went to distribute the books in several villages.

A First Aid Training took place in Nishtha on 10th to 12th Nov. 20 people participated of whom 7 were single women.

A Single Women's Leadership Training took place in Sutra from 15th to 18th Nov. The participants learned how the Sangathan is run and how to strengthen it in future. Discussions and games were conducted. This



was a repeat of the training as held in August for a different group of people. 7 single women from three different blocks including Pratibha and Shilpa attended this meeting.

December 2012

On 25th, 26th and 27th the Sanghathan held a meeting attended by 125 members from all District Kangra Blocks during which village level issues are transferred to the block level. This meeting is held twice a year and focuses not only on serious issues but also on enjoyment, slogans and singing, as well as on togetherness and unity. Three leaders from all panchayats attended. This time the main issue was the upcoming State Election and how to interact with the new government in the years to come.

On 26th Dec 2012 our Sanghathan applied for registration in the DC's office Dharamshala.

On 27th and 28th Radha went to Ahmedabad for a meeting in which 400 single women participated. Discussions were held regarding specific groups: Young widows suffering from HIV who cannot get any work and not afford medicines, Adivasi (tribals) who have little access to education and subsidies and face difficulties in getting governmental jobs and support and Dalits : low cast members who do not have the chance to get jobs because of their being untouchable.

In this gathering it was agreed on that working together on all the various problems will give them all the strength needed to tackle the social injustice. The slogan was raised: "We are all one! The Sanghathan is strong!"

January 2013

The Ekal Nari Shakti Sanghathan, District Kangra, was registered by the government. This will be of considerable benefit to the organization in the years to come.

Interstate Meetings were held in various states. Two members from every block attended along with Government officers from various departments who listen to the problems of single women including problems related to incomes, ration cards, children's health, land, judiciary and so on.

This year, after a long time of lobbying and requesting. the government has increased the subsidies in the "Indira Aavaas" (grhnirmaan/ house building), Mother Teresa and Pension Programs. Income plays an important role in the pension program so we help the single women to show their income and for this we talk with Patwaris regarding their income so they can fill the form and submit in welfare office. Preparatory planning discussions on the One Billion Rising rally to be held on February the 14th were held at Nishtha and other places in District Kangra.

February 2013

Two 'Prabhat Feriyan' (Morning Rallies) in preparation for the OBR-rally on the 14th were carried out in Rakkar and Khaniyara (Sokhni da Kot).

The International Conference on Widowhood in Kathmandu, Nepal took place from 4th – 6th Feb. Radha was one of 3 members from India who attended. Lilli Thapa, the director of the organization in Nepal has worked for the last 15 years on women's rights related issues. The issue of "Dev ki Pratha", child marriages, is still very big in Nepal. The meeting went on for two days. On the final day a big rally was held in the city of Kathmandu. The One Billion Rising Campaign was supported by Nishtha Single Women who joined the International campaign against violence against. A series of rallies were held in Rakkar, Fatehpur, Sokhni da Kot, Khaniyara, Dharamshala and McLeod Ganj.



Single Women and volunteers marched carrying boards, shouting slogans and singing songs for women's rights and against violence.

Radha wrote the following song for the rally:

***One billion are rising
To celebrate February the 14th
The whole country has to be woken
Do good to yourself and listen
It's up to us to fight the violence
Come out of your houses
Do good to yourself and listen
Sing the song of love
Listen and join our song
Do good to yourself and listen
Village and city, come out on the street***

***Uplift every man
Do good to yourself and listen
Laugh and make others laugh
This violence must be chased away
Do good to yourself and listen
Destroy the dark violence
and light bright love
Do good to yourself and listen
Commit to this oath
To fight violence deep rooted
Do good to yourself and listen***



March 2013

On the 3rd and 4th eight single women from District Kangra went to Jantar Mantar, Delhi, for a rally regarding Pension Parishad, which went on until the 8th of the month. Again, as in the meeting in Mumbai, the pension issue for elderly people was raised, because they do not tackle the injustice done to them on their own.

On the 8th of March Nishtha carried out an entertainment and information program on the Mahila Divas (International Women's Day). In this program 268 women, single and married, participated. The Rakkar Single Women's Group prepared and performed an informative play on dowry, violence and culture.

Budget Report: 2012-13

Foreign Account Total Received: 381,912
From Louise Berry via SUTRA : Rs. 82,969
From Nishtha (Aktion Regen) : Rs. 298,943
Foreign Account total Expenditure: 387,497
Local Account Total Received: 119,340
From Louise Berry: 50,000
From Sutra: 69,340
Local Account total Expenditure: 111,241

