Single Women’s Project Annual Report 2015-16

April 2015 started out with a 3 day meeting held at Sutra which was attended by participants from 20 blocks of 7 Districts covered by Himachal Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan. They got together to review the past three months and to make a strategy for the coming months activities.

On 11th Radha, Nishtha’s Single Women Programme Team Leader along with Sutra members Nirmal Chandel and Shubash attended the Swayat Nyaya Panchyat conference at Shimla. Swayat Nyaya Panchyat is a special fast track local court set up for the use of single women so they don’t have to run from pillar to post to get justice. It has been provided by the State out of consideration for the economic difficulties faced by single women rendering them unable to fight their cases in the courts when they take years.

On 19th to 21st April, Radha as the Himachal Pradesh State representative, along with representatives from 6 other states attended the SW National forum meeting at Delhi. The representatives discussed the condition of Single Women’s welfare in the States and about how the implementation of Government schemes get delayed by the State legislators. All the present members decided to raise one main issue to the Central Government: the need for pension increments and Improvement in livelihood conditions. This topic was presented during the meeting with the Cabinet Minister.

In May, Nishtha single women’s coordinator Radha carried out a survey on the Domestic Violence Child Act for Sutra, as requested by the Dept. of Women and Child Development of the Central Government of India. She visited the Government School in Khaniyara and Bhagsu Public School and talked with students, the School Management Committees, teachers and parents over a number of days asking the following questions:

- What do the students, teachers and parents feel about corporal punishment in school?
- Is it necessary to beat or scold students when they perform badly in their studies?
- What are the effects of the mid day meal scheme on students?
- How active are the School Management Committee members.

When all the data is collected then the department will produce a report and use it for future planning. A survey helps government to know about the ground level situation of children in different states.

During this month all the single women activists were busy preparing for 23rd June, International Widow’s Day, mobilizing women during the village level meetings to raise their issues and voices on this special day.

June is the month when the bi-annual Block meetings are held. Advocate Rohit and Rozy were on hand as resource people, advising women about their legal rights and how they can get benefits. The 23rd June, International Widow’s Day and the state level meeting were also frontline topics in the block meetings. We selected some cases which we would like to raise to the Chief Minister through the Sub District Magistrate.

- Anita is a single women from Rait Block has been abandoned by her husband and left her with 2 young sons, she had no contact with him from long time. She is living in her parent’s home and they are already so poor. We requested the government to provide her employment so she can survive with her children.
- **Rampyari** is a single women has been sexually harassed by her neighbor for a long time, she is living in an old rented house and because she has very little money and is alone she could not change house easily. We requested the government to provide her some land and money so she can live comfortably.

- **Jyoti** is a single women from Mandal who has been living with her very poor parents for the past two years. She left her husband because he was unemployed and beat her brutally every day. Her in-laws also supported him and told her to go out and earn money. We asked the government to provide her a class IV job so she can earn something to maintain her child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>No. of Women</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12th June</td>
<td>Kangra</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14th June</td>
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<td>Ladhwada</td>
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On June 22nd the state level meeting of the Single Women’s Forum was held in Shimla. 10 women came with violence cases which had been pending in court for 7-8 years. The women pleaded their desperate cases hoping for justice in front of High Court Advocate and Member from Samaj Kalyan Board, Mr. Satya Thakur Parmar. They agreed that it is a flaw in the law that allows cases to go on for so long and they promised the women to help them in court and put their cases to the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh.

While Radha was in Shimla, the 23rd June, International Widow Day was celebrated with a rally of 150 women who marched from the Post office to the Office of District Commissioner Office Dharamsala. The sound of the Single Women’s slogans and songs for justice filled the streets and echoed off the mountains. At the DC’s Office, the single women activists along with the Press member met with ADM Sudhesh Mukhota due to the absence of DC, and submitted a memorandum to the ADM which lists some of the demands raised by the single women including allocation of land for single women, free medical treatment, specific ration subsidies, free bus fares, increment in pensions and an improvement in their basic standard of living. At the end of the rally all the single women participants got refreshments and a special printed bag.
July was occupied with a campaign to push forward the Planning commission’s 5 year plan for special dispensation for single women under various government schemes. 11 women from five districts held a press conference to ask the reason for the delay in the implementation of the proposed schemes. The single women held a postcard campaign throughout the state under the banner of “Hamara Paisa Hamara Vikas, Phir Kyon Bahvisay Sarkar Ke Hath”, 25,000 postcards were signed by members of the public in public places like bus stands, schools, colleges, hospitals etc and sent to the Prime Minister.

On August 8th the Lions Club Dharamsala organized a health camp for single women with a Doctor from Fortis hospital who did free check ups including blood tests, sugar test, B.P and heart check for 20 single women

Regrettably, On 11th August, Pammi, our single women activist in Rait block, died after a long illness. It was a sad day for the whole Nishtha staff to lose a close friend and colleague. Nishtha appreciates her dedicated work and concern for the Single Women.

The National Forum meeting was held in Delhi from August 22nd to 25th. This meeting, attended by 30 women from 10 states with Jinni Srivastav as a resource person was held to discuss their work and ongoing programmes. Land and single women’s livelihood was the main subject of this meeting, for which the participants met with the Union Minister of Urban Development. Venkaiah Naidu. He assured them that the issue is being attended to by the government and very soon it will implemented.

On 10th September, Ankur NGO (based in Una, H.P.) organized a workshop on Single Women’s Land Rights in Shimla. All the NGOs who are working with single women took part in this workshop. At present, when a woman’s husband dies she doesn’t get immediate possession of the land as is her right. Instead she has to go to the office to apply for her land to be transferred into her name. This process can run for months or years and is sometimes never settled. Despite the law being clear on the right of a widow to get the land of her husband it is just in law, not in practice. All present NGOs committed to working together to fight for Single Women’s Rights.

The three monthly meeting at Sutra was held on 10th to 13th Oct, during which 10 women were unanimously selected to attend the National Forum advisory meeting at Delhi. These selected women
prepared a play based on single women’s lives, what problems she faces in her life when she is left alone. Do people feel they can tease her because she doesn’t have any identity or what?

On 28th to 30th, an advisory meeting was held in New Delhi. The main points of this meeting were skills and success stories of present single women. 120 single women from 13 states participated in this meeting to share their life experiences. ‘Strong bonds between single women throughout the nation’ was the call of our resource person Jinni Srivastav, Baba Adab and Nikhal from Pension Parishad.

On 17th Kummo and Radha participated in an educational seminar in Mandi, How to achieve a good basic level of education, how to get rid of the stigma of untouchability in government schools, particularly in remote schools. Single women members were invited because sometimes their children are also teased because of their Mother’s status.

On 2nd November a college student from Bengal came here to do research about single women’s lives. With our assistance she privately interviewed single women in various villages. We await the results of her research.

The latter part of November was occupied by our Single women activists preparations for the rally on Swayat Nyaya Panchyat which was held on 3rd Dec. This was a huge rally with 2,000 single woman participants from 7 Districts of Himachal Pradesh. The march route was from Fathepur to the Vidhan Sabha (State Legislature) Ground at Tapovan. There we met with the Chief Minister of H.P and presented him with our memorandum.

This month the Single women activists conducted a signature campaign collecting over 3,000 women’s signatures showing their concern about climate change. This appeal was sent to Prakash Javedkar, Union Minister of State for Environment.

On 17th Dec Radha Single women Coordinator was selected for C.S Award for her work in the field of single women. Nishtha is very proud that she should have received this very prestigious award.

From 22nd to 24th Dec, bi-annual block meetings were held at Narwana, Gaggal and Ladhwad. The key topic was to talk about the importance of casting our votes in the upcoming panchayat elections. The Single women activists also mobilized single women to cast their vote on the day and to support candidates who they thought would effective as Panchayat members.

On 11th January, Radha was invited as a resource person in leadership training held at Sambhavna NGO where 50 students from all over India gathered. She talked
about the single women’s program in India, how and when the program started and why the single women need this kind of forum. She felt it was very useful for the students to hear about our movement and it was good experience to talk to and take questions from them.

In February the single women activists attended a specially organized session on HIV and TB in Nishtha along with Nishtha staff. Dr. Di Gibb who is a leading expert, working both in a foremost London hospital and in the field, especially in Africa held this very interesting session. She explained the symptoms and effect of HIV and TB on body and talked about how the treatment can be managed and is very successful. People no longer need to die of TB and AIDS if they take the medication correctly. Sometimes we fieldworkers might have to monitor and help patients on this long-term treatment. We know also that we do not have to be afraid of catching it ourselves from the people we are helping.

Two leadership trainings were held at Sutra on January 5th to 8th and 10th to 13th. The single women activists selected women from various villages to attend this training – generally it is the first time they have been given any training at all so it is very useful for them.

From 16th to 19th January, 23 members from 8 States got together for a meeting at ISI (Indian Social Institute) Delhi. The main agenda of the meeting was how to involve more states in the country in the Single Women’s Movement and how to organize meetings in newly joined States.

During February our activists worked with Marianna who is a medical student and her translator Choekeyi to identify and interview women who habitually eat clay. She is trying to determine why women do this – if it is a lack in their diet or some other reason.

Nishtha celebrated International Women’s Day on 15th March along with more than 150 friends, single women and children on the school ground. Our chief guest Dr. Kishwar gave a speech reminding everyone of the importance of taking this occasion to celebrate our lives as women. The single women’s team performed a meaningful play about the environment and keeping it clean.

On 25th March, a public hearing was organized in the Lions Club Dharamshala attended by 200 women from three blocks. The women asked questions to the present officers Kanta Sharma, LP Sudhan and the block officer. Some women asked why they were not getting pensions and complained about court cases taking so long to progress. Regarding pension problem, officer explained that a single woman has to make her own ration card and cut her name from her son’s family so the son’s income doesn’t come into the picture when she is applying for a pension. This officer also explained about various government schemes through which single women’s children can get benefits such as Mukhmantri kanya dan yojna, mother Teresa scheme and so on.

Alongside this busy programme of events and activities this year the single women activists have been steadily going about their normal work of visiting villages, meeting single women, hearing their problems
and helping them. They have extended their work to cover 93 Villages and now have 2,931 members. Meetings are held in all the villages each month to enable the women to get together and support each other. Each month a meeting is held in Nishtha to discuss ongoing work, forthcoming programmes and any problems they might have. On this day they work together on the land at Nishtha which has been procured and is being developed to provide a training space for single women in organic agriculture. The activists and their helpers are also very much involved in organizing and participating in the outreach clinics in their villages. This is a major way in which our programme gives very direct help to the marginalized women in the most remote areas of our district.

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<th>Divorced</th>
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