



Report of Regional MSS Convention, Jagatsinghpur, Odisha

The regional convention of MSS was organized at Jayagaon, Balikuda Block in Jagatsinghpur District on 31st January 2013. There is a strong presence of MSS in that block.

It was a huge gathering of almost 1000 participants from Balikuda block. Sudarshan Das, Secretary HDF (Human Development Foundation) coordinated and conducted the meeting. Among those present in the meeting were Dr. Rama Singh and Dr. Sri Gopal Mohanty from McMaster University, Canada and Dr. Annapurna Devi Pandey from San Jose State University, USA who is the President of The Orissa Society of the Americas (OSA).

As a tradition of MSS, all participants were greeted by passing on the flower bouquets from one person to another in each row. The meeting started with a welcome song led by Indira Mohanty and a few MSS members: *Ame Karmara Upasana Kariba...* (We will worship our work).



Unnayan Secretary, Rashmi Mohanty who is the main MSS trainer in Odisha gave a brief introduction of MSS and the purpose of the convention. During her discussion she highlighted different issues related to the violence against women, very specially rape cases in Odisha like in Pipili, Raygada and Baripada and the December brutal rape of Nirbhaya in Delhi. In the present scenario MSS has worked with success to minimize the problems of women like atrocities, family violence, dowry and torture, providing women protection and to empower them to march forward in order to build a healthy society.

Then MSS leaders of different districts shared their experiences.

Sarojini Das, Jagatsinghpur: She said that twelve years ago, after the super cyclone of 1999, Rashmi Mohanty visited her village and talked with the women groups. The process of formation of SHG was initiated and later 25 SHGs formed. Then Janani (A federation of SHGs) came into existence with the membership of 350 women. Now the members are involved with the weaving of 'Golden Grass Craft' items in their respective homes and getting economic benefit.



In the meantime they have received training on innovative designing in golden grass supported by Development Commissioner Handicraft, New Delhi and they are preparing 150 types of items. They are also participating in different exhibitions within and outside the state.

In the year 2004, many of these women got involved in MSS during 'Agni Utsav' (fire ceremony) at Jagatsinghpur although formal MSS training was given later. As of today 70 groups are working under the banner of MSS. In addition to many activities in the past, around 150 MSS members recently visited the block office to request for the construction of an embankment for flood relief and consequently 19 lakh of rupees was sanctioned for the purpose.

Bharati Kabi, Mayurbhanj: In the year 2005 MSS started in Gadighati , Jhatiada and Amarda *Gram Panchayats*. So far 157 *Dastas* and 232 *Panjhas* have been formed. Among the activities, issues relating to the problems of women are identified and solved in the village level by the *Dasta Nayak* (leader) and *Panjha Nayak* (leader) MSS messages have been spread by her to all the villages. Even the local police today advise the people for any family or community problem to go to MSS before going to the police.



Minati Behera, Mayurbhanj: According to her 7 women from her group initially took MSS training in 2006. Family problems, dowry atrocities, prevention of alcohol use and management of SHGs are being managed by MSS.

Aliva Sarvang, Sonepur: In last 4 years MSS functions in Boudh and Sonepur district. During last October 2012, 40 persons of Jhupadipada participated in Love India Clean India with the support of MSS. The purpose of this program is to keep the environment clean

Jaymati Sunani, Nuapada: After being involved in the MSS program the mindset of women is gradually changing. They now send their children to school. Through MSS movement awareness on antiliquor campaigns, protection of women, anti caste movement, health care knowledge is developing among women.



Pragnya Paramita Pattnaik, Puri: At Brahmagiri block of Puri district 183 women have been supported by Amara Viswas (NGO) through nano-finance, a small amount (Rs 500 -1000) of loan money. They have started MSS campaign with the aim to make women self reliant.

In addition to experience sharing of MSS groups, some other guests from the local area and outside addressed the gathering.

Annapurna Devi Pandey, a supporter of MSS was overwhelmed by the huge gathering of women. She compared the achievement of women's rights in America with that in Odisha and suggested the women to initiate protests against portraying negative images of women particularly in Doordarshan (TV programmes by the Government). She also expressed concern about skewed male/female ratio, say in Anugul being 1000/835 - an alarming situation.



Sri Gopal Mohanty who is involved with MSS from its inception gave a historical background of MSS movement and expressed satisfaction on the progress in Odisha and hope of spreading the peace movement from villages to districts and to the State if more hands are joined collectively and work persistently by meeting regularly. He emphasized the sustainability of MSS for which economic progress of women would be necessary. He reminded to continue Love India – Clean India project with enthusiasm and to monitor education of the children in their respective community by guarding against teacher absenteeism.

Nishikanta Mohapatra, Consultant, RTI emphatically said that people being the owner of the country could ask the Government officials about anything through RTI Act. He narrated several success stories of the use of RTI and suggested the women to take advantage of this instrument for redressing many of their issues related to the Government.



Pratap Rudra Nanda, Team leader of Trupti Project spoke of different development programs for women in Thailo and Alikanta Gram Panchayat to provide revolving funds to women groups for income generation program. MSS could inspire women to utilize this facility and lead women towards progress.

Nirupama Barik of Chalan Balikuda reported the progress of the women in her area in so far as benefitting by interest free loan that Amara Biswas provides and helping women in tailoring activity.

Kamalakanta Mohanta of Mayurbhanj District believed in women's ultimate success in their struggle and said at local level the livelihood programme by Unnayan helped many women to go forward.

Local residents, Antaryami Boral, a Gandhian, Advocate Bira Narayan Patra and Krishna Satpathy, Secretary, Alaka Budi Anchalik Krushak Parishad expressed their happiness for Balikuda being one of the advanced blocks of Odisha with regard to MSS activities and were willing to extend their help.

Rama Singh from McMaster University emphasized that MSS is not a political party and rather it is a family. While appreciating several songs MSS members sang on that day, he urged the members to share their feelings with others mostly in the form of songs. He explained the meaning of MSS Logo and asked to organize Gandhi Gyan Mela, an awareness campaign at different places of public gathering, say a weekly local market, in order to draw attention of the public to common social problems, one being abuse of alcohol and its detrimental impact on health, economy and destruction of the future of a family. He also reiterated to continue Love India – Clean India right in Jagatsinghpur.

Later a MSS declaration was read and accepted

Lastly MSS of Odisha was named after Annapurna Maharana who was affectionately called '*Chuni Apa*' and hence forth it will be called, **Chuni Apa Mahila Shanti Sena, Odisha.**

In this connection, Krishna Mohanty, a life long Gandhian and a cousin of '*Chuni Apa*', while applauding the new move, narrated her memories associated with '*Chuni Apa*'. Among her several stories a few were very significant. A Swaraj Ashram was constructed besides the Alaka River and Harijan Seva and Khadi work started there under her leadership. In the year 1942, she participated in the independence movement and went to Jail. The work of Gandhi's *Nayee Talim* – Basic Education, in Odisha was initiated by her. During any disaster, be it natural or man made, she would jump in to action immediately. She was well versed in several languages and wrote her autobiography "*Amruta Anubhaba*" which is a collection of her memories. Regarding MSS, She suggested MSS to take initiative for construction of toilets for each and every family.

At the end Dillip Kumar Mohanty, Jayagaon thanked guests, participants, coordinator, supporters and organizers for successfully organizing the convention in his village.

-Satya Narayan Kar

