



**Asha for Education  
and  
Odanadi Seva Samasthe**

**presents**

**Asha Sanctuary  
Conference**

**at**

**Mysore**

**December 14th -16th 2003**

## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

- Akshardeep** Niwara 96, Navi Peth, Pune
- Arz** Baina Beach, Baina, Vasco da Gama, Goa
- Child Rights Trust** 6th Floor, High Point 4, Palace Road, Bangalore
- DEED** Chikkahunsur, Hunsur-H.D. Kote Road, Hunsur, Mysore District
- FIRM** T. C.15 / 247, Red Cross Road Thiruvananthapuram
- Guria** S-8/395 Khajuri Colony, Varanasi UP
- HELP** 2nd lane, Sujatha Nagar, Lawyer Pet Ext. Ongole
- Jagrathi** C3, 2nd Floor, Jyothi Complex, 134/1, Infantry Road, Bangalore
- MICDA** General Secretary MICDA Puttur, Chittoor District, AP
- Nisarga** Shivaji Road, H.D. Kote, Mysore District, Mysore, Karnataka
- Natpurwa** Gram : Barahi (Natpurwa), Post: Sikroriha, Sandila, Hardoi District UP 241001
- ODP** Bannimantap, Bangalore-Mysore Road, Mysore
- Odanadi Seva Samasthe** S R S Colony, Hootagally Village, Belawadi Post, Mysore  
Mysore District, Karnataka
- Parivarthana** Rajiv Gandhi Nagar Opp APMC Bypass Road Mysore Dist
- Prajwala** 23-2-553 Hari Bawli X Road, Shah Ali Banda Hyderabad
- Prerna** Prerna organization, Prerana 7th Lane, Kamathipura Municipal School, Shuk-lajee Street, Mumbai
- RLHP** Gayathripuram, Jyothinagar, Mysore
- Saathi** Flat 41, 6th floor B-1 Maniyar Apts., Tardeo Rd. Mumbai
- Sathi** Ashraya No.1-4-364, S.B.H. Colony, Mantralaya Road, Raichur
- Sanlaap** 38B Mahanirban Road Kolkata
- Sravanti** 32-1-50, K.V.R. Swamy Road, RAJAHMUNDRY - 533101.A.P.
- Support** Old BMC Office, 2nd Floor, Vakola Market, Santacruz (East), Mumbai
- Tomorrow's Foundation** 178A, S. P. Mukherjee Road, 4B Chandraloke, Kalighat,  
Kolkata
- TRY** TRY - To Reach You, No: 13, Giri Nagar, Ramapuram, Chennai
- VOICE** C-2, Triveni, Gilbert Hill, J.P. Road, Andheri (West), Mumbai,
- Vimochana** Vimochana Devadasi Punarvasati Sangha, 2380, Shedbal Rd., Opp Gov-  
ernment hospital, Athani-591304, Karnataka

# CONFERENCE AGENDA

## DECEMBER 14th 2003

Introduction/Welcome  
Analysis of situation of trafficking in the South  
Position of children of WIP  
Break  
OSS  
TRY  
FIRM  
ARZ  
Lunch  
HELP  
MICDA  
Vimochana  
Break  
Raising Awareness: Informal Discussion-Anita  
Cultural Program by OSS children

## DECEMBER 15th 2003

Natpurwa  
Guria  
When culture is culprit  
Break  
Prajwala  
Akshardeep  
Lunch  
Saathi  
SUPPORT  
Perna  
STS  
Sanlaap  
Break  
Government policies- Srikanth

## DECEMBER 16th 2003

Breaking free- What does the children need-Shanmuga  
Existing networks and other initiatives-Srikanth  
Break  
Networking- Need, desire, willingness, direction-Venkata Pingali  
Lunch  
Informal session presented by other groups  
Break  
Recreational trip

# SANCTUARY

Imagine a two-year old in a small shack really sleepy, after all, it is about mid-night, but there is too much noise in the room. There is a lot of movement too. In the semi-darkness he sees his mother with a stranger...not the same stranger from yesterday who had smiled at her, but another one.

And this is about an eleven year old – let us call him Shashi – who does not know anything about his father. When Shashi was eight, his mother was arrested and sentenced to a long stay in jail. Young Shashi refused to go out of the house or to talk to anyone for a whole year.

How bewildering it must all seem to these kids! At the age when they should be learning 2 + 2 makes 4, they are learning the world + them = misfit.

Caring for this group of people takes some courage. NGO's working for the betterment of children of sex workers or children sold to the sex trade face innumerable hurdles from people with vested interests who are sometimes quite powerful, from anti-social elements, from an indifferent community, from evictions and so on, which makes their job all the harder. They would much rather focus on fixing the psyche and spirit of those in their care.

Asha has the distinction of working with numerous NGO's that dare to care for this invisible segment of children, each with its own special strengths. We hope that by bringing NGO's working for **CHILDREN AT RISK** in a single forum, we will be able to empower them by creating an atmosphere conducive to information exchange and growth.

## **What do we hope to achieve?**

The initial goal will be to connect the NGO's and open up channels of communication. The mid-term goal is to attain a greater coordination between NGO activities and government programs so the issues are dealt with more effectively.

*The ends: to have the children integrated into mainstream professional and social life seamlessly.*

## **How do we intend to achieve our objective?**

**Sharing:** Getting the lines of communication amongst the relevant NGO's open by fostering trust and openness.

**Spreading:** Gathering and disseminating information through various public fora and cultivating a more effective relationship among organizations with complementary strengths and a more sensitive society.

**Support:** Asha-Sanctuary's effort in the short term will be directed toward knowledge and practices available internationally.

The children of sex workers are born into wretched conditions not of their making. From the day they are born social conditions as they prevail can only push them into the depths of low self-esteem, poverty and ignorance, all of which lead them back to where they started - over and over. ***Asha can work to facilitate a change for the better.***

# WELCOME

Welcome to the conference organized by Asha for Education, in partnership with Odanadi Seva Samasthe.

Asha for Education has been partnering with many of you for several years. We, at Asha, were struck by the relative invisibility of children at risk, which includes all those children who needed counseling, acceptance in society and stability in their lives to erase the insecurity and emotional upheavals they experience, and the compliance through silence of the average person regarding these children making them more vulnerable. More striking however was the fact that many organizations were doing the same work in different ways. We spoke to several of you and everyone expressed the desire to meet others doing similar work in a gathering like this one, to document the wisdom earned over time by the older organizations, so younger, smaller or newer groups can get a running start by learning from their lessons, and also to share the innovative ways the younger and smaller groups are intervening in the lives of the children in this segment.

Differences in approach and philosophy do exist, but the bottom-line is every organization is looking to find a means to create options for the child. So the focus of this conference is means to solutions to the problems of children vulnerable to being trafficked, the keyword being solutions.

About 15 states are represented with several well known groups. The representation is evenly split between male-female, rural, urban with an average experience of 10 years. We hope also to forge new relationships and generate energy to create a network among all or some of you, regionally, or through other similarities. Through this conference we hope to achieve the following:

- Share and learn about different approaches to mainstreaming the children.
- Seek to document various vocations possible and vocational training methods.
- Explore the role of education in the process of rehabilitation and reintegration.
- Documenting best practices and ways to avoid pitfalls.
- Survey existing networks and explore ways we can work together.

We would like to thank Stanly and Parashu for their willingness to host the conference and for taking care of a lot of ground-level details. Ramesh Dodamani provided excellent support, and without his contribution this conference would not have happened. We would like to acknowledge the support of several Asha-chapters including Princeton, Seattle, Boston, and LA. Further this conference would not have been possible without excellent and timely inputs from several Asha volunteers. We would like to especially acknowledge Anita Balasubramaniam, Melli, Vignesh, Srikanth, SKI, Shanmuga, DP, and Rohini. We would also like to thank all those who contributed articles to our brochure.

-Hansa Mehta and Venkata Pingali

# ODANADI SEVA SAMASTHE

Stanly and Parashu



Odanadi (Together Until Death) is a non-governmental organization based in Mysore, Karnataka, which works for the rescue, rehabilitation and empowerment of victims of commercial sexual exploitation. We run a residential school for the children of the sex workers and the children rescued from the trafficking networks. In addition, Odanadi runs a home for both the children of the sex workers and the children rescued from the trafficking networks and provide them with education and vocational training. We endeavor to provide a decent and dignified childhood to these marginalized children.

Odanadi was a result of a ten-month long pilot study (“Bodies for a Meal”) on the socio-economic conditions of sex workers and their children in Mysore district. The organization was registered as a trust, in 1992 and undertook a year long situational analysis program to understand the ground realities.

Odanadi believes in a multi-pronged approach to fight the problem of sexual exploitation, which addresses both the causes that lead to a flourishing sex trade and the rescue, rehabilitation and empowerment of women and minors sucked unwittingly into the clutches of the trafficking networks.

Over the last ten years, Odanadi has carried out several well-planned operations against brothels and trafficking networks and rescued more than 400 girls from the flesh trade. Most of the rescued girls were minors. It was observed in several cases that the very people who were supposed to protect the women and children were guilty of having sold them into prostitution and for use in pornography. After a rescue operation, the minor girls need a healthy environment to stay (a trauma care center or a rescue home). She is given the choice to stay for any period of time till she fully recovers from the accident. Within that span of time, the people who are involved in the developmental process have to evolve a scientific and realistic mode of rehabilitation to reintegrate her with her family. Individual counseling programs

Individual counseling is an important session where each girl will have privacy and intimacy with the counselor to share her life stories, problems, needs and desires. The counselor encourages each girl to be firm, to remember her capabilities and recognize her strengths and helps her to think in a positive direction.

The rescued girls from the brothels have led a mechanical and miserable life. Fear, distress, anger, stubbornness, inferiority complex, hatred, guilt and suspicion are some of the common feelings among the rescued girls. It is imperative for these girls to be left by themselves for an initial period of time in a free and secure environment. This period helps the

counselor and victim to understand each other and for the counselor to gain the confidence of the victim. In Odanadi, the existing residential school for the children of prostituted women plays an important role in bringing the girls back to normalcy. The rescued girls are happy in engaging themselves with the small children, participating in daily activities, cultural and vocational programs, cooking and gardening. Secondly the victims have an opportunity to mingle with Odanadi's volunteers and sympathizers who are sensitive in dealing with the rescued girls. In essence, this process makes the victims to feel at home. As the rescued girls start coming out of their complexes, they voluntarily take part in the daily affairs of Odanadi. At Odanadi, cultural programs like street plays, folk dances, mimicry and skits are common and keep the girls happy. The girls also involve themselves in regular vocational training like wool weaving, tailoring, plastic wire weaving and kitchen gardening.

The reintegration phase is the most difficult and often it is not possible to take back all the girls together. Each girl's whereabouts and stories are kept confidential to make the reintegration a success and to gain the affection and acceptability of their family. The counseling for the parents and the village folk plays a big role in a successful reintegration effort.

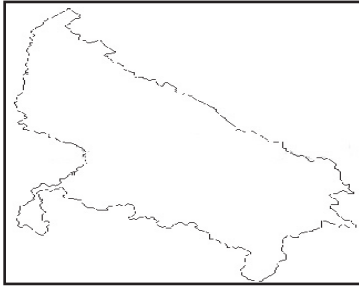
The story of a trafficked and rehabilitated girl does not end with reintegration. In almost all cases the people responsible for introducing or, in other words, selling the victim, belong to the family, clan or village. Hence it is of utmost importance to reassure the victim that the institution or people who rescued her would continue to provide a second home and be a second family to her. All victims fear retaliation from their captors; hence they look to their rescuers for protection. In the process of rescue and rehabilitation most victims form an emotional bond with their surrogate family and start experiencing feelings of trust. Therefore keeping in constant touch gives the victim a sense of security and confidence.

**CONTACT INFORMATION FOR ODANADI SEVA SAMASTHE:**

S R S COLONY,  
HOOTAGALLY VILLAGE,  
BELAWADI POST, MYSORE  
MYSORE DISTRICT, KARNATAKA

# FESTIVAL OF WOMEN IN PROSTITUTION

Ajeet Singh



## FINDING VIABLE ECONOMIC OPTIONS

GURIA began with the adoption of three children of a woman in prostitution (WIP). Guria has been working for the rehabilitation of the women in prostitution (WIP) and their children since 1992 and was registered in 1993. Between helping them with their problem with the National Human Rights Commission, the National Commission for Women, etc. and by running educational programs, referral health services for the children of the WIP, pimps, etc., Guria has been able to ease the stronghold of the mafia-pimp-police nexus in a big way which has resulted in a child prostitution free red light area. This has also given a lot of confidence to these women and has resulted in brave acts of defiance, such as, press conferences by the WIP against the criminals and refusal to pay “taxes”. As a new approach we are also living in a Bedia (community involved in traditional family-based prostitution) village as a part of these families in Madhya Pradesh since we don't want to be an “OUTSIDER”.

## THE FESTIVAL OF WIP

The Guria Festival, organised at a national level, has given these women a new lease of life. Apart from awareness, the first ever festival of WIP was also an important means of rehabilitation through their readymade classical and folk song and dance traditions. Moreover, having been keepers of the traditional form of music and dance in this era of extinction, they have gained respect on the performing stage. The Festival has received extensive media coverage, social acceptance and given confidence among the women to form groups. But the sustainability of the cultural teams at present is a challenge before us. Guria has been working with the goal of fighting against direct and indirect forced prostitution. We use a three pronged strategy:

1. To sensitize the children of these women through formal education and skills training so that they turn their back against prostitution.
2. To empower the women against the criminal nexus, so they can be active decision makers in their futures and the futures of their children.
3. To highlight their talent in folk arts and culture.

This idea to strengthen their dying vocation is successful only because the women who traditionally continue with singing and dancing along with sale of sex, enjoy greater liberty within a family set up – where the mother and the brother are exploiters. Moreover, the vested interests, especially their own mothers, brothers and the other brothel keepers are less skeptical about Guria's intention to rehabilitate the women. We make

them feel it is normal and acceptable when the women are performing as artists and earning an honorarium. It is a subtle move where the family and/or the brothel keepers will have to accept the change in the structure of prostitution, once the programs are proven economically and socially viable outside the brothel set up in the red light areas. The idea is to spread the message of an alternative life style. Further, it will be a message to the women that there is a viable market for their talents, away from the red light areas; and that they could aspire to be a part of the growing entertainment industry. This will give them the economic support, courage and confidence to think of music and dance as a viable vocation and alternative to flesh trade, instead of being tied to the latter. It is also an effort to give a message to society that these stigmatized persons are the keepers of our culture in the areas of folk dance and music. Eight festivals have been held since 1995. We have had support from well known individuals like Mr. Kaifi Azmi, Ms. Shaukat Azmi, Mr. Mahesh Bhatt, Ms. Tanuja Chandra, activist-bureaucrat Mr. G.R. Khairnar and Tabla Maestro Padmashree Mr. Kishan Maharaj. The eight festivals were sponsored by Action Aid, Oxfam, CRY and UNICEF. In these 7 years our approach has gone from plans and hopes to reality and success. Much is possible besides the festival itself, like commercial audio releases, opening the rich traditions to a larger audience for example. We are currently seeking funds for a 5 year plan by which time we would become self-sufficient in this activity. These festivals are meant to evoke a national initiative, building on the small efforts to dance and sing only in isolated areas; and to curb the practice of flesh trade. Presentation of plays, dance dramas, songs etc. depicting their aspirations and their plight at the hands of their exploiters, in violation of law, would give a first hand knowledge needed for a more holistic national initiative. This would avoid imposed movements to merely outlaw prostitution by NGOs and the government on moral grounds or mere charity work. Such movements being devoid of any effort to fight immediate criminal nexus within the redlight areas, poverty, unequal gender relations, religious factors and coercion by organized groups (root causes of prostitution even today). Ending such immediate exploitation within red light areas and direct intervention, at the macro level (source areas) would lay the foundation for rehabilitation instead of exploitation in the name of morality.

### **Expected Outcomes :**

Confidence building of the WIP with regard to alternative economic opportunities for them. Hence, a formal national stage to give an outlet to their talents and grievances is a genuine step towards a future that will usher a feeling of togetherness and strength; and create a weapon for a comprehensive fight against exploitation.

To create sustainable Cultural groups as an alternate which are repositories of our classical and folk music traditions. Community sensitised towards the women and the aesthetic/artistic components of the institution of prostitution.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR GURIA**

S-8/395 KHAJURI COLONY,  
VARANASI, UP

# CHILDREN AT RISK: THE CASE OF MATHAMMA CHILDREN



Dr. R. Subbaramaiah

## THE MATHAMMA PRACTICE

The practice of dedicating girls to Hindu Deities, idols, objects of worship, temples and other religious institutes or places of worship exists in several parts of the country. In Chittoor district the eastern part of 23 mandals, this practice of dedicating girls is widely prevalent among the Scheduled caste sub group Madigas. The practice involves dedication of young girl children to Goddess 'Mathamma' - the incarnation of Adi-Shakti. The girl children dedicated to the Goddess Mathamma are known as the Mathammas - the servants of Goddess Mathamma. Once dedicated, the girls have to spend rest of their life in the service of the Goddess.

The dedication of girl children to the Goddess takes place for a variety of reasons. It often takes place even before the girl child is born. Most commonly, the dedication takes place before the girl child attains puberty.

The Mathammas are denied the right to marriage and family for ever, but they can have children. These children do not have social father. The children of Mathammas are totally neglected and uncared for. The community treats them with contempt. Denied of parental support and without any property, the Mathammas have to work only as commercial sex workers to support their children. Even in their sex work, they are subject to discrimination. The dominant persons in the village treat them as free sexual objects. But their sex-work has limited longevity. Eventually, the Mathammas eke out their livelihood as low paid agricultural labor. Thus, the practice renders them as destitute without any social support. They are highly vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS. In addition, their poor nutritional health status exposes them to several other diseases.

## THE MATHAMMA PROHIBITION ACT

The government of Andhra Pradesh enacted legislation in 1988 (Act 10 of 1988) which prohibits the evil practice of dedicating women to the Hindu deities.

## SURVEY OF MATHAMMA GIRLS/WOMEN

In pursuance of the provisions of a survey was conducted by the District Government (SC Corporation ) and the applicant organisation namely MOTHER INDIA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (MICDA) in 1995-96. The survey identified nearly 332 Mathammas in 19 mandals in Chittoor District.

## **THE REHABILITATION OF THE DISTRICT GOVERNMENT FOR MATHAMMAS**

After the aforesaid survey, the District Government released an amount of Rs.27.38 lakhs for the rehabilitation of Mathamma women. The economic rehabilitation package has not had the desired impact either on the economic status of the Mathammas or on their social status. Inadequate assistance, leakages, diversion of funds for consumption purposes, misappropriation by family members, lack of required orientation and training, and poor backward and forward linkages for the petty business and household dairy projects assisted have minimized the impact of the assistance on the economic status of Mathamma women. On the other hand, the rehabilitation package is not designed to eradicate the social roots of the mathamma practice. Nor does the rehabilitation provide any package for the improvement of the social status of these women. On the contrary, the economic assistance has acted an incentive to a few poor parents to declare their girl children as Mathammas in order to be eligible for assistance. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy is needed to eradicate the evil practice of Mathamma by involving the community. The eradication of this practice should focus on:

**1. COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION:** Efforts should be made to prevent deducation of any Madiga girl as Mathamma. The organization should also educate the community about superstitious and unscientific beliefs. The community should also promote normal social marriage of the dedicated women. It should promote the school going habits among the children of the Mathamma women and ensure total enrolment of all eligible children including girls in the primary school. .

**2. HEALTH EDUCATION AND AWARENESS PROGRAM:** The Health Strategy should provide health, education and awareness to women in the reproductive age group, and others in the community, about common diseases as well as STD, HIV and AIDS and also motivate the eligible couples to adopt small family norm and population control.

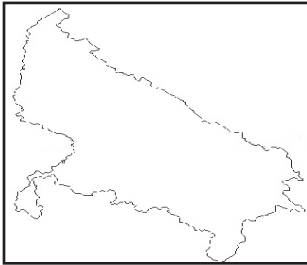
**3. MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH SERVICES:** Apart from providing health education awareness, essential preventive as well as curative health services to the pregnant and lactating mothers and children should be provided.

**4. ECONOMIC REHABILITATION OF MATHAMMA WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN:** The fourth important aspect of the strategy should be to facilitate economic rehabilitation of identified Mathamma women through governmental and non-governmental support. The required economic relief package should be identified on the basis of the preferences of the Mathamma women and their training and other circumstances. The progress of utilization of the assistance already provided by the government should be monitored and evaluated by the social worker and the health worker.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR MICDA:**

GENERAL SECRETARY MICDA  
PUTTUR, CHITTOOR DISTRICT  
ANDHRA PRADESH 517 583

# NATPURWA: A VILLAGE OF WOMEN IN PROSTITUTION



Paromita Ukil

Natpurwa is a village where only prostitutes live. The people belong to the Nat caste (SC). Traditionally, members of this caste have been dholak players, animal breeders, and entertainers at weddings. In certain pockets they have also been prostitutes. The Nats of Natpurwa have been living here for 400 years, practicing prostitution. Those days they enjoyed the patronage of local nawabs and zamindars. Today their patrons come from Sandila town (18 km away) or from Lucknow, which is 70 km.

When they come to this far-flung village, they stay the night. A sumptuous meal has to be cooked along with providing pleasures of the flesh. Consuming alcohol is very common here among both men and women. Come evening and sounds of drunken arguments in none too refined language penetrate the thick darkness that descends here after night-fall. There is no electricity here even though it is so close to the state's capital.

In this village families are composed of mother and sons and daughters, fathers generally do not exist. Around 150 families reside here; half of them are families of prostitutes. The other half of Natpurwa families lives off farming. Till last year, 15 girls had been trafficked to Bombay. Every family is linked with prostitution one way or another. Some may look down upon prostitutes and curse them, but they cannot go very far because they are in effect criticizing their own flesh and blood—sometimes it is a sister, sometimes a mother or an aunt. In all probability, as children they had been fed, clothed and sent to school by a sister who was a prostitute and sole breadwinner of the family.

Mushtari, at 68, gradually made the switch from prostitution to farming as her children were growing old, and as her body was getting old. She has a daughter, who is almost 40, and a son around 26, who is the focus of her life. Today, Mushtari leads a fulfilled life as grandmother and a proud mother. Her two younger sisters also do so and live in separate houses that are so close that they form a cluster. Inside each of these very old mud houses, it is the same old story. Like Mushtari, their sons are the focus of their lives.

Mushtari's son gave her a sense of family and reason to struggle for a better life. It was not easy—neither for the mother nor for the son. The son would see the hurt and ignominy his mother suffered as sex worker. It left a deep mark in his psyche and firmed his determination—to somehow change the situation, to free other women from the pain he saw his mother go through.

Both the boy and his sister, who was much older, had to go to school in another village. It could not have been very pleasant. Within Natpurwa social stigma is practically nonexistent because the entire village is of the same flock, but it is not the same once you

step outside the village boundaries. The little boy, his sister and their cousins—children of Mushtari's one brother and sisters—all went to school together. Today all of them are together running the Asha Vidyalaya they helped found in Natpurwa in July 2002.

Both Neelkamal and Guddu, the two key persons of the Natpurwa project, were doing other jobs earlier in Delhi and in Lucknow. They quit that because their heart was not in those cities, they wanted to change the destiny of the girls of Natpurwa. They strongly believe education is the reason why they and their sisters are better off than their earlier generation. So education will be the vehicle of the revolution they want to bring about in their village by aiming to eradicate prostitution.

Today 85 children regularly attend the school in the village. Of these 45 are children of prostitutes. Right now the school conducts full-fledged classes from standards I to III. There are a few kids, however, who are being coached separately according to the syllabus of standards IV and V. The biggest challenge before the Natpurwa team is to keep the show going. They are keen to take their school to at least class XII so that students acquire that minimum qualification that will enable them to tap sources of livelihood other than collapsed during the heavy monsoon this year.

**CONTACT INFORMATION FOR NATPURWA:**

GRAM : BARAHI (NATPURWA)

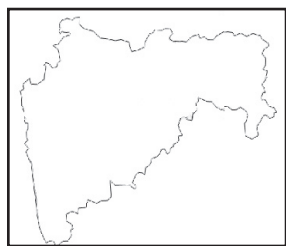
POST: SIKRORIHA

SANDILA, HARDOI DISTRICT

UTTAR PRADESH 241001

|

# THE INVISIBLE CHILD: REACHING OUT TO THE RUNAWAY GIRL CHILD



## **Introduction:**

While millions of children are denied their basic right to life and a future, the girl child remains the most vulnerable. On the street it is no different. Girls runaway from home just as boys do but in smaller numbers and they are not visible on the streets as the boys are. There is very little data available on the situation of the runaway girl child. Interventions in this area have been limited because of this.

## **How SAATHI got involved:**

During the course of interactions with boys on the streets occasionally one encountered, heard about, or learnt of other's experiences with girls on the streets. Thus there was an awareness that they are there, which then naturally gave rise to questions like where these girls are and why they have not been reached out to. One has also heard of instances of them being sexually abused or taken on by pavement families, resulting in other forms of abuse in return for temporary security.

Why is it that these girls are not as visible as boys? Learnings reveal that they are either taken into custodial care by Govt systems, or taken into the fold of pavement families living near the stations or then are picked up by pimps for prostitution. The nexus of various systems is so strong at railway stations that it is believed that they are able to identify and approach them within minutes of their arriving at the station.

There are a lot of problems that these girls face, the most significant one is their being seen as a sex object and repercussions surrounding it. Early intervention at this stage plays a great role in her going back to her family if that is an option possible. Being on the street even for a few days and having had some negative experiences leads to a problem of being accepted back in their families. Societal attitudes also play an important role in this.

## **The runaway girl on the street:**

### **Who is she?**

Any girl upto the age of 21 years who is living by herself and away from her home/ family situation.

### **Why is she on the streets?**

She has either come away herself, with someone or has been lured and duped, or just abandoned. Her reasons for coming away vary from troubled familial relationships to poverty, abuse in search of a better life.

### **Why is she invisible?**

This is because they are pulled into the brothel network almost as soon as they are spotted. If not they are slowly caught in the nexus between pimps, pavement families or other boys. Some get into government custodial care.

#### **What is her future?**

They are forced into prostitution either organized or ad hoc systems. They become victims of abuse. They rarely go back to their families as they are not wanted once they return. Life then becomes one of mere existence with almost no choices.

#### **Saathi's interventions:**

Saathi has evolved strategies of reaching out to runaway girls based at Mumbai Central station. Work here has grown from doing outreach oneself to developing and strengthening relationships with other stakeholders mainly boys living and working at the station to collaborating with the police. There is a day care centre and a night shelter facility that has been put into place. Health interventions have been set up at Nair and JJ hospitals, mental health a san issue is being taken up. Saathi has also decided to set up a shelter for young adolescent runaway girls.

#### **Activities:**

**Outreach:** At Mumbai Central station to reach out to new girls who arrive there. This also involves building relations with other systems there like the Police, Railway authorities, women on the station, ticket checkers and the boys who live and work there.

**Crisis Shelter:** This forms a crucial part of our work. This shelter is the result of a collaboration with Prerana and CCDT some other NGOs.

**Day Centre :** At Agripada municipal school which also functions as a resource centre and meeting place. The Day centre would evolve to include a range of facilities like education, nutrition, recreation, counseling, vocational training etc.

**Case work and Group work:** Individual case counseling and systematic follow up. Also group sessions to keep them motivated and as part of a learning process.

**Networking:** With other NGOs and Government systems like JAPU, RPF GRPF ( government systems), referring girls to existing shelter facilities.

**City level intervention:** In the form of representations in CCVC ( Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children and Forum Against Child Sexual Exploitation) and FACSE

**Documentation and Advocacy:** Of the issues arising, the processes involved and cases

#### **Our Focus This Year**

To strengthen the existing day care centre to include more activities.

To work on issues of vocational training, and shelter for these girls.

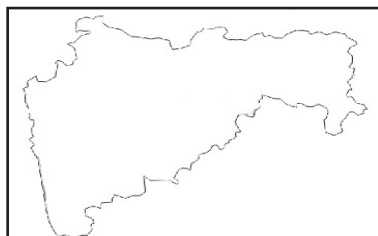
To develop better understanding of strategies of work with girls affected by mental health problems.

To document our experiences of work with this group over the last three years.

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR SAATHI:**

FLAT 41, 6TH FLOOR B-1 MANIYAR APTS.,  
TARDEO RD.

# VOICE: VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION IN COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE



Mugdha Velankar

The following programs are conducted at the railway stations and at the three in-house centres in Dadar, Andheri West and Andheri East.

**Ank Akshar Anubhav:** This forms the core of VOICE's activities. Initially, all children are part of the non-formal education process that VOICE provides on the railway stations at Andheri and Vile Parle and two in-house centres in Dadar and Andheri East. VOICE representatives are in constant touch with the children, earning their trust and at the same time urging upon them the imperative of education. About 300 children are currently involved in this program.

**Swadhar:** Swadhar is a unique five-year experimental program for children who have committed to giving up the street in order to become self-reliant. This is a full-time program, which emphasizes values, vocational skills and discovery and nurture of each individual's talents. Along with their education, they are given a "family" environment and they also grow by contributing as VOICE staff members. They estimate that it will take this long for these children to make the break with their earlier street life complete and irreversible. While the students are paid a monthly stipend, the sum they receive is definitely much less than what they could earn on the streets. This, however, is the key to Swadhar's success: by voluntarily making this short-term monetary sacrifice, the children are able to express and prove their intent of committed participation. The children are exposed to, languages, general knowledge and value education, music lessons in a variety of instruments and skill training.

**Srajan:** Srajan is designed to teach the children relevant income generating vocational skills that will lead to self-reliance and enhance self-respect. Skills taught so far include tailoring, screen-printing, diya making and the creation of paper products for ongoing and special occasions. This year, they have also introduced computer education. The children also learn leadership skills and how to manage a small, independent unit of production.

**Prayas:** Saving and money management. 175 children now save money on a regular basis. 4 children have purchased new bicycles with monies from their savings accounts. Santosh Waghmare (12 yrs.old) has saved Rs.10,000/- over a period of 3 year

**Uday:** Uday, a project for mobile shoe shiners, was initiated in 1993 with the goal of giving children an opportunity to seek alternative employment through a process of education, skill training and an awakening. There are currently around 20 VOICE children in

Project Uday. As many as 45 shoe shiners have given up shoe shining in lieu of participation in project Swadhar or involvement with other entrepreneurship, such as selling flowers, handkerchiefs or other articles. At least 25 to 30 of these children are also attending school.

**Educational Camps:** The aim of these camps is to develop a “we” feeling among children from different centers, to expose them to various places of interest and develop leadership skills among children. 3 long duration camps of 15 days each have been held, to the following places: Delhi, Agra, Bharatpur, Fatehpur Sikhri, Udaipur, Jaipur, Ajmer, Jodhpur, Sariska, Goa. VOICE has also conducted short duration camps of 2-5 days. Possible educational camps that have been envisioned for the next five years are tours of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, Karnataka, and Himachal Pradesh.

**Sur Aur Sangeet:** VOICE feels that music is a very important and powerful medium of expression. It is not only an important cultural component, but it also provides relief to body and mind, and has a soothing, therapeutic effect. Several of its students learn traditional Indian instruments, like the tabla and harmonium, as well as other instruments such as the guitar and keyboard. Currently, there are groups of two or three students studying each of these instruments with great enthusiasm and determination. In keeping with the VOICE philosophy, the older children are encouraged to pass on their knowledge to others. After having completed forty lessons of recorder, the older children begin to instruct other younger children. This allows not only exposure to as many children as possible, but also reinforces the knowledge and understanding of the older children. Currently, there are 5 children at each of the centers who are thus learning the recorder.

**Yoga:** This program was started as a means to relieve stress among the adolescent children. The program was initiated about 7 months ago and there has been a noteworthy change in the children. They are becoming more emotionally stable and their levels of concentration have increased.

**Development of Educational Materials:** VOICE has continuously been developing educational material for the special needs of its students. This material has not only been helpful to them, but also to other similar organizations in such places as Gujarat, U.P., and Maharashtra with whom they have shared it. The material includes worksheets for language and math, educational games, and stories and poems based on the realities of the children’s life experiences. VOICE plans to develop this material further and make it available to any organization for which it would be helpful. They also have developed material for teacher training to enhance their skills and enable them to most effectively respond to the special educational needs of our children.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR VOICE:**

C-2, TRIVENI  
GILBERT HILL  
J.P. ROAD  
ANDHERI (WEST), MUMBAI

# THE PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN OF WOMEN IN PROSTITUTION IN KERALA: A HOME FOR THE CHILDREN



Subhash Thottiparambil

## **The background**

Women in prostitution (WIP), especially street WIP are isolated from society on the basis of their mode of living. It is often believed that WIP should be educated about the need for protecting their own children as if they are not aware of it. However, they are as much aware as any other mother about the care of their children. It is the double standard of the society, which makes it impossible for them. In fact many of the WIP are working to look after their children and other family members.

## **The stigma and discrimination**

The children of WIP face a number of problems due to the negative attitude of the society. Some of the children are denied admissions into schools because of their background. When admitted, the children are discriminated and ostracized in schools, which may affect the psychological health. Some of them are admitted in private boarding schools and paid by their mothers. But when these women are arrested and put in the jail, they are not able to pay for the children. In many cases sex workers admit children without revealing their identity, which creates tension for the mothers as well as the children.

There are no facilities to look after the small babies. For this reason many women sell their children as soon as they are born. Some women give their children in care of other women while working for which they have to pay heavily. Women also keep their children with close relatives. But the relatives usually do not allow the mothers to stay with them, thus separating the child from mother. Often women take the children also along with them during work, which is not healthy for the children.

There are very few residential centers, which admit the children of sex workers. In these centers, they do not allow the women to take back the children during vacation period, and in effect the women lose the child for ever.

The children undergo shame and psychological trauma: during police arrests and when subjected to verbal abuse and social ostracisation. They are vulnerable to abuse of their body. The health care facilities are not properly used, because of the social exclusion.

It is seen that the problem of children of WIP is linked with the problem of their mothers. Stigma and frequent arrests and jailing of these mothers should come to an end, in order to provide a stable and healthy environment to these children.

## **Significance of Chilla**

All the existing centers in Kerala are orphanages. The children staying in these centers are considered as the centers' children. The children of WIP are no longer orphans. They have their own mothers who are WIP. Most of the time, these mothers are in the streets for the livelihood. They have no home or shelter. So their children are also in the streets with them. They wish to send their children to school, but they are not ready to give up their basic human right as a mother. But the treatment of the present orphanages is entirely different. These centers are not ready to admit these children as children of WIP. Even if some orphanages are ready to admit these children, they put forward some conditions like mothers can not visit the children. Sometimes they can not get back their children when they are in need. In other words admitting a sex workers child in an orphanage simply means loss of other motherhood.

Our concept is to provide a place for children of WIP where they can live together. Here there will be no violation of basic human rights of women as WIP. This centre basically is a roosting place for these children. Unlike other centers, there will not be any restriction to mothers to visit their children. Chilla provides a home to the children, deliver nutritious food, provides educational services, extends emotional and counseling services, recreational facilities, and avenues to develop all the innate potentialities

Chilla aims to change the existing notion that the children of WIP are criminals. So we work with the assumption that heredity does not inherently and essentially determine who a person is going to be, whereas social situation often does. Hence we wanted to provide children of sex workers with facilities and resources that will enable them in resisting the stereotyping stigma and succumbing to it. Foundation for Integrated Research in Mental Health was the mother NGO which facilitated the concept of Chilla.

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# CHILD MARRIAGE AND ADULT OBSESSION



## [Vulnerability of the Girl Child]

Indrani Sinha

This write up is based on the study done by a research scientist from Jadavpur University, which came out as a book this year. My recent learning from the lives of victims of trafficking gives me to feel that child marriage is one of the menaces that have to be eradicated from our country. Social reformers have done considerable amount of work in the different states of India to stop child marriage but the strength of the institution of marriage forces families to give girl child in marriage for religious, social, and economic reasons and thus the practice goes on.

The Vedic age talks about post puberty marriage and the minimum of maturity is accepted between 16 and 18. The Rig Veda and Atharva Veda refer to marriage of a mature maiden which once again means marriage of a girl above 16. The Manu Smriti also does not sanction child marriages, but later, child marriages became prevalent and religion failed to put a stop to this practice, which is almost sexual violence to a child. In post Vedic / post Manu times the marriage occurred at pre-puberty age. However, the child stayed back with the parental family and joined the husband after another function on reaching puberty. This ensured that she was given in marriage early but joined the husband only after puberty and it was safe for her mental and physical health.

Avijit Dutta, the researcher, mentions very detailed instances of child marriage after the Muslim invasion in India where the Hindus' feared abduction and forced marriage of girl children by the Muslims in his study. Similarly, within the Muslim religion child marriage is accepted as they believe girl child should be married before any harm happens to her purity which is kind of related only to sex.

As we work with the victims of trafficking, this is the most difficult situation for us. We have rescued and rehabilitated more than 350 girl children in the last five years and have learnt that 70% of these girls have left the safety of their marital family because have learnt that 70% of these girls have left the safety of their marital family because of marriage, marriage proposals, or interest of marrying them off to a wealthy groom without knowing the whereabouts of the grooms' family.

In a study done by Sanlaap in the year 2003, of 189 rescued girls and living in the shelter home (run by Sanlaap), we found that 16 girls were from 9-12 age group and 168 were between 16-25 age group and maximum were below 18. From the same study we found that 78 girls were married before the age of 15 and of the 110 unmarried all had sexual relationship, abuse and violence happening to them before reaching the age of 15.

While discussing this matter with the girls and to find out why they got married before the age of 15 or / and why they were sexually abused they mentioned that they expected marriage to these men or were given in marriage to men who offered alliances to their parents. While working with the parents of these girls we tried to talk about the harm done to these girls where marriage had an important part to play, but we generally were stopped by the parents saying it is important to give the girl in marriage before she is 15 as is the practice in their religion and also socially sanctioned by both the Hindus and the Muslims.

In our study and our past experiences we have continuously found that child marriages put the girl in a situation where her physical and mental health is disturbed. Too many children are born when the body is not prepared for childbirth. Child birth and abortion leaves the girl harmed physically as it is almost abuse of her physical and mental status and we have seen many cases of girls running away when they have not been able to accept this abuse. The vulnerability of the girl after sexual abuse also increases when she looks for change and tries to run away from her status and gets into the hands of the traffickers who are organized and waiting to lure such young girls. It is very difficult to prove this sexual abuse as rape due to lack of evidence and it is very difficult to convince the families to condemn these as the institution of marriage is too strong and the social sanctions of this institution is in built and very difficult to protest against.

In the same study we also found out that 23 girls were brought into prostitution by their relatives (parents, uncles, aunts) and 15 were brought by their husbands and boy-friends (would be husbands). While looking at the educational level of these girl children we found that 120 of them were illiterate, 30 were just literate, 30 had been to the primary level and only 9 had crossed the primary level. Economically 104 girls came from below poverty level and lower income group families who thought marriage before the age of 15 would change the status of the girl child and a burden will be off the family.

It is not necessary to discuss at length the violence that these little girls went through in a brothel, or the STD that they are infected with but we surely need to mention that some of these girls were also HIV positive when the police rescued them. The concern is not only of child marriage but of the way a girl child is treated in the name of child marriage which is socially sanctioned and economically sought for by the under privileged families of this country. The discrimination of the girl child in India is still a major issue and child marriage is a very effective way of doing away with the responsibility of the girl child by the family. The law in this country forbids marriage of a girl child under the age of 18 but who is going to implement the law for those families where there is no education and very little economic stability?

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38B MAHANIRBAN ROAD  
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## SRAVANTI- A PROFILE

**Organization:** SRAVANTI  
(Association for Rural And Tribal Development)

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**Establishment Date:** 31-07-1992

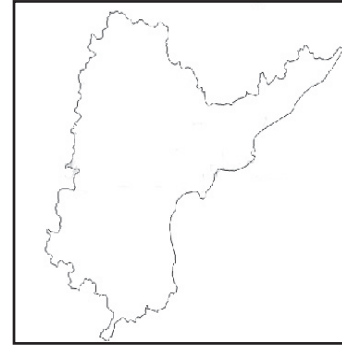
**Focus:** Women & Children

**Strengths:** Sravanti has got more than one decade experience in development field and has been involved in women and child development activities in the Godavari District. It has a strong resource team that has been involved in various government and non-governmental organizations' meetings and workshops. It has got linkages with National and International networks in the field of Anti-trafficking and child rights.

**Other information:**

Sravanti is nodal agency for Anti-trafficking committee of East Godavari District headed by District Collector. The organization has been engaged in awareness generation among adolescent girls and general public of the issues related to trafficking and HIV/AIDS in collaboration with UNICEF, Save the Children, Oxfam and Women Development and Child Welfare Department of Govt. of A.P. It has been the convener, A.P. Alliance for Child Rights, East and West Godavari Districts Region.

Mr. Durgesh Prasad, Chief Functionary of the Organization is a regular resource Person to District Rural Development Agency, East Godavari District, Forest and Fisheries Departments of Govt. of Andhra Pradesh for training on Participatory Rural Appraisal, Communication Skills, Community Organization and Conservation of Coastal Bio-diversity etc., Durgesh Prasad has worked as a consultant to "Disaster Mitigation Resource Institute" (DMRI), Vijayawada by CARE-INDIA with the support from European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO). Mr. Durgesh Prasad is presently member of Paryavaran Vahini, East Godavari District Unit (Ministry of Environment and Forests), Government of India, New Delhi. He is also one of the authors of an environmental education Book named "KRISHNA" published by Academy of Gandhian Studies, Hyderabad. He is a member, State Guidance Committee on Participatory Mangrove Conservation and Management, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, as well as a member, Working group on Disaster Preparedness Program headed by CARE, INDIA. He is also the district convener, A.P. Coalition in Defense of Diversity, East Godavari District chapter.



**VIMOCHANA**  
**DEVADASI PUNARVASATI SANGH,**  
**ATHANI-591304.**  
**BELGAUM DISTRICT, KARNATAKA STATE, INDIA**  
**(STATE AND NATIONAL AWARD WINNER)**



**DEVADASI**  
**(An euphemism for Prostitution)**  
**Uplift Her From the MORES of Social Mire**  
**GIVE HER DIGNITY.**

**Organization:** “Vimochana Devadasi Punarvasati Sangha” ATHANI-591304, Belgaum District, Karnataka State, INDIA.

**Status: N.G.O.**

**Registration Details:** Belgaum, 4th September 1985  
Registered Under: Karnataka Societies Registration act 1960.  
F.C.R.A. No.:094440036.

Year of Registration: 30<sup>th</sup> September 1985.

**Vision and Mission:**

Vision: Eradication of Social evils like Devadasi System.

Mission: Rehabilitation of victims of Devadasi system and commercial sexual exploitation and Trafficking & bring them into mainstream of the society.

**Geographical Area of Operation:** Karnataka State.

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## ASHA FOR EDUCATION



o r g a - **Asha for Education** is a not-for-profit organization established in 1991 at University of California Berkeley with the mission to ***catalyze socio-economic change in India through education of underprivileged children***. Over the past decade, **Asha for Education** has raised close to 4 million dollars and supported more than 400 educational and development related programs across 22 states of India. **Asha for Education** is a secular organization with no political affiliations. **Asha for Education** supports secular programs without any political affiliations. It is also a zero-overhead organization where volunteers bear all the administrative expenses; thus all the funds we raise is utilized for supporting educational programs in India.

With close to 45 chapters across US, 14 in India, 9 in Europe, Singapore, and Australia, **Asha for Education** has galvanised volunteers across the globe. Each chapter selects and evaluates projects independently, raising funds for the projects they propose to support. The volunteers play an active role in visiting the projects, interacting with the organization and the children, and in supporting it in whatever manner possible.

Our volunteers take a personal leadership in carrying out Asha's activities. Involvement with Asha has produced an awareness about developmental issues in India and has inspired a whole range of volunteers to get involved in other social causes. There has also been an increased emphasis on the formation of more chapters in India (called **Asha Centers**) so as to draw upon the collective energy and experience of part and full-time volunteers in India and to build closer bonds with our projects. These Asha centers also serve to network like-minded individuals, in addition to pioneering bold new initiatives in the field of education. Thus, Asha, while making a difference in the lives of underprivileged children of India, is also preparing a group of people who are more socially aware and socially responsible in their lives.

Clearly, identifying, researching, owning, funding, and sustaining projects has formed the core of Asha's activities till now. Asha raises funds for its projects in a number of ways: individual donations, corporate donations, sale of merchandise (T-shirts, calendars, mugs, greeting cards, etc.), fundraising dinners, Indian classical music and dance concerts, popular music concerts and many others.

Several Asha chapters also work towards **raising awareness in appropriate forums about various issues affecting the people of India**. This awareness-raising is accomplished by organizing discussion series, invited talks and study groups. Asha also acts as a network for various grass-roots workers and volunteers and non-governmental organizations.

To learn more about us log on to [www.ashanet.org](http://www.ashanet.org)

