

Report of Activities

During January to June 2009, the following activities were undertaken by JOSH.

1. The Second National Youth Convention:

The Second National Youth Convention on Youth and Democracy was held on the 21st and 22nd of February, 2009 in Bhilwara, Rajasthan. The convention was attended by over 1,200 young participants from both rural and urban areas of 11 states, including group from Srinagar and from Bangladesh. The convention was organized by MKSS, School for Democracy, SRAbhiyan and JOSH.

The two day convention was held to discuss and focus on the crucial role of youth in strengthening Democracy. The convention was structured with sessions on role of youth in democracy and politics, along with workshops of various concerns like negative impact of globalization, gender, Forest Rights, agriculture, Right to Education Bill, state of Dalits, Adivasis and Nomadic tribes, Human Rights, terrorism and security, Right to Information, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Education and Employment and others. The main objective of these workshops was to create a general understanding on these issues, the challenges in these areas, the role youth can play in addressing these concerns, and finally draw out a plan for action. Along with these there were expressive workshops like theatre, puppetry, film and photography, songs, media and journalism, (cartoons and) comics (poster making), dance and other modes of expression and communication. These workshops were facilitated by eminent resource persons like, Jagdeep Chokkar, the MKSS team (Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey, Shankar Singh and others), Dr. Muzaffar Bhatt from Kashmir, Malvika, Vipul Mudgal (eminent journalist) and others.

The first day started with the plenary on the role of youth in politics and democracy. Interesting views from the panel, on the issue were put forward. It was pointed out by the speakers that there is need for youth to take on greater

participation in politics and political processes. Crucial issues like transparency in the election process were discussed, where Mr. Ramlal Jat (MLA, Bhilwara) pointed out that the candidates are forced to spend undue money during election campaign and how such practices breed corruption later. Dr. Muzaffar Bhatt, activist from Srinagar spoke about the state of youth and democracy in Kashmir and human rights violations that has plagued all democratic processes there.

The workshops held on different issues highlighted and opened up discussion on important areas. *Resolutions for future action were passed in the closing plenary on the issues of employment, education, social activism and political participation.* The participants expressed the need for a national forum to take up issues related employment, education, and political participation of youth.

The second day of the convention started with an open session where presentations were done by the different workshop groups and also youth from different places shared about their work and ideas of democracy and politics. After which the participants divided themselves into four groups and discussed the role and the agenda for the youth in education, employment, social activism and politics.

Education is identified as one of the crucial issue affecting youth. The group discussed about the disparity in resources between the rural and urban youth. As an effort towards bridging this gap, the youth suggested that there should be resource centers whereby information and resources available to urban youth can also be shared with rural youth. There was also discussion about inclusion of Right to Information act and NREGA in the school curriculum.

Employment is another important issue that affects and concerns youth. On this the group suggested the need for an urban employment guarantee, like the NREGA, which will assure specified number of days of work in the city. It was also suggested that NREGA should also include semi and skilled labour, and the government should encourage labor intensive work and avoid use of machines at

work sites. This will help in opening up more employment opportunity for different types of labor.

Social activism was discussed as an integral part of the process of involving youth in different democratic process. In this the group discussed the importance of youth activism and the role it can play in bringing about constructive change in the society. The group then suggested that youth, in both urban and rural areas, should organize themselves and take on specific issues affecting them and work towards creating public opinion and awareness. This will help in ensuring their active participation in issues that affect them. Several young activists, from both urban and rural areas were present in this discussion and shared with the group their experience of working on different issues.



Discussion on Politics and the involvement of youth in it generated interesting inputs and plans for action. The youth suggested that they, as youth, should work, in their respective areas, against communal and caste based politics. They also proposed that as youth they should take more active interest in student politics and ensure that such bodies take up issues affecting the youth and students and also become accountable in their actions.

The first day of the convention concluded with a candle light march praying and demanding for peace and love; and against terrorism, hatred and all divisive forces. In this occasion tribute was paid to Late. Zaheen Matin, a young martyr from the city of Bhilwara who lost his life protecting the residents in Hotel Taj, in Mumbai, in the 26th September terrorist attack. The march started from the Ambedkar Circle, where the participants divided themselves into four groups, one led to the Jama Masjid, one towards the Badi Mandir, one towards the Gurudwara and the other to the Church in city of Bhilwara.



The Second national youth convention brought together youth from different backgrounds who shared their experiences of life and work with each other. It was an interesting mix of urban students from various colleges from Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur, Indore, to urban poor youth from slums in Delhi to youth from nomadic tribes and rural students and youth. Their interactions helped in breaking barriers of mind set and in understanding each others concerns, happiness and challenges. This convention has motivated all of us to open up more such spaces where youth can get the opportunity to interact with each other.



2. Jan Manch on Right to Information and Employment Guarantee:

A Jan Manch was held on the 21st of the March on the issues on Right to Information and Employment Guarantee. This forum was organized to interact with the representatives of the political parties, to give them a charter of demands from both the Right to Information and Employment Guarantee campaigns. Groups like MKSS, NCPRI, JOSH, Hazard Center, NFIW, Right to Food, NTUI, activists and several individuals linked with these campaigns came together to organize this Jan Manch held in the lawns of the Constitutional Club in Delhi.

Representatives from all national and some regional parties attended the Jan Manch, where they were presented with the charter of demands on Right to Information, NREGS and urban employment guarantee. Both the National Congress and Left parties agreed on many of the demands placed and thereafter included them in their election manifesto.

The **Indian National Congress (INC)** committed to broaden and increase the scope under the NREGA of the right to at least 100 days work in a year beyond households to everyone (individual adults). They also committed to link minimum wages, with the consumer price index by providing a real wage of Rs 100/- per day, as well as the commitment to enact a National Food Security Act (along with providing 25KGs of rice or wheat a month to every BPL family).

The Manifesto of the **Communist Party of India (Marxist)** goes beyond the commitments and the minimum demands of the Jan Manch in some respects by promising as many days of work as demanded. CPM also committed to provide for a universal PDS with subsidized food grains, and expansion of the Antodaya scheme.

The Manifesto of the **Communist Party of India (CPI)** also contains **all** the major demands of the Jan Manch, **on Employment** entitlements- both in rural and urban areas.

On transparency issues however, there has been **silence** of the parties who, (except for the CPI-M) have not even responded **to the demands to strengthen transparency, institutional accountability, and the Peoples Right to Information.**

While it was made clear that no dilution or amendment in the existing Right to Information Act 2005 is wanted, some suggestions as measures to strengthen implementation of the Act is been demanded. It may be note that the CPI(M) has promised to “strengthen the right to information Act” as well as enact the Lok Pal Bill. However, there are measures like the establishment of a National Council for the Right to Information, to help ensure effective implementation of the RTI Act, and Public Grievance Commissions to deal with issues of accountability and grievance redressal that have not been addressed in the manifestoes.

3. Implementation of Section 4 of the Right to Information Act, 2005:

Section 4 of the RTI Act lists 17 sub clause on which all public authorities are obligated to proactively disclose information about its functioning. According to the RTI Act, all public authorities were supposed to have implemented Section 4 within 120 days from the enactment of the Act (which is by 12th of October 2005). Section 4 is an important provision of the RTI Act, as it requires categorization and cataloging of information, presenting information in a form such that it can be accessed easily by citizens, update the information provided at regular intervals and publish all information such that it is widely disseminated.

An RTI application was filed by the members of JOSH (Joint Operation for Social Help) in November 2007 asking for implementation of Section 4 in University of Delhi and all the colleges. However, after the application reached as an appeal in front of the Central Information Commission (CIC), the CIC ordered complete implementation by the 14th of November 2008. Since section 4 still remained unimplemented in University of Delhi and its colleges, JOSH approached the CIC with appeals of non compliance. In response, the CIC proactively formed a committee of the members of JOSH, Public Information Officer of University of Delhi and an observer from CIC, with the aim to work together towards better implementation of Section 4 of the RTI Act. The one day seminar organized by the University of Delhi, to discuss and understand the different requirements under the Section 4 of the RTI Act was one of the efforts in this direction. The seminar on implementation of section 4 of the Right to Information Act, 2005 was held on the 7th of June 2009 in University of Delhi. This seminar was attended by the Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor, Registrar of University of Delhi, along with Shri Shailesh Gandhi (Central Information Commissioner) eminent social and political activists Smt. Aruna Roy and Shri Nikhil Dey and principals and public information officers of different colleges under University of Delhi.

JOSH initially started work with the University of Delhi authorities to help to compile all the information under the section 4 provisions of the RTI Act. In this direction several meetings were held to suggest changes and additions to the present information handbook of the University of Delhi. It was during one such meeting

that it was decided that a training and sensitization session for all the principals of the colleges under Delhi University will help in starting the process of assuring better implementation of Section 4 of the RTI Act.

This seminar, for the first time created a platform where issues of transparency and queries on implementation of Right to Information were discussed. The seminar was concluded by Shri Deepak Pentel assuring that transparency will only help the systems function better. He also urged to those present that they should view transparency and the RTI Act in the larger perspective of social justice.

As a follow up of the seminar, JOSH is working with authorities of different colleges and guiding them on how to improve reporting under the various provisions of the Section 4 of the RTI Act, 2005.

4. MAKSAD: *The community initiative started with youth in the slums of Kalyanpuri, Trilokpuri and Khichripur, in East of Delhi.*

In MAKSAD, during the following months regular classes, on basic computer learning and spoken English were held. During the months of December and January, three students from IIM, Indore joined as interns. They spent time with the Maksad team to help them in structuring the courses better and thereby making it more effective.

Students from MAKSAD also participated in the National Youth Convention in Bhilwara where they took part in different workshops and discussions held on the role of youth in politics, employment, social activism and education.

5. Youth Task Force: *The initiative of JOSH, working with students in various colleges and universities.*

- **Banner Signature Campaign on Internal Examination in Delhi University:** YTF team conducted an awareness campaign, by taking signature of students, on the irregularities in the Internal Examination system in Delhi University (DU). More than 1,500 students took part in this campaign and registered their protest by signing, against the arbitrary moderation of marks, class tests instead of assignment and non-transparent functioning of the Internal Assessment Committee.



Banners been signed





Banner signed by students

- **YTF, as one of the eight young achievers by NDTV:** NDTV featured YTF along with seven other youth initiatives in Delhi. They raised the issue of Internal Assessment and examination transparency and dedicated an episode, where YTF members, teachers and other students participated in a debate talking about the different problems of the non-transparent examination system in DU.



YTF members discussing transparency issues on NDTV

- **Awareness lectures in colleges on Transparent Examination System in Delhi University (DU):** Posters were pasted and several interaction meeting were held in different colleges to create awareness amongst students regarding their democratic right to ask for their evaluated answer sheets and a transparent examination system in their university.



Awareness campaign in process



YTF volunteers pasting posters

- **Irkam Ali: A victim of the non-transparent examination system of DU:** Ikram Ali, a student of Deshbandhu College is a victim of the non-transparent system in DU. Ikram has been detained is still in first year of his graduation, because for the last two years, the college and/or university of Delhi has not send his internal assessment marks due to which he has

been disqualified and failed in his examination. For the last two years he has been running from his college to the university, where each department has been passing the blame to another. A RTI application was filed by YTF, requesting the Central Information Commission to invoke the clause of 48 hours of the RTI Act. This was done, since date of examination registration was shortly due. The CIC refused to consider and hear the case under 48 hours, thereby depriving Irkam Ali the last chance of saving the third year lost in trying to get his Internal Assessment marks listed in his mark sheet. YTF members submitted a representation to the Dean of Colleges and sought her appointment. YTF members also tried to meet Dean of Examination regarding the issue.

Apart from these activities, regular meetings of YTF were held.



YTF Core Team after the weekly meeting

- **Right to Information against Faculty of Management Studies (FMS):** A RTI application was drafted by JOSH for Nitesh Duhan a student of FMS last year asking for break up of marks for his interview. Nitesh Duhan had scored the highest marks in the written qualifying examination for FMS, however he could not get his chose of course since he was awarded on 3 out of the total 30 marks assigned for group discussion (GD) and personal interview (PI). Appalled by this he decided to pursue the matter. Nitesh got in touch with JOSH in last year, to help him to access the break up of marks for his GD and PI. After getting no information from the public information officer, the case moved to first

appeal, where the Appellate authority ordered the PIO to furnish all information. Even after that there was no answer given. Considering all these, the Central Information Commission ordered a show cause to the Dean of FMS, also the PIO to furnish reasons for the delay in furnishing complete information even after the order of the Appellate authority. Fighting this case in front of the Central Information Commission, members of JOSH proved that the PIO of FMS, had on purpose tried to mislead the applicant and had mala fide intentions. The CIC agreed with the submission made from the applicant's side and levied penalty of Rs. 25,000/ on the Dean of FMS (PIO) and ordered that complete information to be given to Nitesh. This case was widely covered by the national media.

6. Participated in the Right to Transparent Governance Workshop,

Dhaka: This was a workshop organized by South Asia Human Rights (SAHR) in Dhaka on the 21st and 22nd of April 2009, where individuals working towards transparent governance in South Asian countries participated. There were members from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Maldives. JOSH participated on behalf of MKSS from India to share the history of the people's movement of Right to Information that unfolded in India. The status and present implementation experiences from India were also shared.

7. Right to Information Workshop for Students with Tehelka

Foundation, Delhi: A five days workshop was organized by Tehelka Foundation for students of Blue Bell School and Salam Balak Trust in Delhi on Right to Information. JOSH conducted several sessions on various aspects of the implementation of the RTI Act, and also how it can be best used by students.

8. Session with young entrepreneurs of Liberal Youth Forum:

A one day interaction with young entrepreneurs of LYF was arranged with JOSH. During this session, young representatives interacted with JOSH members to understand and learn from the experiences of working with youth on issues of governance.

9. Interview and experience sharing with Oberlin College, Ohio, USA:

Lauren Abendschein, Faculty of Oberlin College, Ohio visited JOSH to understand and learn more about the experience of working as young people on various issues of governance. This was part of her visit to India, South Africa and Brazil where she is meeting young people who have started their own work and have been able to make a difference, with the aim to get ideas to better design the curriculum of the Creativity & Leadership: Entrepreneurship program at Oberlin. JOSH was chosen as one of the case studies which they wanted to understand and learn from.

10. African-Asian civil society exchange on the UN Millennium

Development Goals: A meeting was organized for an Africa-Asia Civil Society Exchange with the objective of enabling the UN Millennium Campaign partners in Asia and Africa to share their experiences, challenges and success and also to forge a partnership on how they can support each other in advocating and campaigning for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. JOSH was chosen as one of the groups working on issues of transparency and governance, to share experiences from the field. This was held on the 23rd of June, 2009.

11. Participation in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

(NREGA) Rozgaar Mela in Vijayapura, Rajasthan: JOSH participated in the Rozgaar Mela organized by Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan and Government of Rajasthan. The Mela was held on the 25th of June, 2009. During this mela, a model for better transparency in NREGA works that have been developed by different civil society groups in Rajasthan were demonstrated. Hon able Chief Minister, Shri Ashok Gehlot, Hon able Central Minister for Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Institution, Shri C. P. Joshi, and Hon able Minister of State for the Department of Rural Development, Shri Bharat Singh along with other government officials was present at the Rozgaar Mela.

After have initiated a proactive campaign on implementation of Section 4 of the RTI Act, in Delhi, JOSH was given the opportunity to prepared a sample template for implementation of Section 4 of the RTI Act for Gram panchayats, which was then shared with the participants at the Mela.