

MSSO NEWS 2011



Annual Newsletter of Maharashtra Seva Samiti Organization (MSSO)

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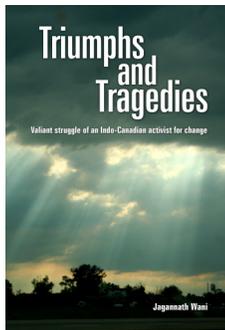
Generous donors of Maharashtra Seva Samiti Organization (MSSO),
with matching funds from
the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
make a difference in the lives of many less fortunate

MSSO Vision

- To promote sustainable development, economic as well as social, of the less fortunate

MSSO Mission

- To create long term partnership of Canadian donors and hardworking, selfless, grassroots social workers for building the future and for responding promptly to emergencies
- To enhance the value of donations through careful selection of NGO partners and effective management of development projects
- To empower women to participate as equal partners in achievement of social justice and equitable development
- To promote balance between development and environment



Triumphs and Tragedies - Dr. Jagannath Wani's life now in a book form!

We at MSSO have always marveled at Dr. Wani's uncanny ability to immediately sense greatness when he encounters it, through keeping his eyes, ears, and antennae open for effective MSSO involvement through NGO partners. Dr. Wani has finally chronicled how all of this happened

over the last almost-30 years. "Triumphs and Tragedies" is heart-rending story of his life and experience of personal heartbreak in India and in Canada, and how he turned this into a formidable body of activism to help those less fortunate. A must-read and an inspiration on both sides of the world, available from

MSSO 4 Strathbury Circle SW Calgary, Alberta Canada T3H 1P7	Price \$20 (Cdn or US) Including postage & handling, payable to MSSO
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Dr. Wani's work continues, even though he is phasing out and acting in an advisory capacity to the present MSSO Board. You will find below the stories of two remarkable individuals and their projects he discovered.

Disabled have Special Abilities

In 2000 Dr. Wani heard about a boy with no hands and no legs writing beautiful notes holding a pen in his teeth. Dr.

Wani was curious to meet this interesting determined individual. This was at the Helpers of the Handicapped in Kolhapur (HHK). There he found wheel chair bound HHK leader Naseema Hurzuk who had conquered her disabilities and had assisted hundreds of physically challenged to become fully functional. The visit later led to providing MSSO assistance to several projects of HHK. The latest project involved expansion of their integrated co-ed school. In the current year, 12% of the students enrolled in the school are physically challenged. So as to provide easy access to physically challenged students, the entire school is designed to be barrier free. The new first floor of the school was inaugurated on 3rd December 2010 by H.E. Mr. Daniel Bood, Canadian Consul, Political and Economic Affairs, Mumbai. The celebration was attended by Dr. Jagannath Wani and Board member Chandrakant Lad. The project received matching funds from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).



Canadian Consul Danniell Bood Inaugurating the new facility

The first batch of the students from the school appeared for the Secondary School Certificate examination at the end of the 10th grade in March 2011. In the class of 14, there were 5 physically challenged students. The two top performers were both physically challenged students.

It being the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, HHK also organized a ceremony for bestowing their two annual awards. Mrs. Rajani Limaye, President, Prabodhini Trust, Nashik, received the "Apang Mitra Puraskar" (Friend

of the disabled Award) for her dedicated service for education and welfare of the mentally challenged. Prabodhini Trust is one of MSSO project partners. The second award, “Bharari Puraskar” (Outstanding Disabled Achiever Award), was bestowed upon Prof. Madan Jagtap for outstanding leadership and excellence in the educational field despite severe disability. Mr. Chandrakant (CD) Lad released the 26th Annual Report of the HHK.



Jagannath Wani presenting the Outstanding Disabled Award

Nileema Mishra wins Magsaysay Award

Another of Dr. Wani’s discoveries is Nileema Mishra, 2011 winner of the prestigious award in all of Asia, the Ramon Magsaysay award, for her astounding work. The award is dubbed as the Nobel Prize of Asia. The award citation summarizes her achievements in the following words. “In electing Nileema Mishra to receive the 2011 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Emergent Leadership, the board of trustees recognizes her purpose-driven zeal to live and work tirelessly with villagers in Maharashtra, India, organizing them to successfully address both their aspirations and their adversities through collective action and heightened confidence in their potential to improve their own lives.”



Microfinance in action at BNGVN

Nileema decided very young to make a difference in the lives of poor villagers. Acting on Gandhian principles and armed with her education and 8 years’ experience, Nileema went back to her own village and founded Bhagini Nivedita Gramin Vigyan Niketan (BNGVN). Creating impact in the lives of the people, with their own efforts BNGVN believes that the solutions to the problems of the community have to

be found within the community. One major area of focus for BNGVN has been the formation of Small Savings Groups. Poor people are trapped into the vicious circle of debt with sky high interest rates. Droughts and epidemics make the situation worse. To resolve these problems, ‘microfinance’ was offered. While the community was getting empowered through microfinance, it was also necessary to inculcate some discipline as well as values. This led BNGVN to introduce the concepts like “Gram Nidhi” (Village Fund) and “Aadarsh Gaon” (Model Village). The Village Fund is used to make loans to the needy on the recommendation of the village assembly, which verifies that the beneficiary fulfills the eligibility criteria. Social pressure motivates the family to abide by the terms set by the village assembly. The beneficiaries, though poor, are really diligent in paying back installments of the loan. So far, BNGVN has recovered 100% of all their loans.



Group effort at BNGVN in making export quality quilts

Education of Rescued Child Labors

The Gandhi Society of Calgary last year collected \$4,000 to support education and development of rescued child laborers from brick factories in Kolhapur. The project is run by **Avani** which is the abbreviation of **Anna, Vastra, Nivara** (Food, Clothing, and Shelter). In October 2010, Cyrene Banerjee organized a luncheon in Calgary for **Arun Gandhi**, who shared delightful stories about his famous grandfather, Mahatma Gandhi. MSSO involvement included actual project visits and learning more about the Avani project.

Anuradha Bhosale, a victim of child labour herself, founded Avani in 1994 and is dedicated to the rights of child labourers in the Kolhapur district of Maharashtra, India. Avani provides the exploited, abandoned, or the poorest children with safe housing and education to prepare them for a life outside the prison of poverty. Since 2006, 5,300 children have been regularized by Avani and are currently attending government schools. Last year alone, Avani was responsible for the rescue and protection of 120 children. For the first eight standards of school, the Avani children attend a government sponsored school from 11:30 am to 5:30 pm. For the ninth and tenth standards, the children transfer to a privately run organization. Avani provides additional English classes and individual tutoring each evening following day classes.

Avani also works for the educational and health development of migrant children in the brickyards of the Kolhapur district. Every six months from October to May, migrant families

from the drought affected areas of Maharashtra come to Kolhapur to find work in the brickyards. The families live in very small, unhealthy dwellings without proper nourishment and clothing.



Avani School for children of brickyard workers

In recent times, the Avani staff have rescued the exploited children of these families and provided teaching at or near brickyard locations. With the help of Gandhi Society's donation, on January 1, 2011, Avani began operating five makeshift brickyard schools in the Kolhapur district, providing basic education and nutritious meals to 87 students (including 45 girls).



Snacks time at Avani

Individual sponsors who will donate \$350 (basically less than \$1/day) will be provided with details about the adopted child and his/her progress.

Agricultural Development and Education

Jnana Prabodhini, Solapur, started the project on 1st August 2008 and completed it on 31st July 2011 on schedule and within the approved budget. The major components included construction of academic and residence facilities for 120 students and 10 additional staff. MSSO contributed \$123280 and CIDA contributed \$384591.

All 100% of the available seats for admission to the diploma program are filled. The school has become a counseling center for the farmers in the vicinity. The water and soil testing facility is unique in the district and the farmers are using it extensively. The barren land hit by earthquake has become lush-green with 8000 fruit trees.



All graduates are gainfully employed; 113 joined their family farming, 21 have been employed in government schemes and 18 are working in private companies.

The partner has been very successful in the area of gender equality. In July 2007, there were only 10 girls in the class of 52, putting the percentage of female students at 19%. In July 2011, there were 27 girls in a class of 60. Thus the percentage of girls increased to 45%.



Providing Guidance to the Farmers

During the project period the partner organized 14 information meetings for the farmers, with the average attendance of 66. The attendees received guidance on various topics on agriculture including rainwater harvesting as well as on side businesses such as sheep, goat and pig rearing, tending honey bees, etc. Besides these meetings, farmers also visit the partner regularly for consultation.

At the start of the project the only plant nursery in the district was the one operated by the partner. Now, five past students of agriculture school have started their own plant nurseries.

The project site was recently recognized as an agricultural tourism center by the state government. It now attracts tourists including environmentalists, friends of animals and bird-watchers.

On the environment front, more than 8000 fruit trees have not only enhanced the environment but it also has added to income generation to support the project activities.

As part of the public engagement, the project coordinators toured North America for two months beginning 4th June 2009. They visited four cities in Canada and four in the U.S.A. They attended the biennial convention of Marathi speaking persons in Philadelphia where more than 4000 delegates from Canada and U.S.A. participated. They addressed the MSSO Silver Jubilee function in Calgary which was attended by more than 150 donors of MSSO. On the domestic front, a continuous stream of daily visitors, varying between 5 and 20, come to see the project.

Dr. Sampath Kumar, from CIDA's India Post in New Delhi, visited the project site from 20th till 22nd January 2010 and gave a very positive feedback on the progress of the project.



Dr. Sampath Kumar addressing the students

As a result of the CIDA assistance, the partner could create ideal school facilities and also could appoint well qualified staff. This helped in establishing a thriving agriculture education institution. There are two other institutions in the nearby districts providing similar diploma program in agriculture education. Each institution is allowed to admit 60 new students. In July 2010, the partner attracted more students than they could accept. So the enrollment quota was 100% full whereas the other two institutions did not attract enough students to fill their quota. They could enroll only 40 and 43 students respectively.

Gift of Sight – Popular Project with MSSO Donors

Many MSSO donors earmark their donations for free cataract surgeries for the less privileged. The quality service provided by the MSSO partner Sharda Netralay (SN) has increased the flow of patients traveling long distances to come to SN. To accommodate this unexpected increase of patients SN has to expand the hospital facility. Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission have approved the use of their funds for the urgently needed construction. The Alberta Government's Community Initiative Program has also approved matching funds for the construction under their International Development assistance plan.

In the year 2009-10, SN examined 27,096 patients in their OPD, provided 1,556 free cataract and other surgeries to less

privileged and partial subsidies to 1,091 patients. The mobile clinic provided free eye check up for 6,133 school children. Additional information about the ophthalmic hospital is available on the website: <www.shardanetralay.org>

Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr. Wani



The Brihan Maharashtra Mandal (BMM) of North America is the federation of over 50 associations of Marathi speaking persons in various cities and towns in Canada and the U.S.A. with the combined number of members exceeding 8,000 families. They hold their biennial conventions in different cities in North America. Their 15th biennial convention was held in Chicago in July 2011. Close to 3000 persons had registered for the convention. At the convention BMM conferred Lifetime Achievement Award on Dr. Jagannath Wani, MSSO Founder President, for his social work in North America and India. This is the first time ever BMM introduced the category of the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Donations to MSSO are eligible for tax credit
(charity registration No. 10765 4410 RR 0001).

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