



Mahila Shanti Sena

WOMEN'S PEACE BRIGADE INTERNATIONAL • FOUNDED: FEBRUARY 2002

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Assembled by Dr. Sri Gopal Mohanty

India Covid Crisis

Pandemic has posed the biggest challenge for the entire humanity. Country after country were devastated in the first phase and now the virus has returned with a deadly vengeance. For example, at the time of this writing, the total number of covid cases and number of deaths, respectively, stand at: 154 M(million) and 3.23 M worldwide, 20.7M and 226K for India, and 1.25M and over 24K for Canada. Saving lives is the call of the day. From frontline health workers in the hospital to teachers in the school and neighbor and social workers in the community, our humanity is under stress and their patience and resilience is under test.

MSS women responded to the challenge by immediately engaging themselves into action in their respective community. In the first phase of the pandemic, they did what they could do best like supplying food for the poor, cooking food for returning migrant labourers, organizing awareness campaigns, distributing freely self-made masks, taking care of children's education (see reports).

The situation in India has changed for the worst. COVID crisis has engulfed the nation; pyres are burning all through the night, people are losing their loved ones on their way to hospital due to shortage of oxygen, hospitals have no bed. Poor are starving - they have lost their livelihood. This crisis is unlike any other. Its tentacles are spreading to every corner of India. Ask anyone and you will hear that someone close to them is a victim of covid. The enormity of the catastrophe is creating a deep sense of helplessness.

And yet signs of hope and action are beckoning us to move and do whatever we can, as MSS women did in the first phase and as quite a few groups of youth volunteers are helping the neighborhood people. (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/covid19as-the-state-fails-society-rises-101620052757563.html>). At this critical juncture, MSS is getting ready to help with food, transportation of patients, and oxygen, in addition to supplying masks as a preventive measure.

Please help.

Sri Gopal Mohanty
Rama Shankar Singh

MSS – Partner Organizations

CANADA

Canadian Gandhi Foundation for World Peace,
Edmonton, Canada

INDIA

ADITHI (NGO)
Muzaffarpur, Bihar, India

Asha Darshan
Kumarkata, Assam

Gandhi Peace Foundation
Rajghat, New Delhi, India

Gandhian Studies Foundation
Rajghat, Varanasi, U.P., India

Jaya Prakash Bharati (NGO)
Rasulpur, Saran, Bihar, India

Kasturba Gandhi Foundation
Agartala, Tripura, India

Mahila Shanti Sena
Manipur, India

Shrambharati (NGO)
Khadigam, Bihar, India

Serv Seva Sangh
Doimukh, Arunachal Pradesh

Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS)
Kumarkata, Assam, India

Vision Society for Interactive Operational Needs (VISION)
Varanasi, India

Unnayan (NGO)
Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

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MSS is a registered not-for-profit
organization in Canada.

Declaration: The opinions expressed
in this newsletter are those of the
authors and not necessarily of MSS
or the partner organizations.

Mahila Shanti Sena (MSS) (Women's Peace Brigade International)

An International Peace Initiative co-sponsored by Centre for Peace Studies,
McMaster University (Canada) and Shrambharati (NGO, India) in 2002.

...Give women a chance...

...Make them agents of change...

...Help break the circle of poverty, violence and neglect...

...It (each village community) should be able to plan its total life in terms of economy, education, health and other things pertaining to local life. The village community needs an army of peace-workers, who will not fight among themselves but are willing to solve problems and resolve conflicts and disputes peacefully. In this task of neighbourhood-building, women are likely to be better than men. That is the rationale of Mahila Shanti Sena...

..Can we not use her (woman's) creative talents to make society more human and enlightened?

Acharya Ramamurti

What is Mahila Shanti Sena?

It is a peace movement

- to empower women in order to build a peaceful and just society
- to raise mass awareness among women to realize their strength and power
- to focus on problems facing women such as violence, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and neglect.
- to provide training in the rudiments of peace, democracy and development
- to promote Gandhian tradition of engaging in constructive village service.

Participation in MSS peace movement is open to both men and women.

When did it start and what has followed?

- Conceptualized by Late Acharya Ramamurti, a revered social activist and leader in Gandhian tradition.
- Created by rural women at the Buddhist City, Vaishali, in Vashali Sabha held in February 2002.
- Attracted about 10,000 women in Bihar to Vaishali Sabha.
- Founded by Shrambharati (NGO, India) and McMaster University.
- Spread to North Eastern States of India, UP and Odisha.
- Held three conferences, one in Vashali (2002) and supported by UNICEF and McMaster, the second in New Delhi (2005) supported by CIDA, Govt of India and McMaster, and the third in Sarnath, Varanasi (2007)
- MSS members getting elected to Panchayats and elected women joining MSS

How does it operate?

It fosters awareness among women on all the above issues through training camps, workshops and conferences and spreading in regions by formation of MSS groups of five or ten. It promotes neighbourhood building, peaceful settlement of mutual conflicts, peace rallies. It encourages to join other women groups, say self-help groups (SHG) for income generation.

Odisha MSS Covid-19 Activities

Rashmi Mohanty

During the pandemic of COVID-19, members of the MSS in different localities spontaneously generated awareness in their neighborhood about the destructive nature of this pandemic which is unlike other earlier ones and sensitize the people about its symptoms and severity and about preventive measures like maintaining social distance, using masks and often sanitizing hands. Several groups stitched masks in their respective locations and distributed them free to the needy. In some cases, they supplied masks to school children. In total more than 10,000 masks have been distributed. **(See picture #7, a mother with her small child is a volunteer).**

In some local areas, particularly in Jagatsinghpur and Mayurbhanj Districts, MSS volunteers helped returning migrant workers to reinstate in temporary quarantine facilities by encouraging them to lead normal routine life like doing daily exercises and celebrating festivals with precautionary measures. They supplied cooked food for them as well as other needy ones. In Jagatsinghpur, the volunteers distributed food materials donated by J.D. Centre for Arts.

Members of MSS have received praises from different quarters of the society for their selfless services.



Food preparation



Relief distribution



Mask stitching, and samples



Mask distribution team members in two blocks of Mayurbhanj District

Assam Covid-19 Relief Programme

Conducted by Asha Darshan in Baksa District, Assam in Collaboration with Asha for Education and Mahila Shanti Sena

Biju Borbaruah

Asha Darshan has done several activities to help the community during lockdown and post flood. AshaDarshan took some important steps to help people fight against the pandemic and continue engage the students with their studies even during the lockdown. Also help the flood affective people by providing foodstuff. These activities were done in collaboration with Asha For Education and in association with Mahila Shanti Sena (MSS).

Details mentioned below-

A) Distribution of Foodstuff to the poor families:

In March and April 2020 many poor families in Baksa district were facing food crisis. The main earning members in many families are daily wage labour and small business man. Due to lockdown they could not earn regularly. So, they face problems in maintaining their families. Though government provided food materials to the families, the quantity was not sufficient. Some students of these families are studying in the schools run by AshaDarshan. That is why AshaDarshan in collaboration with Asha For Education decided to provide some food stuffs by identifying the neediest families. Total 404 families covered for this relief.

B) Distribution of foodstuff among the students:

Asha Darshan has been running 8 schools in collaboration with Asha For Education. As the schools are closed due to lockdown, the foodstuffs of mid-day meal were unused. So these were distributed among the students'. Total 379 students were covered for this assistance.

C) Organization of awareness meeting on COVID 19:

AshaDarshan organized awareness meeting in 26 villages of Tamulpur area. In the meeting precautions to save from COVID 19 were explain.

D) Distribution of Mask among the rural people:

AshaDarshan distributed mask among 255 poor families. Also Asha Darshan trying to provide mask in coming days covering more families.

E) Distribution of soap: AshaDarshan has distributed soap among the poor families in

Tamulpur area. As a precaution to save from COVID 19 use of soap in hand washing is essential. AshaDarshan is planning to continue it, as because most of the families ignore it due to their poor financial conditions.

F) Continuation of classes for the students:

During the lockdown period we could not conduct online classes as most of the students have not android mobile phone. So, we tried to engage the students through tutorial classes. Teses classes were for small group i.e 10-15 students. COVID 19 protocol i.e, social distancing and hand sanitization ensured here.

G) Flood relief: The devastating flood in the month of June and July in Assam also affect in some areas of Tamulpur development block. We have distributed foodstuff among 57 families covering 2 villages of Tamulpur area. Also we are going to distribute foodstuff among 149 families covering 1 villages of Jiadhali chariali area under Dhemaji District.





Mahila Shanti Gandhigram, Tamil Nadu” COVID-19 pandemic Report

Kalpana Mohanty



Mahila Shanti Sena members have been doing some good work during the Covid-19 pandemic. They have tried to see that people in their villages remove fear from their mind and continue to be more positive. They have advised women to prepare a balanced and nutritious diet that would help in increasing immunity of their family.

As advised by Prof. Sri Gopal Mohanty and Dr. Rama Singh, Dr. Kalpana suggested and requested to all the MSS members whom she briefly met a few days back to do exercise, meditation, reading, and singing. She will teach relaxation exercise at the earliest opportunity.

On 8th June, Gandhigram Trust with the donation from philanthropists distributed Ayurvedic kits to all the children of the crèche centre belonging to Gandhigram Trust and Gandhigram Rural Instituted -Deemed to be University. Sixteen Mahila Shanti Sena members received totally sixteen kits for all the crèche children. The kits consists of

1. Child friendly mask
2. Chyavanprash (An ayurvedic combination for increasing immunity)
3. Amla in honey

4. Ayush kwath (A powder for preparing decoction as a preventive for covid-19)
5. Groundnut cake
6. Neem soap for washing hands



Awareness was given to the crèche teachers about the importance of three things to be followed regularly

1. Wearing the masks
2. Washing the hands
3. Maintaining social distancing

Drawing sessions were organized by the MSS members for children in Thopampatti and Melkaraipudur villages. They had taken all precautions like wearing masks and maintaining social distancing.

Online sessions on drawing, story writing and poetry recital were also organized by Dr. R. Kalpana



(through coordination of Shanti Ashram, Coimbatore) for children by sending WhatsApp messages.

The MSS members who are also Crèche teachers have attended some online classes on different topics, like the different aspects of pre- school education, simple dance for children, poetry writing and storytelling.



All around the world, millions of people hushed on Feb. 18 to hear NASA aerospace engineer **Swati Mohan** calmly announced, “Touchdown confirmed. Perseverance is safely on the surface of Mars, ready to begin seeking the signs of past life.” She is the mission’s guidance, navigation and controls operations lead, effectively the eyes and ears of the spacecraft on its seven-month, 300 million-mile cruise to Earth’s neighboring planet.



Professor **Veena Sahajwala** is known as the “Queen of Waste”. She is an inventor and Professor of Materials Science at University of South Wales, Australia and the Director of the UNSW SM@RT Centre for Sustainable Materials Research and Technology. She is internationally renowned for pioneering the high temperature transformation of waste in the production of a new generation of ‘green materials’.

International Women's Day

Sri Gopal Mohanty

As usual, the International Women's Day was celebrated on March 8. The time is most appropriate to remember and recognize women's many achievements and accomplishments. For instance, it is overwhelmingly impressive to see 23 women to be heads of their respective Governments. The following is the list:

Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany;
Sheikh Hassina Wajed, Prime Minister of Bangladesh;
Erna Solberg, Prime Minister of Norway;
Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland;
Bidhya Devi Bhandari, President of Nepal;
Saaro Kuugongelwa, Prime Minister of Namibia;
Mette Frederiksen, Prime Minister of Denmark;
Kersti Kaljulaid, President of Estonia;
Tsai Ing-Wen, President of Taiwan;
Ana Brnabic, Prime Minister of Serbia;
Halimah Jakob, President of Singapore;
Jecinda Ardern, Prime Minister of NZ;
Katrin Jakobsdottir, Prime Minister of Iceland;
Sahle Work-Zewde, President of Ethiopia;
Salome Zourabichvili, President of Georgia;
Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados;

Paula-Mae Weekes, President of Trinidad and Tobago;

Maia Sandu, President of Moldova;

Sanna Marin, Prime Minister of Finland;

Zuzana Caputova, President of Slovakia;

Katerina Sakellaropoulou, Prime Minister of Greece;

Ingrida Simonyte, Prime Minister of Lithuania;

Rose Christiane Raponda, Prime Minister of Gabon.

While celebrating women and their accomplishments during March, something else has drawn the world's attention most acutely and severely, that this month is the first anniversary of imposed locked down due to corona virus pandemic.

In India, because of immediate lock down with minimum notice, the survival of a certain section of daily wage earners and the sudden flow rush of returning migrant labourers became the utmost challenge mostly in rural areas. Rural people also confronted with the awareness related to the virus – understanding the seriousness of the pandemic and the need of using masks, maintaining social distance and frequently washing hands.

Unnoticeable are many women including MSS members who spontaneously and bravely volunteered to provide immediate help particularly on those issues stated above. Their coming forward is something arising from their inner feelings with no aspiration for being recognizable leaders.

Let's celebrate them and their presence among us. Let us remember them on the International Women's Day.