

CLAIMING DIGNITY AND JUSTICE



Story of a Dalit Madiga Women's Collective
Jagrutha Mahila Sanghatane (JMS)

Dedicated to the courageous Dalit Madiga Women of Karnataka who continue their struggle to claim dignity and justice

For Private Circulation only

Jagrutha Mahila Sanghatane

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Karnataka

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At the turn of the second millennium: 1999 - 2000.....



.... the beginning was tough. Lives of Dalit Madiga women were entrenched in hunger and starvation. Forced into bonded labour, involving back-breaking, low paid work, for which they were routinely denied wages, women began lives as child-brides becoming mothers without experiencing childhood or adolescence. They were beaten up at home and outside, pushed away from common spaces - water sources and wells, denied access to panchayats and hospitals, socially boycotted when they did not obey landlords, molested-raped- paraded nude when 'their' boys and girls fell in love with 'others' and more.....

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September 2001... yet another Dalit woman was violated! Yerramma from Vanenuru village in Bellary district, was stripped and paraded nude for over a kilometre in the village, later tied to a flag post in front of the gram panchayat, kicked and beaten up by dominant caste men and women till she fell unconscious. She was blamed as having been instrumental in the elopement of a Dalit boy and an dominant caste girl...

The Jagrutha Mahila Sanghatane (JMS) was just forming. And this incident opened up unhealed wounds and the dalit women decided it was time to claim their dignity....within households and outside!

The district of Raichur, with its feudal history of being part of the Nizam state, provided a perfect example for the embodiment of caste-class-patriarchal mix resulting in violence on Dalit women and violation of their dignity both within and outside their homes. Raichur, the drought prone area of the deccan plateau, hailed as the rice bowl of Karnataka, was also home to the most marginalised communities in the state, the Dalit Madigas. A deadly combination of an entrenched caste system including extreme forms of untouchability and patriarchal values was enforced with an iron hand by the feudal landlords belonging to the dominant community, some of whom ironically professed to be followers of Basava Dharma (Religion preached by Basaveshwara based on equality and social justice).

When the oppressed Dalits showed signs of resistance and dared to transgress caste subjugation, they were dealt with severely. Women were stripped naked and paraded in the open, and not infrequently, the entire community was forced into submission through social and economic boycott. Emerging from these experiences of extreme caste-based oppression, Raichur became the cradle of Dalit liberation movement in early 80's which was spearheaded by Prof. B. Krishnappa and was called the Dalit Sangharash Samiti (DSS). With the DSS came the hope of a large-scale dalit mobilization, dalit assertion and liberation. However by 2000, the DSS had splintered into several factions with hardly any presence of Dalit women in any one them. Rapes and molestations of Madiga women became merely symbolic, rallying points for caste identity when the sexual assault was by dominant castes; however the gender based discrimination and violence within Dalit communities and households was not even acknowledged!

The triple burden and discrimination imposed by the oppressive structures of caste – patriarchy - class heavily weighed on the dalit women agricultural labourers and continued without any resistance.

Such systemic oppression needed something more than slogans that one heard at the turn of the millennium, when several Dalit groups in the country were gearing up to put caste onto the global map of discrimination in the upcoming Durban Conference in 2000. It required a form of resistance to emerge from within the dalit community to confront gender based injustice within and caste-gender based injustice in the larger society.

At such a juncture, a small social experiment started in and around an insignificant village called Pothnal in Manvi taluk of Raichur district in 1999. Jagrutha Mahila Sanghatan (Conscientised Women's Collective) is a story of a social experiment aimed at catalysing the birth of a grassroots Dalit women's voice to resist and counter the hegemonies of caste, class and gender. The two-pronged strategy that guided the process was - *sangharsh* (struggle) for rights and *navnirman* (reconstruction, re-creation) for dignity. Through a process of social mobilisation and collectivisation, interrogation of the structures of oppression, using organised power to confront head on violence related to caste and gender, the Madiga women have battled an uphill struggle for justice, equality and dignity.

The Madiga women have come a long way from being unable to sit even for an hour at the sangha meetings to entering the thresholds of gram panchayat to demand their entitlements, obtaining bank loans for their collective activities, monitoring local PHCs and anganwadis and importantly raising a strong, collective voice against violence.

The sixteen year journey from being 'unorganised Madiga women agricultural labourers' to becoming Jagrutha Mahila Sanghatane(JMS) , can be described as a social experiment of moving with the community at their own pace ushering in processes to increase their ownership and control over the very processes of this social experiment.

This photo book is an attempt to capture some glimpses of JMS's journey – the collective of Dalit Madiga women agricultural labourers, moments from their lives and struggles, their journey of *sangharsh* and *navnirman* (struggle and reconstruction) which has continued for a decade and a half...

The history of JMS is a journey where Dalit Madiga women took charge of their life to be active citizens rather than being passive and hapless victims. The collective strength was realised through historical struggles, numerous campaigns initiated for claiming spaces and rights. It meant that they had to resolve to come out of the confines of their households and villages, take to the streets and visit different places even beyond Raichur to explore newer paths and move ahead against all odds and frustrations. It meant they had to question all forms of oppression and exploitative power relations within their own community and in the caste-ridden society. In fact, the street was their school to gain new consciousness and experience the power of the collective. The process gave rise to a number of women leaders from the community, who in their own way decided to take lead.

Chilipili school for children from the Dalit community has gained a reputation as among the best residential bridge schools in the district. Healing themselves from the all pervasive violence and healing not less than 5000 men and women with their herbal medicines has brought them recognition from different corners. Awards recognising their journey and struggle includes Citigroup's National Award for community venture of neem fertiliser (2006), leadership award by Karnataka state government and National Commission for Women (2013).



Madiga community, through an oppressive societal arrangement was relegated to doing 'impure' jobs of disposing the dead animals, skinning the cows, preparing products from animal skin like footwear which the dominant castes used, and beating drums during dominant castes funerals as well as joyful ceremonies . The Dalit movement changed such equations slowly, atleast for men. But the cultural space for women continued to be restricted. Using cultural spaces such as community celebrations, Ambedkar Jayanti, songs and dance, using traditional drums and a unique cultural get-together of women during the hot dry summers known as *byasige habba* (summer festival) were the key processes for mobilising and organising Dalit women.





Yerramma was paraded nude... standing by her in solidarity gave us the strength to start questioning caste based violence.



Building on our strengths and capacities we came together as a collective to question centuries old discrimination, violence and atrocities embedded in the societal structures.



While men only beat the drums, women gradually took leadership.

Meanwhile
we continued
to protest against
discrimination
and
violence on women,
both
at home and outside.





Questioning caste barriers was not possible without taking a public platform; and what better platform than Ambedkar himself!

Confronting caste and gender based violence was the primary motive that shaped the formation of Jagrutha Mahila Sanghatan. Its core agenda was shaped by the principles of social justice, equity and commitment to human dignity.

JMS women called for the first ever historic *Pothnal Bundh* and *rasta roko*, protesting against the assault and parading nude of Yerrama, a Dalit Madiga woman, in Vanenur village of neighbouring Bellary district in September 2001. This historic solidarity and massive public show of strength firmly ingrained in the collective memory of Dalit women, carved the identity of JMS and its future course.

Relentless struggles continued against all forms of violence and discrimination (domestic as well as caste based) against Dalit women, evoking a response from the otherwise unresponsive and lethargic police and administrative machinery to Dalit women 's issues, in Raichur district.



Pregnancy and maternity care were the poignant points of caste discrimination. Health care personnel avoided touching Dalit women without which ante-natal and post-natal care were incomplete and deprived the women of both forms of care. Ironically, health personnel and health centres were spaces where dalit women experienced untouchability and caste discrimination, instead of health, wellbeing and dignity. Corruption and informal payments for certifying various pensions such as widow pension, old age pension and disability pension was the additional 'informal tax' they had to pay for being poor and marginalised. JMS campaigned to reclaim the primary health centres (PHC) through a continuous campaign, known as *nodi namma prathamika arogya kendra* (Know Your PHC) which included resisting all corrupt practices, visiting and monitoring PHCs and a constructive yet critical engagement/dialogue with the health administration.





We started reclaiming our public spaces and entitlements in public service systems.... Gram Panchayats, Primary Health Centres, Public Distribution System, Anganwadis and schools.



With increased awareness of political systems, we started claiming our space in Gram Panchayats.

Even though the state of Karnataka ushered in the Panchayat Raj institution in the country much before the 72nd and 73rd constitutional amendments on local governance, Dalit women had never participated in gram sabhas or stepped into a gram panchayat till the year 2000. The gram panchayats were still in the stranglehold of the land lords and gram sabhas, if and when held, continued to be held in dominant caste areas which Dalits in general and Dalit Women in particular had hardly any access to. The campaign to claim governance space was facilitated by JMS through a prolonged campaign called *nodi namma grama panchayat* (see your gram panchayat). At times, it meant cancellation of gram sabhas held without notice and confronting authorities for not conducting *gram sabhas*.



Larger struggles and solidarity for social justice have inspired JMS. It led agricultural workers' struggles to make it a labour movement of all subaltern communities during the prolonged years of drought (2001-2004). This included the struggle against harvesting machines employed by land lords which had displaced labour successively for three years. In 2004, the government imposed the first ever historic ban on paddy harvesting machines for the year 2004-05 in the district of Raichur.

JMS actively supported Dalit movements on issues of atrocities as well as in demanding proportionate reservation for Madigas (Madiga Meesalathi Horata Samiti) in Karnataka. At the national level, solidarity with National Alliance of People's Movements, Narmada Bachao Andolan, People's health movements continued.



The building blocks of JMS were the units of women that got formed in about 50 villages in and around Pothnal, spread across Sindhanur and Manvi Talukas of Raichur District. The Madiga women found creative ways of crafting their own identity in each village by finding their own space through weekly meetings, perspective building sessions on caste-class-patriarchy, taking responsibility to manage their group savings and negotiating with the banks, taking up issues of common concern in each of the villages such as sanitation, drinking water, functioning of anganwadis, availability of food-grains in the PDS (fair-price shops) and work, participating in *gram sabhas* and registering their names for benefits such as housing and scholarships for children. It is here that issues of violence, atrocity and discrimination were discussed and decisions taken.



Sometimes we took
microphone
to speak, sing
and yet other times
we hoisted flags
in our communities.



Being agricultural labourers and adept at managing households on scarce resources, the Dalit women inherently exhibit entrepreneurial spirit where risk-taking is inevitable. The lack of space for exercising such collective enterprise was a great barrier. JMS cultivated such spaces through cultural get-togethers and collective enterprises in their own villages. Some enterprises such as neem fertiliser production and terracotta handicrafts & jewellery, branded as CHIGURU Enterprise, outclassed all expectations by producing and selling products of great quality.

The experiment was also of building ownership and control over the process of decision making. The neem fertiliser unit led by group of women from Muddanaguddi village and the neem fertiliser has been certified by local farmers for its quality. The CHIGURU enterprise has won awards for women for enterprise and leadership. Women's perseverance against all odds has now survived 16 years and continues to grow with its own cadence of ups and downs as the old leadership seeks younger more educated comrades to join the sanghatan to expand its scope to meet new challenges in dalit madiga women's struggle for equality, dignity and justice.





We led rallies and protests demanding wage and work, and work, we did get!.

Work and wages are the life-lines of agricultural and wage labourers. Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) assured 100 days of work per rural household... However, the nexus between dominant class and Panchayat members, use of machinery and forging documents emerged as a huge impediment to the realisation of this entitlement. The average annual work provided under the scheme in 2009 stagnated at 8 days per household. JMS joined hands with larger labour unions and networks such as Grameena Kooli Karmikara Sanghatane (GRAKOOS) to demand for 100 days of work for all workers.

The mobilisation over two years in nine panchayats made an average of 80 days of work available to all household in 2011. In some villages ... they even completed 100 days of work! All in all, over three years, through JMS' effort, wage labourers were able to access work worth 4.5 crores. It meant, however, confronting corruption at multiple levels and engagement with the Gram Panchayats to help implement the programme.



Chilipili school went beyond literacy and the educational curriculum to be a school of life and learning where Dalit boys and girls learnt to live together, respecting each others' spaces and boundaries. Most of them were above the age of 9 years and totally unfamiliar with the written word or numerals. However, with two years of intensive facilitation most of them enrolled in the 5th or 6th standard while some exceptionally talented children enrolled in 7th and even 8th standard in mainstream schools. Most of them cruised ahead of the other privileged children in their schools to become leaders. Renuka, one such girl from Tadakal village, even brought laurels to the district by scoring 78% in 10th Standard.

The quality of the work, dedication of teachers and ownership of children over the Chilipili School tested JMS' resolve to negotiate a government programme (National child labour programme) without giving bribe for 16 long years! Chilipili School, was JMS' investment for the future of Dalit community as it saw over 600 children passing through its school.



The arrival of a tractor at JMS, ushered in a new sense of ownership and confidence in women. It lessened their dependency on the dominant caste tractor owners for transportation of neem seeds, transportation of women for rallies and for land development. Tractor became an important part of reconstruction activities such as neem fertiliser, land development and transportation means for children's activities. During the floods in 2009, the tractor distributed relief materials. In the land development of 55 families in four villages, tractor served a useful purpose. It also served as a mobile theatre during the campaign to revive the public distribution system, carried sloganeering women for various rallies and provided an edge to JMS in a number of its activities.

ಲೈಫ್‌ಲೈನ್ * ಸತ್ಯವಿ * ಕತಕಾರ ಬುಧವಾರ 22.06.2011

ಮಾನ್ವಿ:ಉ.ಖಾ.ಕೂಲಿ ಹಣ ಪಾವತಿಸಲು ಒತ್ತಾಯಿಸಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಂದ ತಾ.ಪಂ. ಕಾರ್ಯಾಲಯದ ಮುಂದೆ ಧರಣಿ

ಸುದ್ದಿಮೂಲ ವಾರ್ತೆ ಮಾನ್ವಿ ಜಿ.ಎ.21

ಉದ್ಯೋಗ ಖಾತ್ರಿ ಯೋಜನೆಯಡಿ ಯಲ್ಲಿ ಕೆಲಸ ಮಾಡಿದ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ ಕೂಲಿ ಹಣ ನೀಡಬೇಕೆಂದು ಒತ್ತಾಯಿಸಿ ನೂರಾರು ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಸೋಮವಾರ ತಾ.ಪಂ.ಕಾರ್ಯಾಲಯದ ಮುಂದೆ ಧರಣಿ ನಡೆಸಿದರು.

ಪೋಷ್ಕಾಡ್ ಜಾಗೃತಿ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಸಂಘಟನೆ ಮತ್ತು ನವ ಜೀವನದ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಒಕ್ಕೂಟದ ನೇತೃತ್ವದಲ್ಲಿ ಉಟಕನೂರು, ಪೋಷ್ಕಾಡ್, ಹಿರೇಕೊಟ್ಟೆಕಲ್, ಚಿಕ್ಕಕೊಟ್ಟೆಕಲ್, ಬಾಗಲವಾಡ, ಅಮೀನಗಡ, ಸಾದಾಪುರ, ಕುರ್ಡಿ, ಬ್ಯಾಗವಾಟ ಬಾಗೂ ತೋರಣದಿನ್ರಿ ಗ್ರಾ.ಪಂ.ಗಳ ನೂರಾರು ಮಹಿಳಾ ಕೂಲಿಕಾರರು ಬಾಕಿ ಇರುವ ಕೂಲಿ ಹಣ ನೀಡಬೇಕೆಂದು ಒತ್ತಾಯಿಸಿ ಬೆಳಿಗ್ಗೆಯಿಂದ ಸಂಜೆವರೆಗೆ ಪ್ರತಿಭಟನೆ ನಡೆಸಿದರು.



ಪ್ರಮುಖ ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳಾದ ಬಾಕಿ ಕೂಲಿ ನೀಡಬೇಕು, ಜಾಬ್ ಕಾರ್ಡ್ ವಿತರಣೆ ಮಾಡಬೇಕು, ಗ್ರಾ.ಪಂ. ಯೋಜನಾಧಿಕಾರಿಗಳು ಪಂಚಾಯತಿಯಲ್ಲಿದ್ದು ಸರಿಯಾಗಿ ಕಾರ್ಯ ನಿರ್ವಹಿಸಬೇಕು, ಕೆಲಸ ನೀಡದಿದ್ದರೆ ನಿರುದ್ಯೋಗ ಭತ್ಯೆ ನೀಡಬೇಕು ಎಂಬ ಪ್ರಮುಖ ಬೇಡಿಕೆಗಳ ಮನವಿ ಪತ್ರವನ್ನು ತಾ.ಪಂ.ಕಾರ್ಯಾಲಯದ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥಾಪಕ ರಾಮಧಾನ್ ಅವರಿಗೆ ಸಲ್ಲಿಸಿದರು.

ಮನವಿ ಸ್ವೀಕರಿಸಿದ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥಾಪಕರು ಸಂಭಂಧಪಟ್ಟ ಗ್ರಾ.ಪಂ.ಗಳ ಓಡಿಓಗಳಿಗೆ ಈ ಕುರಿತಂತೆ ಸೂಚನೆ ನೀಡಿ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆ ಬಗೆಹರಿಸುವ ಭರವಸೆ ನೀಡಿದರು.

ಈ ಧರಣಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಜಾಗೃತಿ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಸಂಘಟನೆಯ ಪದಾಧಿಕಾರಿಗಳಾದ ಚಿನ್ನಮ್ಮ, ನರಸಮ್ಮ, ಸುನಂದಾ, ಸಲೀನಮ್ಮ, ಸಿದ್ಧಮ್ಮ, ರತ್ನಮ್ಮ ಇನ್ನಿತರರು ಭಾಗವಹಿಸಿದ್ದರು.

For over half a century, some of the Dalit women had never seen the National flag being hoisted. At the most, they had been merely spectators when the flag was hoisted in a nearby school on the independence day (15th August) or republic day (26th January) every year. Most of the children from Dalit communities were not in school.

When the Chilipili School was established in the village, for the very first time, the national flag was hoisted within the Dalit Community by a Dalit woman, the President of the Sangha. Children and teachers from the mainstream school were obliged to visit the Chilipili community school at least twice a year.



In the mid-90's, Raichur district had the dubious distinction of topping the country India in the number of child labourers! Caste oppression, feudal stranglehold and extreme poverty forced Dalit children to dropout of dysfunctional primary schools and pushed them into bonded labour or *jeeta padhati* . Along with JMS' efforts to make schools accessible to Dalit children, Chilipili Child Labourers' Special School began in the year 2000 in Markamdinni village (about 12 kms from Pothnal) with the dream of confronting the systemic violence against young children and to restore their dignity. Between 2000 and 2008, it was a day school run in the community centre (Ambedkar Bhavan) located within the dalit community. From 2008-2015, it functioned as a residential school for boys and girls at the JMS centre, Pothnal.





Being deprived of education ourselves, we decided that our children will get quality education and claim their rightful space within the public education system.



As we understood our privileges, rights and entitlements, our children started understanding politics, growing beyond books.



For our children we dreamt *navnirman*, a new world of hopes and dreams.

JMS' 16 year old Chilipili School came to be known as the best model school run under the National Child Labour Project by the government in the district of Raichur. Beyond getting children ready to compete, survive and excel in the formal school, it was a centre for creative learning through the medium of theatre, songs, dance, sports, exposures and meeting various personalities from within the community and outside.

More than all, it meant a school of life for boys and girls from Dalit Communities to live together respecting each other and grow together as friends. They also interacted with the members of JMS and members of their own community, as they heard inspiring stories of Ambedkar, Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule.





Meanwhile our children enjoyed the peaceful learning environment at Chilipili School while learning through dance, art and theatre.

Claiming spaces in the villages was equally a long drawn struggle for women as it was for resisting oppression and exploitation as a collective. The women were constantly pushed to prove themselves of their capacity to come together, stay together and to work together. It meant that they had to meet challenges within their own households, confront a collective resistance from the men in their own Dalit community and challenge fierce patriarchal barriers in the villages. At times women ventured into the male bastion of taking up contracts of public works from the government against all odds, as was the instance of a road construction in Muddanagudi village. Every single enterprise of women, such as this, is a saga of struggle against various power bastions. Such a confidence grew through the solidarity that women nourished through their interactions with each other in the *sanghas*.



• ಸ್ವಸಹಾಯ ಸಂಘಗಳಿಗೆ ಸಾಮರ್ಥ್ಯ ತರಬೇತಿ



We also claimed the roads, their construction and our passage to liberation.



We reclaimed our lands lying fallow for decades, not only through our enterprise but also through our collective understanding of entitlements.



Inherently we are entrepreneurs and through collective strength we demonstrated it. Meanwhile participating in sports opened our minds and gave wings to our dreams

Though most of the Dalit households have been landless agricultural labourers, some of those who got lands from government under various development programmes, had remained fallow as it needed investment to make them cultivable. Access to and ownership of natural resources, a key belief of JMS as part of empowerment, led collective enterprise of cleaning up of about 125 acres of 55 households and rendering it cultivable through organic manure. Even during the semi-drought years, with whatever rainfall was available, communities cultivated food crops which not only produced food, but fodder for animals as well. The micro water-shed that was implemented in these lands was instrumental in soil conservation and water storage in these fields.



JMS approached the issue of health as part of the larger vision of wellbeing and dignity with the perspective of enhancing Dalit women's autonomy over health resources. The slogan was *namma arogya namma kayi-yalli* (our health in our hands). The primary focus of JMS' struggles was to demand health entitlements with dignity at government health centers, government hospitals and anganwadis as well as creating a team of health workers to address primary health care needs. Herbal medicines have been a part of the health culture of the region. However this was a neglected space with the dominance of the allopathic systems of medicine.

The Sanghatan trained health workers in the knowledge systems of local health traditions for reviving it. Women gained knowledge, worked with ease and skill to grow and use medicinal plants to prepare herbal medicines. This was the beginning of a new sense of identity as a health worker. Women became healers in their own communities and also produced various kinds of medicines based on traditional knowledge for diseases such as skin diseases, pains, paralysis, anemia and white discharge.





As healers, we listened to others' struggles to bring healing to minds and bodies. We also ventured into packaging traditional knowledge into herbal healing products - oils, decoctions...



As intricate parts of our lives came together, we strung terracotta beads into ornaments that adorned others' lives and ours!

Moulding and shaping the lives of over 600 drop-out children through Chilipili School, which had equal number of girls as well, was an important exercise that JMS ventured into. It transformed the lives of many children, who otherwise would have continued through the drudgery of life. Now many of them are enrolled in professional institutions and universities pursuing higher education. The new generation brings hope to break the shackles of bondage and slavery.



Working with the most marginalised, landless, Dalit, women agricultural wage labourers meant, it was literally the most resourceless community one could think of! Beyond mere economics, building livelihood meant claiming dignity for them. Women learnt a range of skills - preparing incense sticks, tailoring, embroidery, preparing organic pesticides, organic cultivation of paddy and pulses, community land development, vermi compost, herbal medicines, making terracotta articles, neem fertiliser and so on. This also meant that women had to firmly believe in a process that was unfamiliar and invest their time in it with a hope that returns would come soon.

The ones which survived the test of time got consolidated under the banner of CHIGURU - the terracotta jewellery unit, herbal medicines unit and neem fertiliser unit. The terracotta jewellery, a much sought after product in the country and abroad, apart from being a livelihood assurance for a few women, brought immense sense of dignity to them by being the best in the market. In many places JMS women also came to be known as CHIGURU women. (*Chiguru* means new shoot)



The floods of Oct 1-2, 2009 in North Karnataka and adjoining Andhra Pradesh took people of Raichur unawares as they were just recovering from a failed monsoon and declared drought. Almost a million people were affected. The JMS office, which is located in the original habitation of Dalits in Pothnal, was flooded in the night and children of Chilipili School were miraculously rescued from the rising flood waters.

JMS suffered a massive loss of equipment, materials, terracotta jewellery and whole stock of freshly made neem fertiliser. Number of villages around also suffered heavy damage. Rebuilding lives and livelihood - both were huge challenges that JMS faced as always with equanimity and quiet dignity.





And in the floods of October 2009 in North Karnataka, our JMS office and campus were devastated, so also the villages around. But we rebuilt our lives again.

The Decennial Celebrations of JMS held in 2011, was an important land mark event which the JMS leadership organised. JMS had earlier received recognition and number of awards. However, in 2011, JMS grew as a symbol of Dalit Community Empowerment by recognising persons from the community and their contributions to the society. The Sanghatan, gave away awards to Dalit writers, poets, traditional birth attendants and traditional healers from the community. These celebrations provided women leaders opportunities to exhibit their skills of organising, negotiating and managing events. Above all, it instilled confidence and strength in other women from the community.





Being awarded and recognised only ensures that our struggle continues towards claiming dignity and justice.





My final words of advice to you are - educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself.
With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle.
The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual.
There is nothing material or social in it.
For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power.
It is battle for freedom.
It is the battle of reclamation of human personality.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar