

**REPORT FOR THE PERIOD OF**

**OCTOBER 2009 TO MARCH 2010**

**SUBMITTED TO**

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Since the inception of women's movement the question of women's struggles and contributions getting worthy recognition or being acknowledged, is constant. Thus, in an effort towards bringing the 'invisible' beings of many exemplary women to forefront, Olakh initiated the process of documenting women biographies – 'her' story.

The project period of 3 years is completing (in March 2011) and discussions with funding partners are on for further commitments. Olakh is experiencing constant demand to move and focus work in rural areas. This would be a crucial decision. During the six months of October 2009 to March 2010, Olakh moved ahead with objectives to promote and spread feminist ideology. It was realized through activities of Resource centre and creating grass root activists and thinkers.

Reading centers (mobile urban slums of Vadodara, every month and one gaining new insights from a interviews of elderly women intervention and counseling support and guidance with with their skill and capacity



library) were initiated in 3 there was a reader's forum reader's workshop. After reflection meeting, the continued. And lastly, centre saw people seeking Aneri members continuing building.

### ***Seeking directions from young hearts...***

The other regular activities to collect resources, student placement, trainings, networking and collaboration happened too. A detailed narration of the above follows in this report.

### **Student placements**

After re-starting this activity in July 2009, there were 14 students from different institutes placed at Olakh in this phase. Of these, 5 girls continued from the earlier phase (2 from Social Work College, Bhavnagar and 3 from Anand Institute of Social Work). 9 other students joined later, 1 girl from Anand (PG), 2 girls and 3 boys from Faculty of Law, Vadodara and 3 girls from Adult Education Centre, Vadodara.

Time period for students varied and they were allotted role and responsibilities as per their need to learn and Olakh's requirements. The group supported with work of data collection and compilation for Resource Directory in counseling centre where, they gathered information of organizations, groups, emergency help, shelter homes, etc. from cities of Gujarat.

Another was compiling case studies and feedbacks of counselees at Olakh (office and women's collective initiative for justice at doorstep). They even participated in reader's forums, international violence campaign, etc.

## Board meeting

A meeting of Olakh's Board was held on **5<sup>th</sup> March 2010** in New Delhi at Ms. Sayeda Hameed's residence. She is one of Olakh's trustees and a member of the Indian Planning Commission. Understanding the importance of her presence, the meeting took place in New Delhi.

The agenda of the meeting was to share the (current) status of Olakh, its team, programs and financial situations. Two important aspects discussed were first, Olakh's future plan after March 2011. Here, it was discussed and suggested that now focus should be laid on turning Olakh's premises to a residential training centre that could serve also as an emergency shelter (safe and secure) for women and girls in crises.

The second is documentation of women's biographies ('her story') that includes short and long interviews, photo and biography books and felicitation of Gujarati elderly women. It was discussed how the entire project needs to be taken ahead.

And looking at the present situation where the demand for livelihood support has increased within urban communities, Olakh also needs to focus on expanding activities to rural areas. It is realized that the work of changing mindset and spreading ideology might get diluted with the changing needs of people. Lastly, as the project period is coming to an end, it is important to explore the possibilities of long term funding to reduce uncertainties arising due to fixed funding periods. This is essential for both the on going projects and construction of a residential training centre.

## Organizational Development

Organizational Development by Ms. Jacintha (Bangalore) She led three sessions, one October, November and days.

The focus lay on personal/professional Olakh and team members. and responsibilities, need planning, power and position ownership were taken up.



sessions were conducted as shared and decided. each in the months of December 2009, of 2 to 3

issues/problems, relationship and growth of Important aspects of role and importance of with commitment and

## Visitors and Guests

The phase saw **106 visitors and guests** at Olakh. It comprises of students coming to acquire information about Olakh or for reference of resources, individuals interested in joining Olakh's activities, counselees, academicians, professionals and well wishers.

A thought shared by Hasmukh Patel, a lawyer, ***"Olakh organization is a 'full stop' for problems in our society. You can get love in a totally different way"***. (28<sup>th</sup> October 2009)

## Creating 'Her' stories

Taking the process of documenting lives of extraordinary elderly (Gujarati) women ahead, another **20 detailed interviews** were conducted in the **first half (October to December 2009)** of this phase. These women are from Vadodara, Ahmedabad and Bharuch cities. The interviews were divided in two sessions as sharing done could not be confined to a few hours in a single day. Though after two days of sharing, talking and discussing, the team felt the need and urge to know and hear more, as every woman is an encyclopedia in herself!



Of these **20 women, 8 are artists from fields of dance, theatre, etc. and the other 12 are activists, promoting and fighting for various social causes.** It is interesting to learn that the women writers have somewhere or the other have portrayed discrimination and violence on women and girls. And the social workers and activists have done through their articles or poems. It is an example that shows women, from all fields when plunge to support fellow human's (women's), feel the pain and joy of each other and bring it out in a form they are most comfortable with. This is solidarity of a woman for another (woman).

The **richness and variety in thoughts and perspectives is seen among these 20 women.** We have Ms. Survana, a writer associated with a Dalit group and Ms. Suhas, also a writer who writes poems on women's suffering and pain. Ms. Usha Malji, an actress, a teacher who makes issue based documentary films. There are Ms. Pushpa, Ms. Bharti, Ms. Meera associated with Sarvodaya sect based on philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave, with non violence as the force of life. And there is Ms. Damyanti, a communist talking of the use of all means (even violent) to be heard. **But ultimately they all vouch for peace and justice.**

For the team, **sessions** were long and **intense** where both (interviewer and the elderly woman) are taken on a journey of pain, suffering and joy. Both, at times cried in the sessions. It is natural as to re-live one's life without a feel of close experiences once again, is hard. For the team, it's a time to relate, know the women closely and understand what was not thought of.



*When the eyes says it all...*

The **interviews** being **intense**, not more than 6 a week were conducted. Even when it was planned to travel more, it turned out to be physically and emotionally stressful. One woman interviewed means knowing and understanding her, her life, her work, relating to her pain, struggles, joy and making small researches on her, actually leading to the **first 'draft'** of her biographical sketch.

When the interviews were initiated, it was decided that the book on biographies would have not more than 6 pages (3/back to back) for each story. Though as the study of different biographies written by others continued in the process, the understanding deepened and it led to first drafts also of 12-14 pages! It is because a biography comprises of a woman's life, her work and contribution to the society and emphasizes also on her surroundings that could have played an important role in shaping her and vice versa. An analysis and recognition of all that made her or tried to break her, is understand in totality. The team believes that unless the interviewers do not relate to the elderly women as their fellow women, the experience become dry and monotonous. And the team is not untouched after meeting these women and the feeling of oneness leads to the writing shaping up like smooth flowing water, without barriers.

➤ **A Review & Reflection meeting:**

To acquire feedbacks and suggestions for the program, to check if work being done is with feminist perspectives and efforts put are in a right direction, this meeting was held on **22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010, at Olakh's office**. The meeting focused on making plans for publications and felicitation program also. The group comprised of women experts from different social and development fields.



After sharing on initiation of the project, its conceptualization, the need and importance along with work in progress, the focus shifted to future requirements. **The major decisions and areas of importance are:**

- The program to be divided in 3 aspects of short/quick interviews, long interviews and the felicitation of elderly women.
- Different publications like photo book culled from short interviews, book on biographies for long interviews and leaflets, brochures, etc. for felicitation event.
- Workforce at Olakh is less, so short interviews should be divided according to districts and cities with interested local people taking the interviews. This would make the work fast and involve interested and sensitive people. The photo book could be published by April 2010.
- Long interviews meanwhile, should be done by Olakh team along with short ones, the book on biographies being a 3 year long project itself. Those who conducted interviews would only pen the biographies. Final, editing or corrections would be made during publishing.
- Finer aspects of language, translation and photography were discussed too.
- For the felicitation event involving large number of youth, media and influential/resourceful people and groups is needed. It needs extensive and exhaustive planning of 6 months to organize such a grand show in October 2010. Thus, a second meeting of experts is planned for April 2010.

At present, the audio transcription of 25 interviews out of 30 (10 interviews of last phase) is complete. A soft version (in CDs & DVDs) of audio and video footages with photographs for all 30 women is done. This technical work was not thought about earlier but now it is considered essential before starting new interviews. It is lengthy and needs concentrated time.

**Trainings/Workshops (organized by Olakh/ were resource person)**



• **Workshop on Empowerment: Change Management and Leadership** – After preparations of last phase, this national workshop was held from **1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2009** in Vadodara. The group consisted of **25 senior women** who are founders/initiators of certain women's groups and NGOs from across India.

The workshop aimed at decreasing conflict in workplace by nurturing team work, enhancing work quality, motivate and recognize team members and bring about positive change. The main aim was to begin this process with self and then spread it around. Ms. Shqipe Malushi from USA was the resource person.

• **Training on Gender** – Two days gender basic training was organized by Sharda Mahila Vikas Society on **12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> October 2009** for its members. Olakh was the facilitator with **50 women participating**.

• **Gender, Democracy and Citizenship for Youth** – Continuing the gender course initiated since February 2009, another **15 days training from 1<sup>st</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> November 2009** was conducted in Himachal Pradesh. It was organized by Jagori Grameen (Himachal) and Olakh was one of the resource persons for gender, patriarchy and feminism. **28 young women and men** from Himachal, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra and Gujarat states participated. From **Olakh 4 women participated** (1 team member and 3 Aneri members).

• **Dialogue on ‘Women’s Respect as the Responsibility of Society** – This talk was organized by Jamaat-e-Islami’s (Vadodara) women wing on **21<sup>st</sup> November 2009**. Ms. Manju from Olakh was a resource person to talk on status of women in society, role of women to improve and enhance their lives with role and responsibility of society. 5 women from Aneri participated with **50 other women from different areas and communities of the city (mainly Muslim)**.



• **Apprenticeship Training** – Taking forward the collaboration with Pradan (M.P.) two trainings on gender were conducted, from **12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> November 2009** where, **22** individuals participated and from **16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> February 2010** where, **21** individuals participated. These participants were young women and men coming from fields of social work, engineering, agriculture, etc.

Learning shared by one male participant, ***“Now I understand the contribution of women in bringing development, how women are discriminated in our families, in day-to-day activities, all without our knowledge”***.

• **Gender Training** – Two days gender training from **26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> November 2009** was organized by India Soya Forum – Network of NGOs – Producer Company & Soya farmers for their field executives (women and men). The aim also was to know and discuss on increasing women’s participation in Soya production. **17 executives** participated.



• **Gender Training** – Two days gender basic training was imparted to **25** middle level activists from 10 partner organizations of CRY, Ahmedabad. The training was on **12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> January 2010**.

• **Reader’s Workshop**



To have 2-3 days exclusively only to read, is a dream for many that can be hardly realized. Taking ahead the importance of reading and sharing ideas, beliefs and perspectives through and over reading from Olakh’s monthly reader’s forum, **3 days Reader’s Workshop from 25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> February 2010 was organized by Olakh**. The workshop was held at Nandigram in Valsad city (South Gujarat).

The aim was extensive reading for all days and dialogue with **5 eminent women writers**. The participants read about the writers, their work and shared their views/opinions with them. The sessions of sharing on lives of the writers, was heart rendering. The participating group consisted of **20 women** (10 from Aneri, 5 general readers and 5 Olakh team members).



*Reading interests all ages...*

### **Training/Workshops (as participants)**

- **Training with GCERT** – 4 days training on HELP (Health Education and Life Skill Program) was organized from **15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> November 2009** by GCERT where 100 individuals participated. The purpose was creating district level resource persons in 7 districts of Gujarat. The individuals trained had to train the physical education teachers of secondary schools after this training. One team member from Olakh participated, though only 2-3 came from social work field with others being secondary schools teachers She shared that she learned about health education and new techniques of making teaching patterns interesting and learning, easy.

### **Networking and Collaboration**

- **Support Forum:** Like earlier phases, two days forum of heads of organizations from Gujarat was held on **2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2010 at Dharampur**. 30 individuals participated along with Olakh's representation by Ms. Nimisha.

- **Meeting of Forum against Rape:** This was organized by Akhil Hind Mahila Parishad on **28<sup>th</sup> January 2010 at Surat**. Ms. Nimsha from Olakh joined the co-ordinating committee for forum against Rape (South Gujarat). The focus was on protesting against rising and consequent rapes (especially gang rapes) that took place in the 6 months in South Gujarat. Nearly 150 individuals were present.

- **Networking to promote & initiate Film Screenings:** This was carried out in 3 areas. On **20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> February 2010**, Ms. Nimisha visited two organizations, Prayas (Mangrol) run by Ms. Bharti and Gora (Kevadia, Rajpipla) run by Dr. Ashok and on **21<sup>st</sup> March 2010**, she visited schools of Dharampur to meet Ms. Kokila, to explore possibilities of organizing study circles through film screenings for their students, workers and other groups. It was proposed that the program could be carried out in collaboration with these organizations and Olakh as a resource person. All 3 organizations showed willingness as the medium of films is preferred and understood well by everyone.

- **Meeting at Gujarat Sahitya Academy & Sahitya Parishad:** This meeting was to felicitate different women writers for their writings and have a sharing and discussion on their works. It was held in Surat on **20<sup>th</sup> March 2010**.

## International Fortnightly Campaign to Fight against Violence on Women and Girls: 25<sup>th</sup> November to 10<sup>th</sup> December

This campaign is celebrated every year, taking relevant and burning issues of society. This year, with the first discussion at Olakh, the thought of how a world filled with happiness and joy could be created, came up. The group reflected that it could only be when a society full of peace is created, one that is free of violence of all types. Taking this aim ahead, it was thought first to organize a campaign with a big event to bring awareness. This could be done through film screenings at a public cinema hall in the city. The team thus tried to get permission from concerned authorities but was not successful and it was decided to have film screenings in slums and schools that were a part of Olakh's activities since few years.

The theme of the campaign was on two areas – Women's Empowerment and Gender. A short street play called 'Lathi Katha' (Story of a Stick) based on empowerment was prepared and short documentary films on gender were selected for screenings.

➤ **Lathi Katha** – This street play was prepared by Gujarat state violence network for the year's violence campaign. The play is a true story based on a custom of Ethiopia. It is that when a girl marries, her mother gives a 'stick' along with different gifts and goods. The aim is whenever her husband does violence on her, she could take the stick, leave her house and knock on the door of the whole community and let them know of her situation. The women of the community would come out with their sticks and gather at the village square. With every woman out of their homes, not willing to return until the victimized woman gets justice, the men are put in a dilemma. The husband feeling ashamed asks for forgiveness in the presence of the group. The story explains that empowerment comes also with unity and justice can be sought in a non-violent manner.



To spread this message, different individuals from various groups/organizations of Gujarat were trained, who could later perform the play in different parts of the state. Three members from Olakh took the **training** at Sahiyar organization (Vadodara) on **13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> October 2009**. They then trained 6 other women at Olakh. The uniqueness of Olakh's group was that along with team members (2), the other women were survivors of violence and came from slums. They (survivors) had never acted before or even thought of it. But their enthusiasm was great and the performances came straight from the heart.

Sayara from Kalyan Nagar said, ***"The play is really good. I had never thought that violence could be handled in such a simple manner"***.

The play was performed in 7 areas including a leprosy rehabilitation centre (Sewa Tirth) and a shopping mall (Vadodara Central). A film based on HIV/AIDS was screened at the mall as it was the International HIV/AIDS day on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December. It was the first time many of Olakh's women, especially those from slums were visiting a mall and thus it was an exciting and proud experience for them. They thought that only educated and so called 'rich' people could visit a mall. Their happiness was worth seeing as even going up and down the escalators made them laugh heartily!



On the last day of the campaign (10<sup>th</sup> December), the International Human Rights Day a public performance was made at a square called Gandhi Nagar Gruh. After the performance, few from

the audience shared their views on the issue. One of the student's from Law faculty talked on human rights and laws related to women. The program closed with an oath taken to join hands in creating a violence free society and then lighting candles. It became significant as the square, like its name has a statue of Mahatma Gandhi and the program was held next to it.

➤ **Film Screenings** – In 9 schools for students of 8<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> grades, 3 slums and the leprosy rehabilitation centre a film called 'Girija' was screened. This documentary talks about gender discrimination and how its roots are laid from childhood. Through the story of a young sister and brother of a village affected by water crises due to a demons curse, gender discrimination in



different forms is shown. The girl is discriminated with education and nutrition but still defeats the demon by her bravery and presence of mind. The message of equal opportunity and care to make girls and boys, equally brave and intelligent is given.

***Understanding and relating to the discriminations...***

A teacher at Hill Memorial School said, ***“Such a wonderful film! Where did you get it from? It is too good. We came to know of the differences that we put between girls and boys, in a simple way”.***

The students enjoyed and understood the film, the being story simple and easy to relate to. Many girls shared that they face discrimination in school and participated and encouraged



similar types of at home. The teachers also the students.

The other film screened was Silence) on sexual public servants like doctors. slum and was liked by the

'Chuppi Todo' (Break the harassment of women by It was screened in one audience.

The campaign tried not only non-violence and gender became a source of pride for time came out of homes and spoke, performed publicly. **1,200 people** (approx.) were reached through the campaign.

to spread the messages of discrimination but also women who for the first

## International Women's Day: 8<sup>th</sup> March 2010



On 8<sup>th</sup> March 2010, Ms. Nimisha was invited at Railway Staff Colony to share and talk on the history and significance of Women's Day. Around 250 people of railway staff with their families participated. It was a good experience to talk and share with a mixed group of women and men and to know perceptions of people.

On the same day, Ms. Nimisha was felicitated at the International Lion's Club for her remarkable contribution in the area of Women's Empowerment. It was indeed a moment of pride for Ms. Nimisha and Olakh. A group of 50 people, the members of the club were present at the function.



*Woman of substance...*

And as a part of the awareness spreading, the theatre group of Olakh comprising of the Aneri women (details shared later in the report) gave two public performances of 'Lathi Katha' street play.



One was in the rural area of Mangrol for the group of Prayas organization where **200 women participated**. The other was in the tribal area of Rajpipla with the group of Gora organization where **250 women participated**. The performers shared that the rural and tribal audiences were enthusiastic, supportive and understood the issues easily as they believe in empowerment and justice through non-violence.

**"The goal of life is to make your heartbeat match the beat of the universe, to match your nature with Nature."**

**- Joseph Campbell**

## Feminist Resource Centre

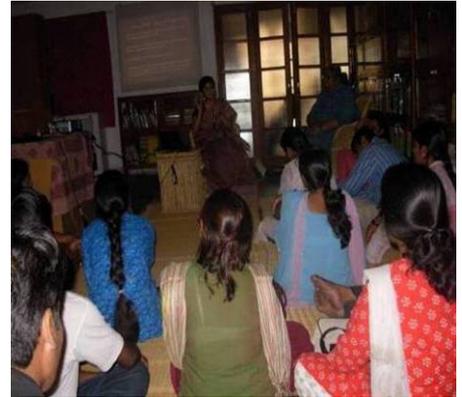
### Reader's Forums

With the aim to promote reading and inculcate it in the lives of people, the first reader's forum continued on 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of every month. The motive is to bring change in mindsets through medium of literature. At Olakh it is believed strongly that there can be a way out of problems and crises or even for healthy and peaceful living, when we get together, have dialogue and discuss things.



In this phase **6 forums** took place largely concentrating on sharing and critical discussions on works and perceptions of few Gujarati women writers. Two forums focused on the concept of reading, its importance and need for reading. These were taken by Ms. Darshini, a lecturer in the M.S. University of Vadodara. These forums were enjoyed thoroughly by participants. The planning, objectives and importance of having a reader's workshop also were taken.

***"What we have gained today is something that we had never experienced before. It has increased our interest towards reading and we are thankful to Olakh for this",*** shared Bhumi, Preeti and Rima (12<sup>th</sup> December 2009).



The concern of increasing members in the forum was discussed with people from marginalized groups/communities to be involved as Olakh largely works with them. The need to spread the word around was also taken. The forum in March taking place after the Reader's Workshop (shared earlier), was exciting for the group for they were eager to share their experiences. Many said that a feature of having such a workshop is needed once in 3-4 months. They have developed now a habit of reading regularly and after hearing to the women writers, they are touched and motivated to bring change in their lives. **The forum has an average of 20-22 members attending regularly.**

### Mobile library/Reading centers



In this phase, the activity of mobile library was taken further and **initiated in 3 slums**. These communities are ones where Olakh also carries out some of the field programs. The average users are **12-15 people in each area**. The literacy level is low though people participate in story telling sessions taken to involve them irrespective of education or literacy levels.

**The preference for material ranges from story books, magazines, to poems and so on.** To make people aware of this activity, the team members make prior weekly visits to every area and few volunteers have been identified in each slum to take the process ahead and involve locals.

*Knowledge sees no barriers when determined to be sought ...*



### **Publications and Packages**

In this phase, Olakh published another translation work from the gender basic books called 'Narivaad Chun Che?' (What is Feminism) in Gujarati. It is now planned to have a large level dissemination across the state of the publications from the gender basic books. This would fulfill the aim of dissemination and spread feminist perspectives and ideology through literature, one of the basic objectives of Olakh and its resource centre.

With increasing trend and use of technology in forms of media, an entire compilation of photographs (hard copies) was made. This includes programs of Olakh like resource centre, community activities, trainings and workshops and Olakh in general. The idea is to have a photo presentation on Olakh for easy understanding for meetings, workshops and presentations. This presentation includes photographs since Olakh's inception that can leave an impression.

### **Collection and Dissemination of Resources**

This phase saw the outreach of resource centre to **133 users with usage of 331 resources** that includes books (story books and issue based books on law, violence, empowerment, etc.), films (on gender) and posters (on health, education and rights).

The centre saw an increase in resources with **325 resources added**. This comprises of 7 Audio CDs (classical music), 16 films/documentaries (on conflict, music and art and theatre), 5 posters (on women's rights and empowerment) and 297 books and reports (a mix of story books, poetry, law, etc.).

*Heal the World, make it a better place...*

- Michael Jackson

## **Feminist Counseling and Intervention Center with Healing and Support**

After the violence campaign, the counseling and intervention team again shifted to community work of building rapport with women and people in different slums. From field visits and constant interaction with individuals and families, it is learned that the issue of inflation has affected the masses in many ways. The impact of globalization is seen on each one, in one or the other ways. Everyone is in need of money more than they did earlier and due to fast and rapidly moving life styles, comforts and luxuries are opted for than just sticking to basic necessities. People do not have time from their lives to look around at other people and issues affecting society. This is an alarming situation where, people at large have become indifferent to other people and to the world. People at times share that though they know that a friend or relative might be breathing her/his last breath, their busy life schedule and set priorities do not allow them to meet these dying people. This is a simple example of how the human world is becoming materialistic and that wants have overtaken the needs.

This has raised questions and dilemmas for Olakh's counseling and intervention team also where, it is seen that unlike early times, today when people are in need of support, they rush to Olakh but when the question of extending their hands to support is raised, only 5 out of 100 are ready. So a question of how to move ahead with the work of intervention and support to survivors of violence, hangs over the team.

### **Intervention and Counseling**

During this phase there were **79 women (38 Hindu, 21 Muslim and 20 Dalit)** who approached for counseling and intervention at Olakh office and women at the collective initiative for justice at doorstep. Of these, **58 were new (Annexure 1) and 21 follow-up** counselees.

Lawyer Javed Maharaja  
*moving era the kind of  
 undertakes is a necessity  
 definitely give women a  
 path for justice will open*



said, *"In today's fast  
 intervention Olakh  
 for society. This will  
 new strength and a new  
 up. (17<sup>th</sup> December 2009)*

The women's collective initiative for justice at doorstep was formed in Kishanwadi and Jalaram Nagar and the one at Kalyan Nagar was revived from the month of January 2010. At Kishanwadi, 15 to 20 women come together, share issues and listen to other women approaching them with problems. They sit every 15 days (on Thursdays). At Jalaram Nagar, 5 to 10 women gather every 15 days (on Wednesdays) and address to issues brought to them. At Kalyan Nagar, the number of women coming is less as compared to other areas as most women work as domestic help for the whole day. Due to few members, individual counseling takes place there. To have detailed discussions and find alternatives for these women, visits were made after which, only 5 women come to the collective. They come only when there is a case to be handled. It had been decided to run the collective every Friday in Kalyan Nagar but women members can hardly spare time for said reasons.

### ***Hell at home only...***

This is the story of Bhavika (name changed), a young, bright and lively girl whose life turned to a living hell once she was married. One the first night of marriage, her father in law called the couple and told them how to have sex, insisting that if they want, he could demonstrate! This was just the beginning. Every day he kept asking them what they did in bed and during day time when Bhavika's husband was not around, he tried to molest and harass her. But out of fear, she kept quite. One day, he (father in law) woke her up early in the morning, demanding for tea. At that time, her mother in law was in the bathroom and seeing it as a good opportunity, her father in law, locked his wife and also closed the door to his son's room. Then went to the kitchen and forced himself on Bhavika, tearing her clothes, hitting her and it was only after her husband heard her scream, he rushed to her rescue. Even then her father in law did not give up his lust and threw the couple out when they protested.

Today, even after a year Bhavika is at her mother's house, alone. as her husband due to fear of his father has gone back. She had started to work but there too her father in law created ruckus and so the employer said no to her. She is now determined to take divorce from such a spineless husband and wants to teach the 'old' demon a good lesson.

### **Home and Intervention Visits**

In this period, 10 visits were made, 2 at the police station as police men were not filing complains of women, so the women were accompanied by counseling team. The other 8 were made to in laws house or parental homes of certain counselees to have dialogue with members making them understand the situation and to know their side of the issue. E.g. one of the counselee is not being accepted back by her mother as she had gone against her mother's wish and eloped. Now, the woman's husband is torturing her as both are diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. The counselors had asked the woman to stay at Olakh, but she insisted on going to her mother, so the visit was made. Another was made to meet a woman who verbally abused her husband, so the team met her and dialogued with her. Also, follow up visits are made to keep track of counselees, like one was made in this phase after a counselee had gone back to her husband's house.

## Field Visits

To build rapport, strengthen the ties and get an understanding of the area, **41 field visits** were made in the areas of Kishanwadi, Tulsiwadi, Bawamaanpura and Jalaram Nagar. From the visits it is learned that;

**Kishanwadi:** This area lacks availability of many basic necessities like proper and adequate drinking water, surroundings are unhealthy and residents are poor as compared to other slums. They live in very small huts made of plastic and bamboos but still women here are not sitting at home, crying over their miseries. They either work from home, making eatables or go to work at marriage halls or are domestic helps in nearby areas. Husbands of many are alcoholic. This is an enthusiastic community, welcoming the team and sharing good information. Thus, a good rapport has been built especially with women. A place has been found to carry out activities of collective and mobile reading centre.

**Tulsiwadi:** The team made visits every 15 days in 5 different spots of this slum and it is learned that women here mostly go to work at marriage halls, in homes and are vegetable vendors. They face lot of problems but have no time to join Olakh's activities or share anything. They believe that if they get associated with such work, some monetary return should be given to them. Liquor consumption is high in this area.

**Bawamaanpura:** The common response gained from this community was that when organizations like Olakh that want people to join in its activities, should first take up works like getting people's ration cards prepared, work for widow pension scheme, get BPL cards ready and try to get facilities the area needs. It is only after this that they would join. They insist on Olakh approaching them time and again and not them coming to Olakh. The team tried a lot but the women are not ready to join.

**Jalaram Nagar:** There are many organizations working in this slum, the people are enthusiastic, open and welcoming. They are poor and hard working. 5 women who work as domestic help have shown interest to come and give their time.

## 'Aneri' – Women's Self Help Group

The objective of forming this group is to bring together women and girls from different communities and areas of Vadodara, those facing violence or discrimination, the survivors and women with a passion to do something for society. After the initiation, in last phase it was decided that the group would meet on 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of every month to plan, share, learn and express themselves, to bring change in their lives with bringing change in the patriarchal society. The group is initiated by 5 survivor women and now comprises of women from diverse backgrounds of the so called educated and uneducated, caste, class and religion .

In this phase, every month 2 meetings took place based on various aspects/issues. The women come from communities like Kalyan Nagar, Bawamaanpura, Kishanwadi, etc. The activities were:



### • 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009: Navratri Celebration

This is a festival, mostly celebrated in Gujarat, where women and men dance for 9 nights after the demon Raavan's effigy is burned on the 10<sup>th</sup> day. The Aneri women wanted to celebrate this festival together as the group was new. The arrangements for music were made by Olakh and it was a beautiful sight with women dressed in bright costumes.

Though it was day time, everyone danced merrily. It is important to know that women who come from the poor communities and work as domestic help, had never

enjoyed this festival with such freedom, as when they got out to dance, the elderly ask them to cover their heads, which they do not like. But here they could move freely. The women also felt oneness in the group as they danced together. There were **50 women and young girls in the celebration**. A common feedback was that events like these should be held every two months so that enjoyment and freedom could be experienced together.

• **15<sup>th</sup> October 2009: Eid-Diwali Celebration**

This was also a celebration of two important festivals, Eid and Diwali, where **25 women** participated. They talked and shared about the importance of these festivals, the belief and custom related with these and shared sweets. Eid is a festival for Muslims and Diwali for Hindus.

• **3<sup>rd</sup> November 2009: Talk on Domestic Violence Act**

The protection officer Ms. Surekha gave a simple talk easily understood by the group. She explained about different rights of women under the Domestic Violence Act and the role, duties of the protection officer. She shared also about the kind of support women and girls could get from her. **32 women** participated in this meeting.



*Adequate information & support is very essential...*

• **16<sup>th</sup> November 2009: Visit to Mahila (Woman) Police Station**

This visit was made to get information about the role, duties and function of this body, how women or girls can approach them, when, how it was started and what are the procedures for filing complains. **18 women** participated.

• **1<sup>st</sup> December 2009: International HIV/AIDS Day**

As a part of the international violence campaign, the Aneri members joined for film screening and street play performance held at a city mall. Most women from Aneri were visiting a mall for the first time and were happy to be there as since quite some days they were filled with anxiety regarding the place, what sort of people would be there and so on. Two of the women, Khuslawati and Kala were so excited that they completed their work early and reached before time. After they came their myth that only rich people could visit malls and that poor were thrown, out was broken. **20 women** participated.

• **15<sup>th</sup> December 2009: Talk on Empowerment**

This meeting focused on the role and responsibilities of Aneri group and what should be done and understood for women to get empowered. This was essential as the group are in the process of becoming change agents and are required to extend their support and strength to other women in need. **16 women** participated.

• **1<sup>st</sup> January 2010: Visit to Children's Hostel and State Home for Women**

Being the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the New Year, the women decided to visit a hostel of children with special needs and the differently able, Mukhbadhir Vidhyalay. There they laughed, danced, played games, ate with them and listened to enthusiastic singers from the children's group. The hostel houses 60 children. The group gave the children small gifts like pencils and other stationery that they would like. The women had seen and been with differently able children for the first time and became emotional. They shared that they wanted to do something for these children, just to make them happy.



***Different yet able...***

The next visit was to the State Home for Women and Girls. There are 20-25 women and girls. The group gave them small gifts for New Year. The warden shared about the women's cell. The women went to the crèche of the cell where 2 new born had been abandoned by their parents. The group shared and was sad to see the sight of the residents. They were forced to think that why such situations come in the lives of humans, especially women and girls where they are left with no one and have to seek shelter or are forced to take shelter in places like these, due to their vulnerability. They said that why a human becomes an enemy of fellow human and how can we get together to fight against this crime. Though at times they feel that efforts put are useless and they should give up but some strategies that could really make a difference could be thought of to bring change can be brought, especially to improve status of women, girls and children. **20 women** participated.

• **12<sup>th</sup> January 2010: Celebration of Uttarayan (Kite flying festival)**

As 14<sup>th</sup> January is the festival of kites, Aneri women decided to celebrate it together. The women felt that like every other festival, even on this festival they hardly get time to enjoy from doing household chores and looking after guests. So they wanted to relax and enjoy the festival fully and that too with their women friends. Many of them were flying kites for the first time so the excitement was on its peak. They made special sweets for the occasion and merrily enjoyed the day. **12 women** participated.



Khuslawati shared, ***“This is for the first time that I could get on a roof top and fly a kite myself. I didn't know how to but today I tried and was able to. I really enjoyed it”.***

Kalpna laughed, ***“I never knew that I could also fly a kite and today my kite rose so high in the sky that I could not believe it”.***

• **1<sup>st</sup> February 2010: Planning for Women's Day**

As the women's day (8<sup>th</sup> of March) was approaching, it was decided to plan for it in this Aneri meeting. The women gave suggestions of having a drama/play performances, talk on women's rights, spread awareness on education, inflation, etc. And then for the next meeting it was planned that they would go on a day's picnic. **14 women** participated.

• **14<sup>th</sup> February 2010: Picnic at Poicha**



The group went to nearby river side where the place was good for enjoying peacefully. They sat together, shared about their lives and got an opportunity to know each other closely. They went in an open truck and got food for each other. Apart from enjoying they also shared their dreams and how they could fulfill them. **18 women** participated.

*Learning & sharing while enjoying...*

• **15<sup>th</sup> March 2010: Future Planning for Theatre Group**

This was a reflection and planning meeting to gain a view of taking the theatre group. They discussed about the workshop they had attended earlier in the month (details given later) for theatre and performance of 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> March (as shared before). They decided rules for their group, timings for rehearsals, etc. Ms. Nimisha shared about focusing on issues of society, especially those talked about in the street play, through the medium of theatre. **24 women** participated.

**Capacity Building of Aneri Members**

• **Gender, Democracy and Citizenship for Youth:** As shared earlier in the report, **3 Aneri women** participated in a 15 days training from **1<sup>st</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> November 2009**.



• **Theatre Training:** Ms. Lena from Germany, specializing in theatre, visited Olakh and trained the Aneri women. She conducted 2 days training on **25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> November 2009** comprising of different tips on theatre and acting, focusing on body language and script writing. The women performed short role plays too. **20 Aneri members** with 4 Olakh team members participated.

*Role play to become role models of future...*

• **Visit to Adult Education centre:** The group of **32 women** visited the centre and sought legal information on **12<sup>th</sup> February 2010**. The program threw light on aspects of women's rights in comparison to human rights. Information on situations and crises where women and girls could file complains, was shared. Details of courses at the centre were also given.



Archana shared, ***“Had we not been in Aneri, we would have never gained this information and would be sitting at home like fools”.***

- **Reader’s Workshop at Nandigram:** To enhance the perspectives of Aneri members they participated in the reader’s workshop (as shared earlier) from **25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> February 2010**. The aim was to increase their interest in reading. As shared, they were excited on meeting the women writers, reading books and hearing stories of struggles. **7 from Aneri** participated.

- **Theatre Workshop:** Two Swaroop and Mr. Hiren from guided the theatre group for acting and portraying issues from **3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> March 2010**, participated. Repeated exhausted the group, as they work in closed structures. training taking suggestions performances of the



theatre experts, Ms. Ahmedabad trained and sharpening their skills in of violence. It was held where **16 Aneri members** suggestions from experts are not accustomed to But they continued with the positively and prepared for women’s day.

- **Street play performances at Rural and Tribal areas:** The group performed at two different places on **7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> March 2010** on International Women’s Day (as shared before). First at Prayas, Mangrol and second at Gora, Rajpipla. Seeing the enthusiasm and motivation of women in the audiences, the performing group felt that though these women are less privileged than them who come from urban areas, they do much for others.

- **Theatre and Exposure visit to Ahmedabad:** After the first theatre workshop by Aneri women, they participated in a theatre performance program organized by Samvedan Cultural Trust in Ahmedabad. The group performed along with other groups. The group also visited organizations, women’s groups to increase and enhance their knowledge and understanding. This exposure took place from **26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> March 2010**.



They visited AWAG organization working on violence against women and girls, especially in times of conflict and communal riots. The Aneri women came to know AWAG’s functions, vision, objectives and programs. They saw the livelihood programs operated and run by women members of AWAG. The group also visited Maanav Sadhna working for livelihood. A differently able man runs it and seeing his energy level and dedication to work, the group was motivated and felt that for reaching to one’s goal, only one’s determination is important which, any so called ‘handicap’ cannot not hinder.

For performance of play, a group presented status and situation of Tribal community in the country. It showed how they are marginalized and discriminated in society. The Aneri group liked it and also the intense portrayal of performers. Other groups performed on forms of violence against women and girls and on status of Dalit in society. The Aneri members performed ‘Lathi Katha’ and were appreciated by the audience.

### **Telephone Helpline and Resource Directory**

During this period, the counseling and intervention centre recorded **189 phone calls** where main focus was the follow up calls of counselees.

Keeping in mind the need of survivors for other supportive services with counseling like shelter, police, old age homes, ambulances, hospitals, non formal and formal education, vocational trainings, etc. a resource directory was planned for. Olakh decided to update one directory of cities of Gujarat state and in this phase with the support of 5 students from Law College, information was gathered and compiled.

### **Conclusion**

Now, with ever increasing trends of demands increasing for short term gains and masses, mainly urban, opting for luxury and comforts than just bare minimum needs, organizations like Olakh are also put in a state of dilemma. Olakh works mainly to change mindsets and spread the feminist ideology for creating a just, peaceful and humane society. But it is alarming that processes that do not include immediate monetary or quantifiable gain/outcome, individuals and/or groups willing to get associated, is too less. With technology and goods available at short hand – internet, mobile phone, malls and multiplexes all over – it is also reflected that now people (urban) are either saturated with knowledge and information or are completely blinded by sheet of ‘modernity’. This stops them from sticking to basic values, principles and run after materialistic things.

Though, at Olakh we continue to believe and keep striving to bring about a change in the patriarchal world around us, as these trends are also a new form of male domination that marginalizes the vulnerable, down trodden and women still being at the lowest in order. We believe that change or upward movement, especially of thoughts, is slow but not impossible...

*Woods are lovely, dark & deep,  
But I have promises to keep  
Miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep...*

**- Robert Frost**