



TRACING FOOTPRINTS FINDING PATHWAYS



THIS ZINE HAS BEEN COMMISSIONED BY UTTHAN. IT HAS EMERGED ORGANICALLY FROM A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION, ‘TRANSFORMATIVE NARRATIVES: STORYTELLING FOR EVALUATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING THROUGH A GENDER JUSTICE LENS’ UNDER A MULTI THEMED PROJECT IMPLEMENTED BY UTTHAN OVER 2021-2024. THE PROJECT & THE EVALUATION EXERCISE WAS SUPPORTED BY THE EDELGIVE FOUNDATION.

THE ZINE IS AN EFFORT TO BRING TOGETHER THE EVALUATION LEARNINGS AND REFLECTIONS IN A CREATIVE OUTPUT FORM, TO REACH A WIDER AUDIENCE AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS (IN BOTH ENGLISH & GUJARATI) . IT COMMUNICATES THE STORY OF INDIVIDUAL & COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT & LEADERSHIP PROPELLED BY THE UTTHAN INTERVENTIONS.

TO SHARE WITH THE LARGER WORLD, THE EFFORTS OF A LEADERSHIP WORKING TOWARDS POSITIVE CHANGE IN THEIR OWN LIVES AS WELL AS THOSE OF OTHERS.

TO AFFIRM THAT, ‘WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER’.

THIS ZINE SPEAKS OF THE STORY OF ENGAGEMENT AND CONVERGENCE WITH MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS, OF BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS, OF RISK TAKING, OF DREAMING AND ACHIEVING COLLECTIVE GOALS.



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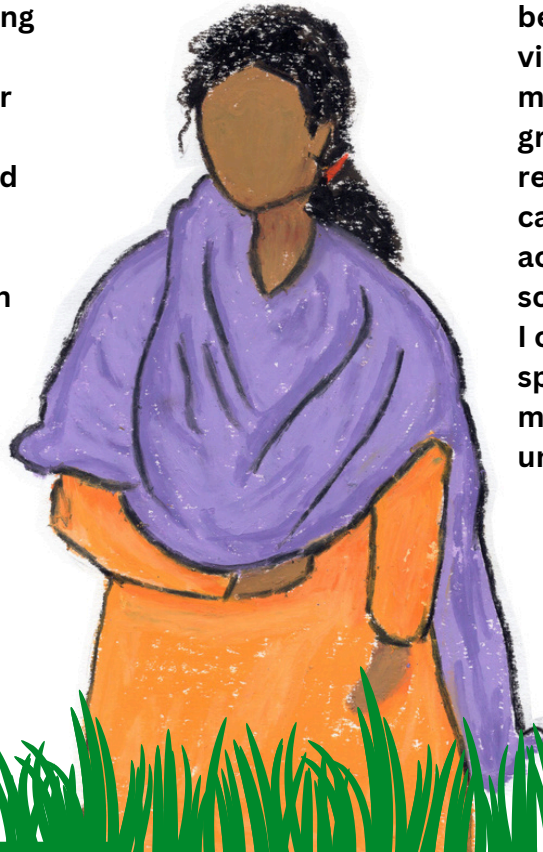
Today I got a call from one of the Pratinidhi ben's of our Mahila sangathan. They need help with a case of violence in the village. Nyay & Shanti Samiti is one of the significant arms of our Sangathan's work; helping survivors of violence.

I am a Nyay & Shanti Samiti leader and I am going to find out about this case. I will be supporting in negotiations and help in documentation that may be further legally required. It seems to be a case of the family denying legal land rights to a woman and threatening violence.



My name is Sonal. I live in Aaramnagar. I am 23 years old and have been working with the Nyay Samiti of the Mahila Sangathan for the last 5 years. The Sangathan was incubated by Utthan.

I work with women and girls who face violence in their homes or public spaces - from husbands, in-laws, natal families, dominant caste people, known/unknown persons.

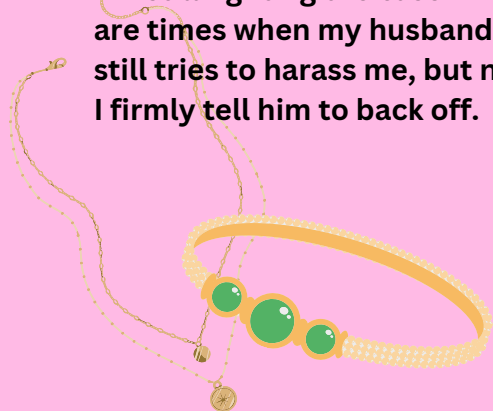


I got to know about Utthan, through the Sangathan's leader ben who used to visit my village. They talked to us about mobilizing in saving-credits groups, the importance of reporting cases of domestic or caste based violence, getting access to the government schemes etc.

I connected with what they spoke about because I was married at 18 and I was unhappy.

My husband and his family used to harass and torture me. I used to just cry earlier but it became unbearable after a point. This is when I came to the Nyay Samiti for help. Operating from their Block office they helped me get all my gold jewelry kept with the in-laws and also to file a legal case of divorce against my husband.

I'm still fighting the case. There are times when my husband still tries to harass me, but now I firmly tell him to back off.



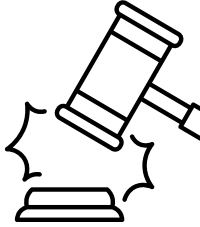


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I had left my studies mid way due to marriage. I am now completing my 12th exams and plan to study Law after this. I want to be able to support women and marginalized communities through the knowledge of law. I have got many trainings at Utthan about laws protecting women facing violence, constitutional values and justice, about feminism and equality. This has taught me about self-confidence, the value of education and financial independence.

I have now bought a scooter from my own savings and travel on it to do the work of Nyay Samiti in different villages and blocks.





I reach Tumli village; Gayatri ben was already there. She is a Sangathan leader and runs the Swa-bhoomi Kendra which operates from the Government Block Development Office. It enables women to get access to land rights and support in cases of violence and land conflict and builds awareness on women's land rights.

Gayatri ben shared that Rekha ben had been receiving violent threats-rape and death threats, from her uncles and their families, because she wishes to claim the land that belonged to her mother. Rekha ben is a single woman with 2 young children. Her claim to the land needs rightful support with safety.

Gayatri ben had already spoken to the opposing party to stop these threats but this hasn't worked. So we decided to speak to Rekha ben, explain to her the institutional and legal process in such a case. We will take the case to the police and further to the court.

Rekha ben has been very disturbed.

“Do I not have the right over the land, which my mother and I have labored”, she asked. We counselled her about her legal rights and assured our full support.

We also connected her with Varsha ben for immediate support in her village. Varsha is a Village Development Committee (VDC) member and has been a very supportive Sangathan member. She raises women related concerns in village development. She was instrumental in getting street lighting of desolate areas of the village included in Gram Panchayat Development Plan as essential for women’s safety.



When Varshaben got to know that Rekhaben has still not got her widow pension, she immediately put her in touch with the Sangathan’s Economic Empowerment Samiti to facilitate this for her. However, Rekha ben was still very worried about her livelihood, income, household expenses. Now with land conflict and violent threats on her land, her life was difficult and uncertain.

Finding livelihood opportunities for many women who leave their marriage becomes difficult. We raised this issue in our Sangathan's Executive committee meeting.

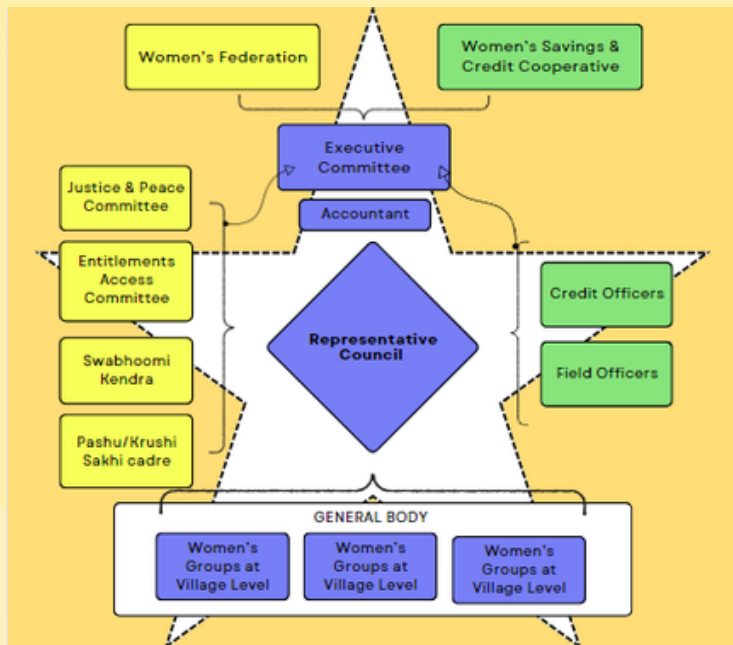
The Utthan team gave us inputs on setting up enterprises run by women themselves with the support of Sangathan. They shared examples of Sangathan women doing goat rearing as an enterprise.

This motivated our goat rearer membership. Some women joined trainings in basic veterinary care. They are called 'Pashu Sakhis'. They now provide veterinary services to a large number of rearers, produce livestock nutrition supplements and now also make by-products of goat's milk.



This enterprise-led livelihood opportunity has been helping many women to increase their income, gain financial independence as well as an aware sense of decision making.

One of the Utthan team members also reminded us of the Co-operative model. A model which the Sangathan has been planning to implement for a long time. The model supports the savings of our members from all the villages which have our member base. It provides an institutional structure to the financial savings and also provides higher amount loans to members or member groups, to run business, or village development activities etc.



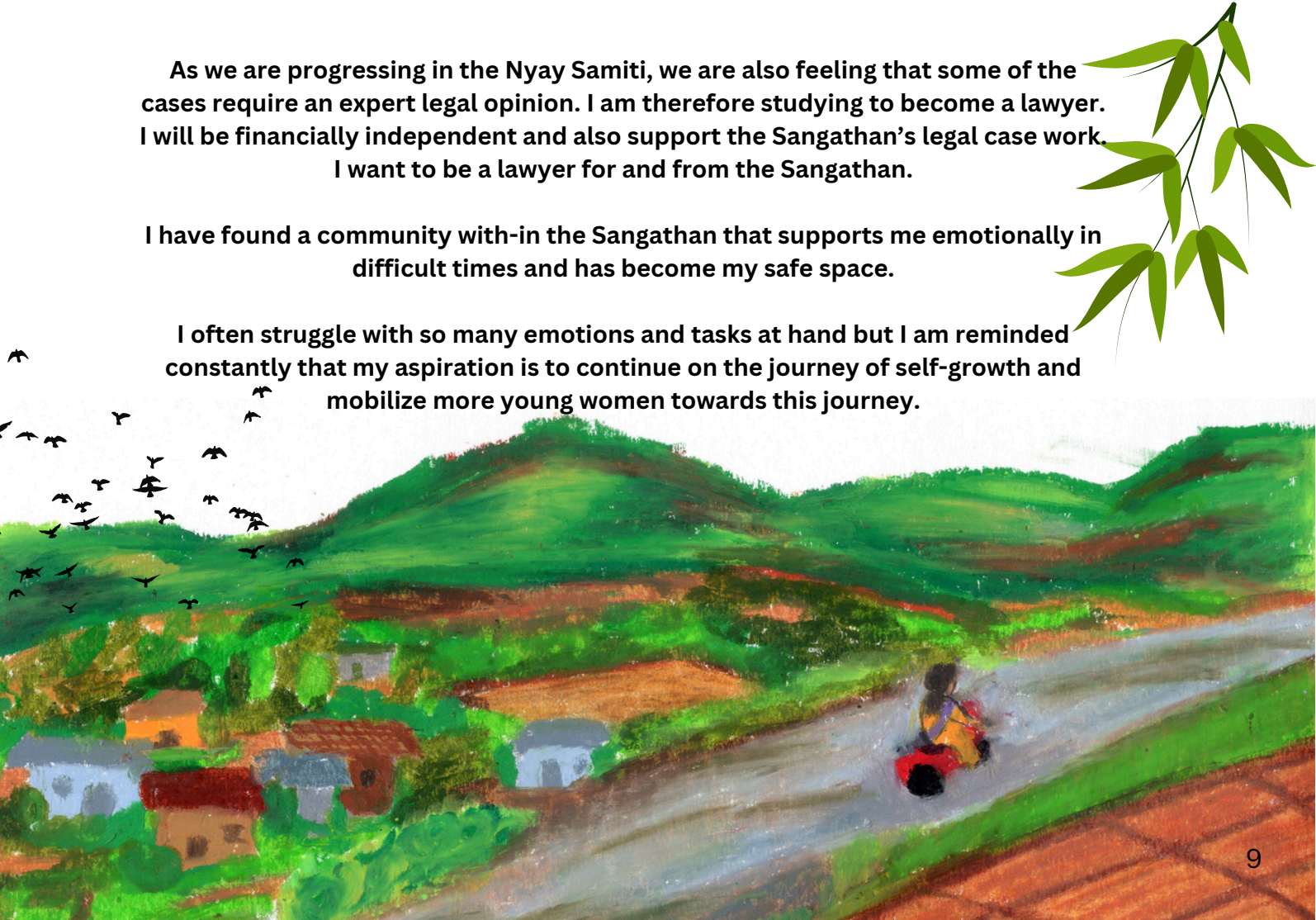
We are in the early stages of setting up the Co-operative. Women survivors and members like Rekha ben will be able to use the savings co-operative for income generation.

Financial empowerment is a necessary step if we are working towards social impact.

As we are progressing in the Nyay Samiti, we are also feeling that some of the cases require an expert legal opinion. I am therefore studying to become a lawyer. I will be financially independent and also support the Sangathan's legal case work. I want to be a lawyer for and from the Sangathan.

I have found a community with-in the Sangathan that supports me emotionally in difficult times and has become my safe space.

I often struggle with so many emotions and tasks at hand but I am reminded constantly that my aspiration is to continue on the journey of self-growth and mobilize more young women towards this journey.



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