



Akshara strives to change lives of women

Because women are half the population and have an unequal status, and are confronted with violence and

have to struggle from birth to death against huge odds.

Women's struggle for basic human rights- equality, justice, livelihood, security and dignity is an ongoing one. Akshara grew out of the 1980s women's movement's campaigns against rape and dowry. It was established informally in 1987 and officially with resources and space in 1995. There are many organizations working with and for women, adolescents and girls. In between these groups are 'young women'. We believe that young women are the potential participants and leaders of the women's movement and of society. By recognizing young women's agency, enhancing their capabilities and empowering them with information, we can help them to individually lead a better life and to collectively struggle for

a better society. We believe in changing society by changing people and encouraging collective functioning. We believe that men have to be encouraged to be active participants in this struggle. Our three pronged strategy of capacity building; information for learning; and public education and advocacy runs through all our programs.

Akshara, a Women's Resource Center,

is a project of FREA India, a non profit, registered Trust, No. F 1656 (BOM), with an exemption from income tax under Section 80 G and with a FCRA registration. The Front for Rapid Economic Advancement was established during the early 1970s period of alternative rural development, indigenous 'small is beautiful' technology and student and dalit movements. It acts as an umbrella organization for different projects.

Our Activities

Young women in lower caste and class neighborhoods have unfulfilled dreams of learning, education, jobs and self confidence. They lack resources and parental encouragement. Those women who find themselves in government 'homes' feel hopelessly trapped in them.

The Empowering Dreams Program uses multiple strategies: to locate the most deserving young women in slums and 'homes'; to enhance their capacities and skills through financial assistance for education, vocational courses; to introduce them to life skills and gender consciousness. The attempt is to involve them in socially relevant interventions for a better society. In three years, we have supported and followed the progress of many young women as they either finished school or college. Some have opted for vocations like para nursing, tailoring and basic English teaching.

We visualize reaching out to a larger number of women, organizing them in groups or co-operatives.

Information for Transformation Program

emphasises information with a gender perspective. Its free library has over 3800 books, journals, newsletters, videos and posters in English and Marathi. The program has developed easy learning strategies for young women and men opting for women's studies. On an average, over 900 users visit the library each year. Refresher courses for undergraduate college lecturers are regularly held. The program takes information outside the library, through book loans to local groups, by developing training modules, workshops and poster exhibitions on gender, violence, sexuality, leadership and other issues for groups of young women within educational institutions, for NGOs and local community groups. A different method of communication in the form a 'Mela' has been developed for young women to interactively learn and strategise an women's issues. Our mission is to create many different and alternative forms of communication suited to small and large groups of women which can be used by other grass root organisations.

The Youth for Change Program

sees every young person as a new voice, potential leader and change agent. Through collaboration with the governmental national social service, it reaches out to a large number of young persons in over 15 peripheral colleges, taking them through an educational, interactive, experiential process moving from a consciousness of the self to awareness of community issues and towards an equal and just society. The program throws up new voices and young groups of self-motivated change agents who take up the challenge of working with other students, involve themselves in socially relevant tasks and advocacy.

it is our belief that a dynamic youth movement with new leaders, will take up the challenge of change, against exploitation and for a better society. Young, poor and tower caste women living in communities in the congested slum of Dharavi, Mumbai face the most restrictions on their mobility, learning and social development. The Community Initiatives Program projects young women as assets and resources rather than liabilities to their families, community and society at large. It introduces value added vocational courses, language and life skills to them. It also works with organizations, which work with young women. A network of grass roots organizations has been formed to understand and act on issues of gender, violence, communalism and mental health. One initiative, likely to strengthen the network will be the mapping of local services and resources for providing information to the local people.

It is our hope to decentralize Akshara and encourage local resource centers in different localities which will take up the task of young women's capacity building, providing empowering information and involving them in local democratic processes and advocacy.

Other Collaborative Programs

- Activist Exchange Program will be developing an online feminist studies course for activists to learn, theorise and practice. This national program is a joint effort with Joyce, Sweden, Jagori, New Delhi, Alochana, Pune and Sakhi, Trivandrum.
- Exploring Women's Expressions in Theatre is a project entitled "Four Seasons" which will develop a one-woman show.
- Anti Violence Initiatives is a collaboration with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences for the publication and dissemination of research and material on violence against women.
- Interactive Programs with young women in government institutions is supported by UNICEF.

The Board of Trust !

Dr Nandita Gandhi (Co-Director, Managing Trustee) is an activist in the women's movement.

Dr Nandita Shah (Co-Director, Managing Trustee) is a professional social worker and a gender trainer.

Ms Abha Bhaiya, a founder member of Jagori, New Delhi, is a gender trainer and consultant.

Mr Dunu Roy is part of the Hazards Centre, New Delhi and is working on issues of technology and environment.

Ms Anjali Dave is a lecturer at Tata Institute of Social Science and is director of the Special Cell for Women and Children.

Mr Pravin Gandhi is an Information Technology professional.

Ms Nina Kapasi is a chartered accountant.

Ms Shimul Javeri Kadri is an architect and member of Women's Architect's Forum.

The Support Group

Dr Rajshree Mahatani, Reader in TI55.

Ms Micky Bhatia, Psychotherapist and analyst.

Ms Lakshmi Menon is a trained librarian and an information activist.

Dr Ramya Subramaniam is a lecturer at the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University.

Ms Bishaka Dutta founder of Point of View is a filmmaker and journalist.

Ms Vasuda Ambiye is a trainer and consultant in communications.

Akshara publications

The Quota Question- Women and Electoral Seats - English and Marathi

Shadow Workers- Women in Home based Production - English and Marathi

Not Just a Matter of Faith- Essays on Communalism

The Akshara Handbook- An Alternative Classification and Documentation System

In Search of Feminist Visions - An Annotated bibliography

Shades of Courage Women and IPC Section 498A

Apne jeevan ki Kuch Jankari - Some Facts - Hindi

Apne Hone ka Such - Stories of Muslim Women - Hindi and Urdu
Purush Pradhante che Gaudbanga! - What is Patriarchy - Marathi
The Law on Trial - The Debate on Uniform Civil Code
Confusing Choices- Part Time Courses and Career Planning
Manual on Yuvati Meta- A Training Kit / Video on Interactive Games on Women's Issues

Akshara Office

Neelambari 501, Road No. 86, Off Gokhale Road

Dadar West, Mumbai 400 028 (INDIA)

Te lef ax: 91-22-4316082

e [mail: aksharacentrewsni.com](mailto:aksharacentrewsni.com) ,

Akshara Library

Gokhale Road Municipal School, Bldg No. 2, 2nd floor (Gujarati section), Gokhale Road, Dadar West, Mumbai 400028
(INDIA)

Tel: 91-22-430 9676