

# NIRNAYA

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Indira Jena  
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## NIRNAYA

an indian women's fund  
# 11, Dcepthi Apartments,  
S.P. Road, Secunderabad - 3  
A.P. India.

Phone : 91 40 2780 5089  
Fax : 91 40 2771 7305  
hyd2\_nirnaya@sancharnet.in  
www.nirnaya.org

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## Women's Rights Day - we too are human

Annie Mathews, Nirnaya 's Advisory Council member and head of Ashish, Legal Center for Women conducted legal awareness camps for the minority women in the operational area of Nirnaya's program volunteer Fareeda Aziz in Mahboobnagar, Andhra Pradesh and two camps for the Andhra Pradesh Mahila Vikalangula Samakhya ( a network of women with disability). Her experience was that the participants at both the camps wanted quick solutions. The participants lacked the patience to understand the functioning of the legal system, the various steps that need to be followed. On 4th December "Women's Rights Day' meeting was conducted at Mahboobnagar. Indira Jena was the Chief Guest of the program while Annie S. Mathews of Ashish, was the Guest of Honor. Around 70 women participated with enthusiasm in this program, which was being organized for the first time in their locality. Ms. Fareeda did the welcome and introduction. Annie Mathews talked about the atrocities committed against women and dowry problems.

Speaking on the occasion Indira Jena said that for the first time a program of this kind was being organized in that area. She talked about equality and self- dignity of women. She said that they were not there to raise slogans and conduct rallies and go against men but to address issues like violence against women, seek equal status for women with that of men. She further said that it is out of fear that women do not step out of their homes. It could be fear of rape, sexual harassment, physical exploitation or being labeled as 'loose women.' She said that men would not have any such fear. At the most a man would fear of theft, a physical attack on him that is all. But a woman faces constant danger and hence is afraid. This fear is a created one. Society created it. Hence women should learn to overcome it. Women have to remove that fear out of them. For this a change in the thought process is required. She further added that someone else creates restrictions and norms, which a woman has to conform to. She has no say in this. Even today there are honor killings of women and girls by their menfolk because the latter believe that the women / girls have brought shame and disgrace to the family. As a final note she appealed to the women present to learn to respect themselves. She said that everyone needs peace and harmony and we should work towards it. The program continued with focus group discussions on the same topic and Vasantha Kumari of Nirnaya, conducted it. She organized group discussions so as to assess what the participants understood about the talks and how they felt about it. Six groups comprising of 5 to 6 women in each were formed in this manner. There was a kind of contest for two best speakers and Khaja Begum and Fareeda were the judges along with Vasantha Kumari.

“  
*it is out of fear that women do not step out of their homes. It could be fear of rape, sexual harassment, physical exploitation or being labeled as 'loose women.'*  
”



## Why choose to be second?

*Sometimes one wonders if man, (the male gender), would have been what he is made out to be today if the woman had asserted her independence? Would our great tradition of joint families have held? Would religions have anointed man as the supreme arbitrator?*

*One wonders.*

*All these things have been possible for man because woman to a large extent has submitted to the second place. She has agreed to play by the rules set by others (read man), however unequal. She has psyched herself into being vulnerable, less capable, less intelligent, so much so that over the ages they have seeped deep into her genes, deep enough for society to be able to hold her up for many an absurd caricature.*

*Women's Rights Day, and 'Zero Tolerance To Violence Week' and such others become necessary only to break these stereotypes and to hold a mirror up to womankind, for her to recognize the self denial she has been needlessly going through.*

*This is no card carrying sloganeering for woman, because one, before making such observations recognizes that there are many things that the man is endowed with and can do which by nature a woman cannot. But the same is true of woman. Only she can do certain things which the man cannot. So it is only just that both are given an equal status in society. There is no first or second.*

*It is time to assert one's self-respect and shake off the unnatural 'man' made restrictions designed to keep a woman down.*

*Women's Days are just regular reminders for introspection and action.*

*Aruna*

## Fundraising

The latter half of the calendar year was one filled with good will gestures and donations. The donations primarily came in for Vikasini Girls School. State Bank of India, Marredpally Secunderabad donated furniture for Vikasini and it was a proud moment when the Assistant General Manager of State Bank Mrs. Gitanjali Mishra came and cut the ribbon for the furniture in October 2004.

Mrs. Pramila Nanda made a donation in November 2004 towards instituting the 'Shyamala Pai Memorial Award' for the student of Vikasini who would score the highest marks in the secondary level board (class 7) examination five years from now. The principal amount has been deposited in RBI bonds and the interest from it will see through the awardee's studies from class 8 - 10 in any standard school. The purpose of this award is that the principal will remain untouched while the accrued interest will serve as a 3-year scholarship so that at least once every three years one student can avail of it. If more such donations come through the scholarship will become a regular annual feature.

There has been a regular flow of one-time donations for the school throughout the period October - December 2004.

Fundraising through sale of greeting cards has been a great success with Nirnaya reaching out to more people and with proper advance planning it should be possible for Nirnaya to raise the income from greeting cards in 2005. The feedback on the theme and content of the greeting cards can be called a kind of unplanned market survey for Nirnaya.



# Program Related Investments

In pursuance of our mission of economic empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized sections of women Nirnaya took up pilot projects of sanctioning revolving funds to two community based women's groups in one village in Nyalkal mandal, Medak district, seven community based women's groups in the slums of Kurnool town, Kurnool district and one village in Thiparthi mandal of Nalgonda district, Andhra Pradesh.



Jharnamma of Ambedkar group in Shamshallapur village Medak said, "I took a loan of Rs.5,000/- from the money you gave our group. I put in Rs.1,000/- and bought a buffalo. It calved and I made Rs.3,000/- from the milk sale. Then I sold the buffalo for Rs.5,000/- and I have the calf. Before we used to eat one meal a day. With this additional income we don't have to sleep on an empty stomach. I will take another loan after some time and buy another buffalo."

It was a longer and more exhaustive process in Kurnool because the groups were many and the activities the women planned varied. A total amount of Rs.75,000/- has been given as a revolving fund. Group discussions for selection of eligible candidates for the first set of loans took place. Vasantha Kumari from Nirnaya was present along with Faizunnisa, Nirnaya fellow, at all the meetings to ensure that there was group participation and a balance maintained in the sanction of loans. A thorough participatory analysis of the group's location, proposed

activity, experience / skill of the woman requesting the loan etc. took place after which the loan disbursement was completed. The activities were of a wide range, like - setting up snack centers, chicken shop, home based sari sale business, sales outlets for dates and dried fruits, milk, curd, flowers, bidi making and direct sale. Since the women got the loan before Ramzan they were able to reap a good profit. There were five Muslim women's groups and two Hindu women's groups.

Akhtar Unnisa aged 34 years, came to Kurnool 15 years back. She is illiterate. Her husband used to do mundane jobs but without much success.

After the birth of her children it became difficult for her to take care of her family consisting of her own family of four and also her husband's parents. It was difficult to get two square meals a day. Their living condition was bad. Recollecting her past Akhtar Unnisa said, "I do not know how we survived during that period. My children used to sleep hungry. I was so miserable and desperate to earn money. We faced a lot of difficulties. I remember myself trying all sorts of work. I somehow mustered the courage to fight the odds of life. I started door-to-door selling of whatever I thought was profitable. I sold fruits, masala powders and other such products.

Slowly I gained experience in this area of work. Then I started selling Khajur(Dates) and I could get a reasonable profit. I heard about Ms. Faiz Unnisa and met her. I joined



the SHG group that was formed in the year 2000 following her advice. I started saving money in the group. I took loans from the group. Initially we tried for a bank loan but we were not successful. As days passed by with the

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# Memorable days at Vikasini

I am working as a program volunteer in Vikasini School at Addagutta Secunderabad. This is a project run by NIRNAYA. It is the urban slum development project. In August it was registered as Vikasini Girl Child Education Trust.

Every day at Vikasini - It's a wonderful day. But, some days are special and unforgettable in my life. It is a totally different experience with a different atmosphere and many other things, which I never experienced in my life earlier.

It is totally a new atmosphere for me with some responsibilities, which were never handled by me. Coming to the children's section, most of the students are intelligent, but there exist stubborn children also.

I am continuing in the same school and already I have completed six months. We can name it as the world of innocence. Here the children are so innocent, that they do not know even the ABC.

I would like to share few incidents that took place a few days back, which are unforgettable. First and foremost is the day when we took the children to Zoo. It was a memorable day because for the first time the children were exposed to the outside world. They were so excited and happy that they were visiting the zoo. We started at 10:20 A.M on 24th July 04 and reached Zoo at 11:20 A.M. 45 students along with 3 teachers and 2 caretakers accompanied us. All the children enjoyed a lot. On seeing the animals they were overjoyed and they started shouting, jumping, screaming and running here and there. For the first time I slapped three to four students because they were not listening to anyone. I know that it is against the rules of the school, but in that situation that was the best remedy to control them. It was a very challenging day for the whole of Vikasini team and we completed it successfully. It was a hard day for us but when Ms. Sugathri encouraged us, we felt very happy and got lot of confidence so that we can handle such type of assignments in future.

On July 7th Ms. Sugathri explained to the students about the germination of seeds. She gave some seeds to the children and told the first and second class children to germinate them. They were very excited and enjoyed

themselves while planting the seeds. Every day they watered the plants. As soon as they came to school in the morning, they checked whether the plants have come or not. After one week when plants came out of the soil, the children were so happy and asked us also to see the plants which came out. They started discussing among themselves about it.

Another memorable day was when I explained the first lesson in English "My Mother Land" for the 2nd class children. It was my first class with them. I was so frustrated because they were not able to answer a simple question like :

- What is the name of our country ?
- What is a river ?

I tried my level best to explain in as simple words as possible.

The very next day I explained a lesson in Telugu. I faced the same situation, which I faced on the previous day. This time they were not able to answer "from which side the sun rises". I did not ask them to name of the direction. I asked them to show practically from which side the sun rises. Both 1st and 2nd class students failed to show the direction. On that day the homework which I gave them was to see "from which side the sun rises and sets". The very next day the children were able to show the direction. After that I explained them about the directions in Telugu and English.

After a few days I was explaining a lesson in science. The topic is "The forms of water". The children don't know how does ice form or with what substance ice consists of? Then I did an experiment and explained them about the forms of water. The students were surprised when they came to know that ice is formed with water and when ice melts it will turn into water again. And that the water becomes vapor and this vapor forms into clouds.

These are the memorable days which I would like to share.

Working at Vikasini is a wonderful experience.

*Madhuri - program volunteer*

### Forging ahead ...

Nirnaya's philosophy has always been to help women from specifically marginalized communities take the lead in organizing their sisters towards empowerment in terms of money, social status and self-esteem. This is an extremely sensitive and difficult initiative but we are proud to say that we have not gone off track so far. While insisting on transparency and accountability from our fellows, we have done a lot of handholding. One of the areas we support is that of commercial sex workers in Chilakaluripeta, Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. Chilakaluripeta population is 1,20,000. (One Lakh Twenty Thousand).

Among them Commercial Sex Workers population is 30,000. (Thirty Thousand).

Chilakaluripeta is a C-Grade Municipality, with very poor living conditions.

Some of the many problems in the area are open drains, and lack of basic amenities. The two sex workers we support are tough women but one visit to the area they had proposed to work in showed us how tough a challenge they have taken up. They have to find a suitable time to get their community women to gather at a common place for a meeting. They have to negotiate their way through the pimps who feel threatened of any attempt on the part of the women to organize as a group and are capable of killing anyone who tries to help them. The HIV /AIDs victims look to these two women for some kind of relief and support. The schools, hospitals, government offices, banks do not extend the necessary support. Neither of them has even the elementary writing skills and they depend on some scribe who seems to ignore most of what they say and just sends a date-wise visits diary to Nirnaya. When one of these women, feeling isolated, calls up our office, there is so much life, vibrancy and at the same time pathos in her voice and narration of small but significant incidents. These two women work in what they call PDP (Pedda Dommari Palem) and CDP (Chinna Dommari Palem) areas. In five months they were able to open savings accounts for three of the self help groups. The commitment and very intimate understanding of these two women will certainly ensure that Nirnaya support

is worthwhile. Samudraveni and Bhramaramba between them have formed 12 self-help groups and have been able to open bank accounts in the names of three groups. The fact that these two women have very low literacy levels does not surface because they are savvy in handling their cell phones and ATM cards! In one of the groups formed by Samudraveni, some members are trained in leaf plate making and tailoring. In one of the other groups, some of the women are engaged in vending fruits, vegetables, setting up petty shops etc. for which they look for support towards scale up costs.

Near Maddi Venkatratnam School, Vaddipalem in what is known as CDP area there is a group of about 10 women with Renuka as their group leader and 5 of the group members are HIV+. They are ready to save irrespective of loans. Some of the other means of livelihood they are engaged in are tailoring, leafplate making, selling fruits, working in hospitals as scavengers, working as domestic help and setting up petty shops. Some women including the group leader Renuka have been saving Rs 30/- per month since 2 years. Some of the women want to stop working as CSW and are keen on rehabilitation. Eramma has grown up children and both are sick. Veeramma is HIV+ and her son goes for construction labor and gives Rs.15/- at home. Some young women are interested in tailoring and are willing to form as a work group to learn tailoring. The women interested in fruit vending generally vend fruits like oranges, mangoes etc., and also all types of seasonal fruits. The returns in fruit vending are more than 100% of the amount invested, according to them.

Supporting the cause of women with disability through a speech and hearing challenged young woman is yet another challenge for Nirnaya. Twenty three year old Janaki, whom Nirnaya supports with a fellowship, has a spouse with similar impairment and they come from a socially and economically vulnerable family. She took up three villages in Thiparthi mandal of Nalgonda district Andhra Pradesh and helped the women with disability form SHGs, got them medical certification, opened accounts for them in State Bank and one of the groups has got a revolving fund from Nirnaya.

### Time out with Vikasini

The efforts to help set up a second Vikasini Girls School are on but it seems to be a fairly daunting task if one is not a 'local' person in the sense of having enough credibility about the intent. An interested person completed the survey, and she made several visits but the co-operation of the local slum leader is not forthcoming and so the project is kept on hold.

Vikasini Girls School, Addagutta, Secunderabad has been making steady strides under the inspiring leadership of our program officer. She has built up a good team in the school. She has inculcated some amount of discipline among the students and won the hearts of the parents of the 56 children.

**Independence Day** was celebrated with Rotary Club Secunderabad West taking a lead role in hosting breakfast for all the students and invitees. The mother of one of the brightest children hoisted the national flag. The children then entertained the invitees with a fancy dress contest where the judges were two of our regular donors, Mrs. Pramila Nanda and Mrs. Suvarna Somshekhar. The prizes were sponsored by Rotary Club.

#### Health Camp

A pediatrician from Medicity Hospitals, Dr. Janaki conducted a medical check up for the students and prescribed medicines wherever necessary and tonics. On her advice, the school team mobilized the mothers of the children to contribute peanuts and jaggery and make peanut candy which would provide the much needed vitamins and



protein. The mid day meal also included greens for iron supplements.

#### Parents Meet

At the parents meet which is only attended by the mothers there was an understanding of the need for discipline and appreciation for the good work that has been going into the education of their children. On seeing Sugathri Sharma Nirnaya's program officer and in charge of the education project at the meeting 40 days after childbirth the mothers were thrilled and heaved a sigh of relief that she was back.

#### Excursion to Visakhapatnam and Borra Caves

The children of classes 1 and 2 were taken out on an excursion in the second week of December 2004. There were a total of 12 members inclusive of two teachers, one mother and 9 children. They had a wonderful time and also learnt what a river, a bay and caves look like. The teachers had gone with information on all this and what was really overwhelming was the exuberance and information the children came back with. This kind of learning is something they will never forget. There is a plan to make this an annual event for children so they understand difficult concepts and have fun at the same time. It has been the experience of Vikasini that whatever children learn practically they retain for a longer time and are able to relate many other aspects of life with their learning. They also learn to share and help each other as friends and this is something that children from that community do not have the luxury of experiencing in their homes.

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help of Ms.Faiz Unnisa the other leader and myself approached State Bank of India, Baazaar branch and met the manager. I personally requested the manager to consider sanctioning of a loan to our group. I said it was my responsibility to see that the loan installments were made on time. We got a loan amount of RS.25,000.00 that we repaid in time. As a second loan we received RS.50,000.00. We promptly repaid it. We are still awaiting another loan but the manager said it would take some time before our turn comes again.

We might or we might not be considered for a loan this time but my concern is that Ramzan festival season is nearing and this is the period for maximum purchases of dry fruits to take place. If we manage to put in more capital in our dry Khajur (Dates) business then we can expect more profit. This period is very crucial for our petty businesses. But we do not have the money required for scaling up of our business. If I get a loan to help me in scaling up of my khajur business I can make good profits."

Akhtar Unnisa comes from a minority community where women are not allowed to come out of the confines of the house and take up the task of earning a living. Still she managed to come to this level. She attributes this to Ms.Faiz Unnisa for giving her the moral support and also for giving guidance to her during difficult situations.

The group sanctioned a loan with which Akhtar Unnisa bought dates in bulk and during Ramzan season she got 50% profit on her investments. She did a roaring business during Ramzan season in November 2004 and is a happy woman today.

Sri Sai Mahila Vikalangula Sangam a community women's group comprising of women with disability in Gaddikondaram village, Thiparthi mandal got a revolving fund of Rs.10,000/-. They have set up a petty shop in the village since the town is far away and there is no proper transport facility.



## Institutional Development

Nirnaya is fortunate in having members on its board of trustees with varied experiences in the field of micro enterprise, entrepreneurship, development studies and women's movement. It has a wonderful advisory council comprising of women from even more varied fields. The field support is taken care of by enthusiastic and able handling of the concerned program staff.

## Conferences/ Meetings / Seminars/ Workshops

- Grantmakers without Borders Annual Conference held from 14-16, October, 2004 at Miami, Florida was attended by Indira Jena.
- Foundations for Peace network meeting held from 14-16, November, 2004 at Colombo, Sri Lanka, was attended by Indira Jena.

In Celebration of International Women's Day



**NIRNAYA**  
Brings You

Dr. Ananda Shankar Jayant's  
Dance Theatre Production

*What  
about me?*

**Poetry :** Tejdeep Kaur Menon, I.P.S.      **Music :** Prema Ramamurthy

**Date :** 6th March 2005, Time : 6.30 p.m.

**Venue :** Ravindra Bharathi, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

With sponsorship from State Bank of India, LHO Hyderabad, Andhra Bank, HO Hyderabad, Canara Bank, Circle Office, Hyderabad, Smart Value Forex and Travells (P) Ltd., Hyderabad and some individuals.



Donations to Nirnaya are exempted from tax under Section 80G of the IT Act, 1961.

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- I would like to donate a sum of  
Rs. \_\_\_\_\_ monthly.
- I would like to donate a sum of  
Rs. \_\_\_\_\_ annually.
- I would like to make a one time endowment of  
Rs. \_\_\_\_\_
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Cheques / Demand drafts should be drawn in favour of  
**NIRNAYA** payable at Secunderabad.

Donations in cash could be made at :

## **Nirnaya**

an Indian women's fund

#11 deepthi apartments, s.p. road,  
secunderabad - 500 026, a.p. India.

Phone: 91-40-27805089

Fax: 91-40-27717305

e-mail: [hyd2\\_nirnaya@sancharnet.in](mailto:hyd2_nirnaya@sancharnet.in)

[www.nirnaya.org](http://www.nirnaya.org)

# NIRNAYA

#11 deepthi apartments, s.p. road, secunderabad - 26, a.p. India.

Phone: 91-40-27805089 Fax: 91-40-27717305

e-mail: [hyd2\\_nirnaya@sancharnet.in](mailto:hyd2_nirnaya@sancharnet.in) [www.nirnaya.org](http://www.nirnaya.org)

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