



Introduction:

In 2024, SPANDHANA placed a strong emphasis on forming and strengthening Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to work actively with local communities. Each SHG member was encouraged not only to fight for their rights within the community but also to stand up for themselves in their personal lives, fostering self-respect and dignity. SPANDHANA provided training on engaging with gram panchayats, accessing government schemes, and understanding labor rights, enabling members to become effective advocates for change. Through these efforts, participants developed essential leadership qualities, improved communication skills, and nurtured empathy towards diverse communities. Additionally, members were motivated to practice kitchen gardening, promoting healthy eating habits and ensuring nutritious food for their families.

This year Spandhana continued its commitment to organizing and empowering rural women labourers through consistent community meetings and awareness programs. The focus was on enabling women to build a better life by strengthening their understanding of rights, access to resources, and collective participation in decision-making processes.

Alongside this, we placed strong emphasis on building awareness about women's rights under the Indian Constitution, labour rights, and the provisions of the Labour Code. These sessions enabled women to understand their entitlements in the workplace, recognise unfair practices, and take steps to protect their rights. In addition, we encouraged active participation in Gram Panchayat meetings so that women could directly engage with local governance, raise community issues, and learn about schemes implemented at the village level.

Through various workshops and study circles conducted during the year, women labourers were empowered with knowledge and awareness that went beyond their immediate work-related concerns. These sessions helped them gain a deeper understanding of their rights, the provisions of the Indian Constitution, and the laws safeguarding labourers. They also explored the stories of historical women who played significant roles in India's freedom struggle and in the drafting of the Constitution. By learning about these inspiring figures and the legacy of women's participation in nation-building, the women labourers not only became more informed but also more motivated to take an active role in shaping their own communities and advocating for their rights.

Spandhana also addressed the often-overlooked issue of mental health among women labourers, providing a supportive environment where they could discuss stress, workplace challenges, and personal struggles without stigma. Alongside this, efforts were made to organise unions for different groups of labourers, including filature workers, agricultural labourers, and beedi workers, to strengthen their collective bargaining power.

Through continuous engagement with beedi workers, we observed the extremely low standard of living in which they survive. This reality has further strengthened our resolve to work towards improving their socio-economic conditions through awareness, advocacy, and direct support.

Highlights

SHG Strengthening and Formation

- Jan 2024: Orientation on SHG banking, group objectives, and kitchen gardening conducted at Hallimala School. Participants learned to maintain records and communicate with local authorities.
- May 2024: Formation of *KANASU* SHG in Gandinagar. Training included group management and awareness on women's legal rights.
- June 2024: Formation and first meeting of *SWAPNA* SHG with beedi worker women from Channapatna. Leadership was democratically elected.

Kitchen Gardening and Food Security

- Feb–Mar 2024: Launched the "*Mane Mane Tharakari*" initiative in Thibbegowdana Doddi and Hallimala to promote household vegetable gardening. Seed kits were distributed and training on organic composting was given.
- Mar 2024: Training continued at the Spandhana office for Hallimala SHG to support food self-sufficiency among marginalized households.

Labor Rights and Union Mobilization

- Apr 2024: Labor Day celebrated with sessions on union history and workers' rights, led by Jayamma, a state Anganwadi union leader.
- June 2024: Workshop on the Indian Constitution and labor rights, focusing on wage justice and unionization for unorganized sector workers.
- Sept 2024: Attempt to mobilize silk reel (filature) workers into a union. Despite fear of employer retaliation, Spandhana offered support and is continuing follow-up.

Women's Rights and Political Participation

- July 2024: Collaboration with writer Akshay Gowtham for a script on a woman's life journey, to be performed by the Manavi cultural team across Karnataka.
- Aug 2024: Workshop on historic women's movements and leaders to inspire community action.
- Oct 2024: Women in Politics workshop encouraged active participation in local elections and raised issues of political monopolization at the panchayat level.

Health and Well-being

- Nov 2024: Workshop on mental health and menstrual hygiene conducted by psychiatric social worker Padma Rekha. Covered stigma, symptoms, treatment options, and safe menstrual practices.

Worker Safety and Advocacy

- Dec 2024: Workshop on challenges faced by beedi and agricultural workers. Issues like health hazards, underpayment, and social security were addressed by experts and leaders.

Major Activities and impact

SL No	Activities	Sub Activities	Impact and Outcomes, Further steps
1.	Educating SHG Members About Opening Bank Account & Kitchen Garden (10/01/2024)	Training SHG members at Hallimala School on SHG concept, objectives, record keeping, bank account creation, and writing to local bodies; Kitchen garden awareness by Ms. Malini	Members understood SHG structure, financial management, and healthy food practices. Further Steps: Support account opening, monitor kitchen garden progress, follow-up training on SHG management.
2.	Awareness on Kitchen Garden – Thibbegowdana Doddi (15/02/2024)	Visit by Ms. Malini & Ms. Mangala; Guidance on seed distribution, minimal water usage, compost making	Increased interest in home gardening for nutrition and income savings. Further Steps: Provide continuous agri-support and create model gardens in the village.
3.	‘Mane Mane Tharakari’ with Hallimala SHG (20/03/2024)	Training at Spandhana Office; Guidance on growing vegetables/fruits in small spaces	Reduced malnutrition and increased household savings on vegetables. Further Steps: Monitor harvest results, scale program to more SHGs.

4.	Formation of KANASU SHG (12/05/2024)	SHG formation with 12 women from Gandinagar; Training on group rules and women's rights	Women organized for mutual support and rights advocacy. Further Steps: Link SHG to microcredit and govt. schemes.
5.	Formation of KANASU SHG (12/05/2024)	SHG formation with 12 women from Gandinagar; Training on group rules and women's rights	Women organized for mutual support and rights advocacy. Further Steps: Link SHG to microcredit and govt. schemes.
6.	Workshop on Constitution & Labor Rights (15/06/2024)	Training by Seetha Lakshmi; Awareness on rights, union formation; Formation of SWAPNA SHG with 12 beedi workers	Workers gained confidence to join unions; new SHG formed. Further Steps: Support SWAPNA SHG growth, connect with labor federations.
7.	SWAPNA SHG First Meeting (22/06/2024)	Rules, record keeping, seal creation, bank account planning	Group set agenda for social and financial empowerment. Further Steps: Facilitate account creation, conduct monthly reviews.
8.	Discussion on New Script (11/07/2024)	Script planning with Akshay Gowtham for cultural play on women's life	Content to raise gender awareness through performances. Further Steps: Finalize script, schedule performances.
9.	Women's Movement for Transformation (18/08/2024)	Session on historic women leaders; Reading recommendations	Inspired women to take leadership roles. Further Steps: Organize leadership training and book clubs.

10.	Organizing Filature Union (27/09/2024)	Awareness on unionization for silk workers; Cultural team performance	Workers are aware of rights but hesitant to form union. Further Steps: Build trust, provide legal backing, repeat sessions.
11.	Women in Politics (19/10/2024)	Discussion on women's role in politics, election barriers	Women encouraged to contest elections. Further Steps: Mentor women candidates for upcoming Panchayat elections.
12.	Mental Health & Menstrual Hygiene Workshop (23/11/2024)	Conducted by psychiatric social worker Padma Rekha	Improved awareness on mental illness and menstrual hygiene. Further Steps: Hold quarterly health awareness sessions.
13.	Challenges of Beedi & Agricultural Workers (12/12/2024)	Health hazards, rights, and organizing for fair wages	Workers are aware of risks and rights. Further Steps: Advocate for social security coverage and safe workplaces.

Outcomes and Impact

- Formation of two new SHGs (*KANASU* and *SWAPNA*) with empowered women leaders.
- Over 100 women and workers were educated on constitutional rights and labor laws.
- Initiated kitchen gardening across multiple villages to address malnutrition.
- Supported political awareness and potential grassroots candidacies.
- Advocated for mental and menstrual health in underserved communities.
- Initiated steps toward unionization in Ramanagara's silk industry.

Way Forward (2025 Goals)

- Continue building SHGs and support groups in uncovered areas.
- Strengthen worker unions and negotiate better labor conditions.
- Expand kitchen garden programs to additional villages.
- Organize more health awareness and political education workshops.
- Advocate for inclusion of beedi workers in social security schemes.