

Bala Sangham

Facilitating empowerment process from childhood to build a cadre of well informed girls and young women with sensitized leadership was the focus of '*Cheli Sanghams*' – Girls Collectives facilitated on demand from the girls during 1994-95.

Realizing the need to sensitize both genders together to address the influences of patriarchal values built through socialization process *Cheli Sanghams* later transformed into *Bala Sanghams* – Collectives of Boys and Girls, to facilitate sensitized second generation for advocating Equity and Equality issues collectively. These are village level collectives of boys & girls in the age group of 10 – 18 years.

Vision

Advocating for Gender Equity and Equality through a cadre of informed and empowered second generation change agents.

Objectives

- To access child rights
- To understand and attempt to eliminate all forms of discrimination against children
- To ensure gender equality in accessing education, health and resources
- To evolve as a pressure group for influencing social change

Issues

- Child rights,
- Gender Discrimination
- Life skill education
- Reproductive health
- Psychological & emotional health
- Understanding adolescence
- Protection and conservation of environment
- Challenging social issues, viz., child labour, child marriages, abuse and atrocities against girls, etc

Activities

- Regular village level meetings
- Periodical cluster meetings
- Mandal level meetings for sharing & interaction
- Trainings for capacity building
- Campaigns and forums for awareness & sensitization
- Melas for collective planning & action
- Networking & Convergence
- Child Rights Protection Committees at Village level

Progress of Bala Sanghams along the years

	1998-1999	1999-2000	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
No. of Chelisanghams*/Balasanghams	33	75	185	288	322	386	427	557	738	1192	1633
No. of members	485	1115	2792	3456	5379	5905	7357	10536	17854	30553	44718

* Till 2000-01 there were only Chelisanghams (Kishori sanghams) and from 2001-02 all those sanghams are converted to Bala Sanghams with boys joining the Kishori/Chelisanghams

Achievements

1. The Children of Toragallu village in Kanagal Mandal of Nalgonda district joined together to form '*Nehru Balala Sangham*'. They held regular meetings to sensitise non-school going children and admitted them in school by convincing their parents. They now also discuss about health and child rights at their meetings.

When a meeting of Bala Sanghams was held at the Mandal level, the members of Sangham also attended it. A member of the Sangham by name Krishna was in the service of a land lord. He was very eager to participate in the meeting but was disappointed because the landlord's wife did not agree to relieve him on the pretext of work. All the children of Bala Sangham then went to the land lord and asked him to send Krishna with them. When the couple did not relent, they told them about child rights and that infringement of such rights could invite action by the police, the lady was taken aback. They had to send Krishna to the meeting. The children shared this proud victory with everyone else at the meeting.

2. In Nizamabad, on the occasion of Environment Day, Balamitra children, teachers, Children of Cheli/Bala Sanghams & Sangham women all participated in collection of information related to the villages and started bio-diversity registers. Also they organised a "*Environment Day Mela*" in Yellareddy Mandal on this occasion. In this mela, they exhibited the information collected from the villages and samples of crops cultivated. The Sangham women were surprised by the number of crops being cultivated in the villages. They took out a rally together and also spoke about forests, trees, protection of old traditional crops and patent rights while discussing about Environment Day. The women said this about food grains, which were becoming extinct: "At least from now onward we will cultivate traditional crops and plant trees".

They are protecting the natural resources in the villages and starting bio-diversity registers. While collecting the information about the village to record in the register, the children of BMK and Cheli/Bala sanghams have been enthusiastic and diligent in collecting details of forests, crops and fauna.

Mandal officers who attended the mela expressed surprise at the various food grains displayed in the exhibition. They enquired about and appreciated the activities of Sangham women. The Sangham women who are also members of *Vana Samrakshana Samities* (Forest Protection Committees) said, “From now on we will protect the forests to save the depleting natural resources, grow trees and also see that they are not cut”.

3. In Tharasingh Bavi Thanda, Warangal District, Bala Sangham children were given Gender trainings. In this village, there was preparation of “*Gudumba* (Cheap liquor)”. The children realized that there are many problems with drinking. The economic status was very low and there were financial problems were threatening and even the health of the drunken felt was in danger. In the drunken mood, they do not know the difference between mother and daughters and there were some issues of forcing daughters to have sex. The wives and children were put to beatings and scolding vulgar words by the drunken persons, which led to disturbances in their poor families as well as village.

One day, the issue was discussed in Balasangham meeting, where the parents were also made to attend the meeting. In this meeting, they discussed with the parents about the problem along with their village upa-sarpanch. The parents were slowly made realized the habit of drinking and its effect on the children, family and village. The parents decided to stop drinking and preparation in the village. They, with the support of Upa-sarpanch, village men and thanda men made a resolution that “if anyone drinks, they have to pay a penalty of Rs. 500/- “. From then onwards, the practice of drinking and preparation was stopped. The Balasangham children are very happy at this achievement. They want to make all Balasanghams to take up such issues and take part in developing the family village.

Bala Panchayat

These are cluster level forums to address common concerns and influence social change with support of ‘Child Rights Protection Committees’ formed to support the Bala Sanghams with the membership of representatives from parents, Grama Panchayat, School Education Committee, teacher, Mahila Sangham and Youth group.

Vision

“Bringing common concerns of Children and Adolescents to fore front, setting up support structures and demanding accountability of the institutions and systems towards their rights”

Activities

- Regular meetings to acquire knowledge on child rights and related issues
- Establishing support structures through networking and convergence to bring their issues to forefront
- Act as pressure group for effective and adolescent friendly policies

Structure

