

The Women of Koderma: An Anti Liquor Movement

Taking responsibility for eradicating the social evil of alcohol abuse by the men-folk of their villages, the women of DMMS demonstrate their strength and determination by uniting in large numbers to voice their opposition to the sale of liquor and compelling shopkeepers to shut shop and discard their stock

Most of the women members of the Damodar Mahila Mandal Sangh (DMMS) Self Help Group (SHG) in Koderma wanted to eradicate the social evil of drinking among the villagers. To create awareness amongst the villagers about alcohol abuse, the women organized an anti-alcohol rally in their block on 23 June 2012.

The women faced many problems because the men were habituated to drinking alcohol and they, the women, were the ones who suffered the most; they were at a loss about how to lessen or eradicate this problem. During the cluster trainings, the SHG members blamed alcohol for their problems and decided to raise a voice against it. Every member knew that this would be a tough task and would lead to disrespect and even harm from the men-folk and society.

At first, many SHG members tried to make their husbands quit drinking. Only some succeeded over a period of two months. They then began to protest against the liquor vendors who, they felt, were also to blame. The agitation against the sellers of alcohol increased day by day. Finally, during the General Body meeting of the SHG of Jainagar, held on 18 June 2012, the leaders of the federation placed on the agenda that strong action should be taken against those selling alcohol otherwise the movement against alcohol would lose its momentum. This led to the preparation of an action plan in which it was decided that a rally would be organized on 23 June 2012. The villages chosen for the rally were Garhai, Garaindih, Nayi Tand and Behradih. The dates for rallies in other villages were to be decided later by the General Body, depending upon the success of the first rally. Four persons took the responsibility of drafting letters and informing the administration (the SP, the SDO and the women's police station). Others took the responsibility of informing all the SHG members and of bringing them to the venue (Birs Chowk) on time. The people from PRADAN took the responsibility of preparing slogans, placards, arranging the sound system and inviting the media.

On D-day, nearly 700 SHG members from Jainagar and Koderma blocks reached Birsa Chowk as scheduled despite the rain. The enthusiasm of the SHG members could be seen in their eyes and their body language. With their heads held high, posters and sticks in their hands, the women moved forward in a disciplined manner, shouting slogans at the top of their voices. The rally stopped near each alcohol vendor's shop and warned him and his staff to stop selling liquor at once, otherwise the women of DMMS would not spare him the next time. By the time the women reached Garaindih, the number of women increased to more than 1,000.

At one stage, when the women warned a family against selling liquor, the man became angry and began abusing the members of the DMMS. The women again told him to close his shop but he kept shouting. His brother came forward and took him away and locked him inside the house and asked for forgiveness. He said that he would not let his brother spoil the lives of others by selling liquor but the vendor's wife shouted at the women to mind their own business and move away from their house. Meanwhile, the man somehow climbed onto the roof of his house with stones and started throwing them at the women. Some of the women got hurt and began to throw stones back at him. The man finding himself helpless and becoming more angry, began throwing the '*khaphra*' (tiles) from the roof at the women and, in this process, hit his own brother so hard on the head that he began to bleed. The women brought the man down from the rooftop, asked him to apologize to the women whom he had hurt, but he refused. The women then called the SP and handed the man over to him. The news of this incident spread quickly and in the nearby villages, people began to hide their liquor containers. The rally continued forward, warning people—

both the ones who drank and those who sold alcohol.

In Behradih, when the women warned the shopkeeper, he denied that he ever sold liquor. Many of the women in the movement were from this village and the nearby area; they urged him to start another business but he denied outright that he sold liquor. He challenged the women to search his shop and house if they didn't believe him. The women took him up on it and began to search his shop and house and came out with two large containers full of liquor which they poured on the road and then rejoiced in their victory.

After warning the liquor vendor sternly, they moved forward and reached the highway in Kamedih, which is believed to have the largest number of liquor stalls, many of them with licenses to sell liquor. Many men were gathered outside the shops to oppose the women but to their dismay, the women greatly outnumbered the men. They not only warned the vendors but also broke the locks of two liquor shops, brought out all the liquor and poured it on the road while the men looked on stunned. Some of the men tried to quarrel and argue but failed in the face of the women's determination.

In other shops, the women went inside and brought out all the liquor they could find and poured it on the ground and warned the vendors not to open their shops again. The women also forced the licensed liquor shop to down its shutters and told the owner to move his shop elsewhere.

The women who had been hurt during the stone throwing action at Garaindih went to the police station and filed an FIR against the man.

The result: one couldn't have expected a better movement from the women of the

DMMS. The movement showed the strength that the women can exercise when they unite. Each and every member participating in the movement gave her best and made the men more careful of their actions.

The next day, the friends of the man from Garaindih went to Gauri *didi*, Champa *didi*, Baswa *didi*, Parwati *didi*, Triveniji and others and requested them to withdraw the FIR so that the man could be released. The women refused. The men threatened to harm them if they didn't take back the FIR. The vendors whose liquor was destroyed came together and threatened the women of the DMMS that they would file a counter FIR against them. At the time of writing this article, the women of the DMMS are being abused and threatened,

which has created some disturbance among the women members and their families. On the other hand, they are ready to face any problem.

Four days after the movement, there is a buzz amongst the villagers about the movement and the power that the women have displayed. Many villagers have come forward to support the women in this movement. The women from all over Jainagar and Koderma are asking for support to start such a movement in their villages as well. The women who once believed that they could not handle such issues are now convinced and believe that they can eradicate liquor from all the villages in which DMMS is present.