Biographical Background: Anuradha Bhosale

Director of AVANI
Founder of Women and Child Rights Campaign (WCRC), Kolhapur, India

Overview:
Anuradha's Bhosale is a renowned grassroots women's rights and anti-child labor activist based in the Kolhapur district, Maharashtra, India where more than 35,000 children are involved in daily labor for local industries. A former child-laborer herself at the age of six, she has spent the past 20 years fighting for the prevention of child exploitation, labor, trafficking, and female infanticide. As director of AVANI organization, she has facilitated the rescue of 341 child laborers, provided 5,604 migrant children the right to health care and education, organized the construction of schools inside the brickyards and established a residential home for migrant children.

From the beginning, Anuradha recognized that child-labor was a cyclical phenomena oftentimes beginning with women in vulnerable positions. Empowering, educating and uniting disadvantaged women to build sustainable futures in a male dominated society has therefore been the backbone of her anti child-labor work and mission. Searching for long-term solutions to the root of the issues surrounding child labor, she founded the *Women and Child Rights Campaign* (WCRC), devoted to educating and empowering widowed, divorced and abandoned women--those at the greatest risk of sending their children into the work force out of necessity. Working at the grassroots level organizing meetings in rural villages, Anuradha drives change by providing marginalized rural women and children access to information regarding their legal civil rights. She motivates them to unite, do for themselves, pursue education and act on their own issues. In 2010, with the assistance of the WCRC trained village adults and children, 3,741 widows, divorced and abandoned women have started to receive their government entitlements reducing the need to send their children into the work force.

While Anuradha Bhosale is visibly at the helm of the women's right and anti child labor cause in her region, her message will always be rooted in the belief that long-term change and growth can only be accomplished by encouraging people to educate and do for themselves.

History:
Anuradha Bhosale was born on December 20, 1971 in Shrirampur, India. With her family in desperate need of money, she became a child laborer at age six. For the next three years, she worked as a domestic servant, yet fortunately earning enough money to pay her own way through school. This early experience impressed upon her the value and importance of an education as one of the only means to better oneself. After graduating with a Master of Social Work from Nirmala Niktan College in Mumbai, she was exposed to the needs of migrant

children who crushed rocks used in paving roads. She introduced these families to the principles of micro-finance and assisted in setting up self-help groups for women.

She was later employed as the Project Holder for the Social Work Department of Bajaj Auto Company (India's second largest auto manufacturer) as part of their corporate social works initiatives responsible for managing the environmental and sanitation projects in 124 rural villages.

In July 1996, she began work with Verala Development Society (VDS) whose mission it was to provide houses for homeless, divorced and widowed women. This entailed a grueling three hour bus commute each way to Sangli yet led to another related position with the the AVANI Organization in Kolhapur conducting the first surveys of migrant children. Anuradha was AVANI's sole employee from 1997 - 2002. She worked without an office space or staff to assist her and conducted her work from a park bench at the town hall garden.

The Indian government had long prohibited any school drop-outs from ever being allowed to attend a government school again. Due to the transient nature of migrant communities, migrant children are a greater risk for being considered drop-outs. This drastically increased the likelihood that they would be forced into child labor practices. Between 1999 - 2004, 36 schools, housing 50 students each, were established to educate the drop out students and children of migrant laborers, especially from the brickyards. It was was at this point that Anuradha realized that simply working to educating these children was not sufficient. She needed to work toward changing the very laws that were hindering children from being granted their basic rights as Indian citizens. Analyzing the roles of various departments of government, Anuradha realized that there were indeed many laws, rights and benefits that were in existence yet simply not being granted to women and children.

Brickyard Schools

In 2002, the Right to Education bill was drafted to provide free and compulsory education for all Indian children between the ages of 6 - 14. Anuradha's work for the next eight years involved forcing the government to vote on their acceptance of the bill -- making it into a law. After 11 years of work with the Indian government, "The Right to Education Act" was finally passed into law in April of 2010. However, this law only provided for the educational opportunities of children between the ages 6 - 14. As pleased as AVANI was for its role in the passing of the law, they then shifted their focus to the education of migrant children between the ages of 3 - 6 years. In response, AVANI began creating and operating schools directly in the brickyards for migrant children of this age group.

AVANI Residential Home

In 2005, a group of migrant laborers requested that Anuradha create a special residential home just for migrant children who were at risk of child labor. She accepted and helped create AVANI Residential Home, initially run out of a hut made from mud and cow dung lacking electricity or running water. In 2007, Dr. Arun Gandhi, the acting president of the *Gandhi Worldwide*

Education Institute (GWEI) began financially supporting the residential home that now houses thirty-seven children. They continue to work in partnership. GWEI has purchased some land outside of Kolhapur and is currently working towards building an institute for that will provide vocational and academic opportunities to migrant and underprivileged populations.

Anuradha married in 1996 and later gave birth to two children (Kadambari and Granth). Throughout her marriage, neither her husband nor in-laws supported Anuradha in her social work. The family did not employ a domestic servant so her family duties began each morning 4:00 am cleaning the pots, washing the floors, clothes and preparing meals. Her marriage would later deteriorate to the degree in which her husband and in-laws forced her and her two young children out of the home with only the clothes on their back.

" I did not have family or close friendships to rely on. I now realized the plight of Indian women and their children who were so often kicked out of the house and abandoned. I realized that I was not alone. That there were many women far worse off than me. They go through worse conditions than mine. I thought that I was quite intelligent and very smart with the work I was doing for others. It wasn't until the world caved in around me that I truly realized what the women I had been working with were dealing with. I no longer sympathized with them--I understood the true meaning of empathy. This became my inspiration, " she stated years later.

Child Rescue & Women's and Children's Rights Campaign (WCRC)

Anuradha's formalized her rights-based work for sustainable development at the grassroots level by founding the *Women's and Children's Rights Campaign* (WCRC) whose aim it is to empower women through education and training to effectively deal with government laws relating to education, labor and benefits. The children of women who were widowed, divorced or whose husbands had abandoned them were most likely to become child laborers to support the family. WCRC has rescued, regularized and repatriated 341 child laborers back into society as productive, working citizens. The WCRC now has a substantial presence in 15 rural villages in a 45 km radius around Kolhapur. Sixty adults and children have been trained as leaders and now identify and act on their own issues. In 2010, with the assistance of the trained village adults and children by the WCRC, 3,741 widows, divorced and abandoned women would start to receive their government benefits. Their children no longer needed to be institutionalized and now reside with their families again.

Facts and Accomplishments relating to Anuradha Bhosale's fight against Child Labor:

- According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) there are approximately 165,000,000 children worldwide between the ages of 5 and 14 actively involved in child labor.
- In the Kolhapur District alone, more than 35,000 children are involved in daily labor for local industries.
- AVANI and WCRC has assisted 5,604 migrant and school drop out children between the ages of 6 - 14 attend government schools throughout the Kolhapur District.
- AVANI now operates schools in the brickyards for migrant children between the ages of 3 - 6 since the Indian government does not recognize their right to education. At any given time, there are over 700 migrant children in this age group living in the brickyards.
- In 2007, the WCRC convinced the district and state governments of Maharashtra to form a task force to rescue child laborers under the age of 18. The WCRC provided the necessary training and education on the Juvenile Justice Act (J J Act) to the police departments and Labor Welfare Department.
- WCRC has rescued, regularized and repatriated 341 child laborers back into our society as productive, working citizens.
- In 2010, with the assistance of the trained village adults and children by the WCRC, 3,741 widows, divorced and abandoned women started to receive their government benefits. Their children no longer need to be institutionalized and now reside with their families again.
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