

**Internship
at
Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram(SBMA),
Uttarakhand**

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Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram, Uttarakhand State

Introduction about SBMA

Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram (SBMA) is an independent organization that works with the people of Garhwal Himalayas.

The Ashram evolved out of years of community struggle led by the late Swami Manmathan, a crusader from Kerala who formed a passionate commitment to the progress of Uttranchal.

In the activist tumult of the 1960's and 70's the people of Garhwal, especially women, gave voice to frustration against bad governance and superstition.

As a platform for their struggle, Swami Manmathan founded SBMA in 1977 in Anjanisain, Tehri Garhwal.

VISION

Happy children from happy families from happy communities.

MISSION

To ensure that the issues and concerns of women and children are solved by the Panchayats on priority basis

STRATEGY

Sensitize and build capacities of the people so that they can actively participate in the process of their own development

APPROACH

Organize people in groups, encourage them to discuss their issues, search solutions and influence Panchayats agenda of development

MAJOR AREAS OF WORK OF SBMA

- a) Child Rights And Protection
- b) Education (ECCD and Model School)
- c) Health
- d) Participation of children in governance
- e) Water and environment sanitation
- f) Disaster preparedness
- g) Livelihood
- h) Watershed Management
- i) Leadership Development
- j) Community mobilization

MAJOR GROWTH POINTS

The growth of SBMA is a continual and on-going process, but there are a few precise moments that stick out and represent the larger changes.

First of all, the women and children who had the courage to take up residence in the ashram at the very beginning deserve commendation. Breaking tradition and leaving their impossible situations at home represented a serious shift in the normal ways of thinking that had predominated in the area for centuries. Almost none of the local villagers understood or accepted that change. The brave women, Mala Devi, Chankhi Devi, Santa Devi, Saunla Devi and others fought local perceptions and worked extremely hard, and ensured a solid ideological foundation for the ashram and its vision of change.

For the first seven years the ashram was completely self-sufficient, relying only on the hard work of its inhabitants for survival, but in 1984, funding agencies began seeing SBMA as an attractive investment. The first grant to SBMA came from Harijan Samaj Kalyan and was for 4000 rupees. Over time, money from various social development organizations began flowing in to increase the scope of SBMA's social work in the area. In the beginning no one thought that SBMA had the infrastructure to be able to manage incoming funds, let alone a larger staff. However, SBMA was successful and projects spread into the districts of Pauri, Chamoli and Terhi.

In 1991, an earthquake devastated the Uttarkashi area. SBMA staff members were some of the first relief workers on the scene. Uttarkashi is approximately 120 kilometers from Anjanisain. Originally, SBMA came only to help in the relief effort, but during that time the need for further SBMA programs became evident. Within a week, SBMA had established a presence and the ashram's coverage had greatly expanded to encompass the Uttarkashi district. Slowly, our presence in Uttarkashi grew and today there is a permanent office there. Over time, the area covered by SBMA programs continued to expand, and SBMA has worked in every district of Uttaranchal.

With the expansion of SBMA programs came, necessarily, the growth of the ashram's staff and organizational capacity. For example, the first SBMA vehicle was introduced in the late 80's and allowed greater access to and expansion of the coverage area. Organizational capacity was also greatly aided by the introduction of computers and innovative techniques in the early 90's. The first computer at the ashram was a bit of a spectacle, and the kids dragged Cyril ji to ponder the new machine on many occasions. The technical network of computers and equipment used in keeping track of accounts and programs, making reports, and keeping in touch with other organizations and partners. Along with technology, there has been a focus on human resource development. Staff members at the ashram began to expand their research and deploy new organizational techniques that came from other parts of India and beyond. All of this has allowed SBMA to be a successful and well-run catalyst for positive change throughout Uttaranchal.

The on-going change that is occurring at the ashram is a shift from a direct implementation force to a support organization that began with the formation of the Uttaranchal state. Research and advocacy to influence policy in the new state have become a focus. We have also been working closely with the local government in the Panchayat program, helping the panchayats to grow and gain capacity. Many other community-based organizations have arisen since SBMA began, and they are working with direct implementation programs. We are beginning to see ourselves in the role of facilitator. This means we would like to support them by sharing the expertise gained during our years of providing services, holding trainings to build their capacity, conducting research, and by increasing communication between the various groups. Positive change continues to occur throughout Uttaranchal, and the SBMA organization is evolving within that context.