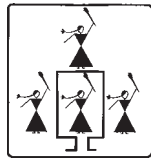


-“AARAMBH”-
A BEGINNING

**.....A Beginning of a Widows’
Land Rights Movement**



Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan
Rajasthan

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FOREWORD

The Hindu Succession Act clearly gives wives and daughters, along with sons, legal rights to land owned by their husband or father. But low-income widows rarely can claim the land owned by their husband, and almost never can claim the land owned by their father. The women are in the position of having "legal rights" to the land and property, but not the "possession" of that land or property.

Why is this? Patriarchy - widespread and institutionalized Patriarchy.

The caste and community customs are designed to deprive widows of their property rights. The land transfer procedures should be done shortly after the death of the landowner. But custom dictates that the widow stay indoors, in one darkened room, for a period of one month, or three months, or even a year. After that period, the land transfer procedures are more complicated, and require her to make application at Tehsil level offices, etc.

Another custom, which carries social sanction but no legal authority is: "The person who pays for the Death Feast has title to the land of the deceased." Again, with the widow confined to one room of a house, arranging a Death Feast for hundreds is beyond her organizing and financial capacity. Male family members, brothers-in-law or their sons, usually do this.

In several castes or communities, it is the custom that a younger brother-in-law marry his widowed sister-in-law. This is not so much out of concern for her future well-being; rather, it is the concern to keep the land in the family, and in this case, under the control of the brother-in-law-turned-husband.

The cultural norms are ancient and deep rooted. The noted Indologist, Shirama Indradeva confirms that "women are considered unfit for independence in all peasant civilizations based on plough agriculture".¹ The reason seems to be based on the understanding of the usual gender relations - Mother Earth being female, must be ploughed by a man, not a woman.

And as if all this is not enough, the patriarchal forces in society draw upon people's superstition to get the widow out of the village and away from her land. In our experience, the common occurrence of widows being called "witches" by members of the community in which they live, is nothing more than a strategy to make life so miserable for the widow that she either leaves the village, or commits suicide. Either way, the land she leaves behind is then available for her brothers-in-law or other castes - which is what they wanted in the first place, when they started those rumours! There are no such things as "witches", who can be blamed for every sickness in the village, for every cow which has stopped giving milk. It is all part of the "land grab" of widows' land.

¹ Shirama Indradeva, "Women in Folk and Elite Traditions - A Comparative Study" *Folklore* 10 (March 1969): pp. 96 - 107

A Woman Without A Man Is Helpless

— the common cultural view

Against this cultural background, Rajasthan low-income widows are poorly educated and in many cases, hardly literate. Legal knowledge of land procedures are unknown. Land records are handwritten, with all kinds of terms that are hard to understand. The basic land records are with the *Patwari*, or the local land revenue official with the up-to-date maps. And finding the *Patwari* at home or in the *Tehsil* office is in itself a major piece of work!

And yet, it is so important that she have some means of production to support herself and her children. Rajasthan low-income widows are not greedy; they want only the few *bighas* of land that are their legal right, on which they can grow cereal crops, and/or vegetables. They have no ambitions of huge profits from cash crops - theirs is an economy of survival. If she has her land, she can sell it if needed; in all likelihood, at least one child will stay with her to work the land; she will have a piece of land on which to build a small house to live in. Granted, a small piece of land will not be enough for all her daily needs. But with a place to live and food grain for much of the year for her small family, the income from some labour work could cover other costs, like food items, clothing, some medicine. Yes, to gain possession of the land that is legally hers, is so important.

Who will help her to claim her rights over land and property?

Alone, she cannot.

Individuals in her parental home or in her marital home may be personally good people, but family dynamics and social custom usually immobilize them and prevent them from standing with a woman who is fighting for her land rights.

Alone, she cannot.

And this is where the Association of Strong Women Alone comes in, and in the case studies in this book, the Association plays a critical role. And so does the village community - note what happens when the community is with her, and when it is not.

Included in this small booklet, are true case studies of land struggles of low income Rajasthan widows, struggles which took place between 2001 and 2004. You will read about bribed *Patwaris* making false land records. You will read about physical beating and atrocities intended to stop the widow's fight for her land. You will read about cases filed in the courts even 14 years ago, and still going on.

You will also read about the courage and tenacity of the widows themselves. The Association of Strong Women Alone brings access to legal and procedural knowledge, brings the support of those who are literate and can write applications for action in relation to the cases, brings the strength of organization. These cases have been worked on by those women who are themselves widows and separated women, each helping the other. The NGO support

of *Astha*, Udaipur, *Hadoti Hast Shilp Sansthan*, Kota and *Widows' Rights International*, England-based, has been there when needed. But the main work has been done by the "strong women alone", who are in fact not alone any more - they have each other, bound together for strength by the Association.

We hope that these case studies give courage to others in other places, to work together to help women claim their land rights. This booklet is a beginning for *Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan* - The Association of Strong Women Alone - to share its work. We hope it is the first of many booklets, booklets which will affirm that widows are not weak women, but strong women, very strong women indeed.

Ginny Shrivastava

Supporter of the
Association

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Greed Pays No Heed

Name : Kesar Bai
Husband's Name : Rampal Bairava
Age : 40 years
Village : Jamola
Tehsil : Masooda
District : Ajmer

Six years back, life took an unexpected turn and the world turned black for Kesar Bai 40, due to the untimely demise of her husband. He succumbed to a prolonged illness of Tuberculosis. His illness entered their lives like a demon, and not only ate her husband, but gulped their meager savings as well.

In this worrisome situation, this widow of Jamola village eked out a living for her 12 year old daughter and herself, by farming a piece of land that was left by her husband. But life had some more misery in store for her. Her greedy uncle-in-law's sons tried to take advantage of this situation. They decided to take control over her land. They knew she was alone with nowhere to go and no one to help her. They were powerful and knew that none of the villagers would dare to stand up against them with Kesar Bai.

They started harassing Kesar Bai and her daughter. They would scorn at her saying ***“You have no right over this land. We have spent a lot of money on your husband's illness, now there is debt on us that you have to repay in the form of this land.”***

Kesar Bai was horrified to hear this, since not only was the land her only source of income, but in reality, they had not spent a single paisa on her husband's treatment. And it was she who had borne all the expenses!

But alas! She was alone and they knew this. But Kesar Bai was a strong woman. She decided not to pay heed to their threats and

insults. After all, the land was in her name and she had a young daughter to look after. When her brothers-in-law saw this, they were over come with rage! They decided to teach her a lesson.

One day when she was working in her field, her brothers-in-law verbally and physically assaulted her. They beat her and fled, leaving her unconscious in the field!

Soon, this became a routine for them. A distraught Kesar Bai went to the elders of her village in the hope of some support. But her worst fears came true when no one came forward to support her. She had no choice but bear it all silently.

In the darkness of night, Kesar Bai wondered if her miseries would ever end. ***“Will I and my daughter ever live our lives with self respect and freedom?”*** But as they say “the darkest hour is just before the dawn”. Dawn came for Keser Bai in the form of a member of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan — The Association of Strong Women Alone —who advised her to meet Chaggiji (a social worker of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan).

Wasting no time, Kesar Bai went to Chaggiji’s place and recounted her situation to her. She said to Chaggiji “If you don’t do something, they’ll surely kill me!” Chaggiji consoled Kesar Bai and assured her of help.

The next day, Chaggiji went to Kesar Bai’s house. She met Kesar Bai’s brothers-in-law and tried to solve their problem by appealing to their good senses. She asked them not to fight with Kesar Bai and to let her live a life of peace. But “pride comes before fall”. Her brothers-in-law refused to accept their mistake, forcing Chaggiji and the Association to call for other actions. Chaggiji asked Kesar Bai to call her brothers and other villagers. The Caste Panchayat was called to solve the case. The Caste Panchayat gave the decision in

Kesar Bai’s favor. They instructed her brothers-in-law to stop harassing Kesar Bai. They declared that the land belonged to Kesar Bai!

Chaggiji took Kesar Bai to the Patwari and he assured her that the land was in her name and no one could do her any harm. Chaggiji also did all the legal formalities for Kesar Bai, so that no one could dare harass her. Her brothers-in-law knew what was happening, but kept quiet out of fear of being sent to jail. They realized that Kesar Bai was not alone any more.

This was a new world for Kesar Bai. A world where she had the right to live with dignity.

Till yesterday, though the land was her own, yet, she had to live her life with the constant fear that it would be snatched away from her. But today, she has support from hundreds of women from The Association of Strong Women Alone to back her up — to fight for her rights. Now she tills her land with her head held high.



Fatal Attraction

Name : Rami Bai
Husband's Name : Tejaram
Age : 40 years
Village : Govindgarh
Tehsil : Pisangan
District : Ajmer

“Beauty can sometimes become punishment for life.” These were the words of an anguished Rami Bai, who became a widow at age 30, 10 years back. Their family consisted of her two brothers-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law, and Rami Bai's own children. One of her brothers-in-law was interested in her and wanted to make her his mistress! But Rami Bai resisted, and this is when her troubles started. He would come home late in the night and bang at her door. When she would refuse to open it, he would threaten her.

Rami Bai had two bighas of land in her name. Her brother-in-law, enraged by her refusals, decided to take revenge against Rami Bai. He thought he would drive her out of the house and take possession of her land. In these troubled times, Rami Bai decided to arrange the marriage of her daughter, without consulting her brother-in-law. This added fuel to the fire.

When the marriage festivities began, and everyone was making merry, her brother-in-law sent some scoundrels to create a nuisance. They broke the fluorescent tube lights that had been put up to light the marriage festivities. “You reap what you sow” was her brother-in-law's sense of justice. His own daughter was standing under one such tube light, and she got hurt.

That was the last straw. Rami Bai's brother-in-law could not take this humiliation. He punished Rami Bai for his own folly! He dragged her and her children out and beat mercilessly. The villagers came to

her aid and saved her. *The marriage festivities that had begun with a lot of fun and frolic, ended on a bitter note. The marriage party left right after the marriage in the middle of night. That night the bride's mother – Rami Bai took shelter at a neighbor's home.*

The next morning, she gathered all her courage and went back to her house. But to her dismay, she found that her brother-in-law was waiting for her! He followed her into the house. He tore her blouse and tried unsuccessfully to rape her. He then threw her out of the house and threatened that if she didn't leave the village, he would do something even more serious. He forced her to leave the village. This time, none of the villagers came to her defense.

A part of Rami Bai died then. She was humiliated, assaulted and striped of all her dignity. But she had no time to dwell in self-pity. She had her children to look after. With strong determination, she went to her mother's family in village Thata. Now, she had no means of earning a livelihood. Her children had to leave school mid-term.

Life had been harsh to Rami Bai, and then she heard about Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan — The Association of Strong Women Alone. She went to a monthly meeting of this Association and told them her story. Chaggiji, a leader of the Association, and all the other members, supported her and promised to help her.

Chaggiji decided to take action, but before that, she had to do some investigation. She, along with a delegation of the members, went to Rami Bai's maternal house. They met her maternal family and discussed Rami Bai. Her brothers requested Chaggiji to help Rami Bai get her piece of land back, since she had no other means of livelihood. To which Chaggiji replied, *“If Rami Bai is confident, we shall surely win”*.

Later Chaggiji and her delegation met with the Ward Councilor – Chandji and discussed Rami Bai's plight with him. With his support,

and along with some villagers, they went to Rami Bai's in-laws' place. They spoke to her brothers-in-law and firmly persuaded them to let Rami Bai go back to her house. The Association with police help, even got a "bound down" police case registered against them to make sure that they would not dare to harm Rami Bai in anyway.

A week later, the members of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan came to drop Rami Bai at her in-laws' place. Some of her family members also came along, and got the lock of her house opened. The Councilor also came with them. Chaggi ji warned her in-laws that "If Rami Bai faces any trouble now, we would not spare you".

However they did not pay heed to this warning. Rami Bai still faced some opposition. Chaggi ji again talked to the Ward Councilor Chandji. He said he would handle the case with police support. Rami Bai's in-laws finally realized that this was going out of their control. They could no more play with Rami Bai's life. They had to take her seriously. No one could now dare to harass Rami Bai in a drunken state. The Association of Strong Women Alone had brought them to their senses. Rami Bai was not alone any more. The strength of the Association was with her.

Chaggi ji with Chandji's support helped Rami Bai to get drought relief work. Now, Rami Bai was on her own. She was not at any one's mercy. Her children have started going to school again. She is a strong woman today.

No Son...No Sunrise?

Name : Hakari Bai
Husband's Name : Rupa Meena
Age : 50 years
Village : Pogra
Tehsil : Kherwada
District : Udaipur

"You do not have a son and so you have no right over your property". These were the words of Narsingh, Hakari Bai's nephew. Greed knows no boundaries. ***I regret the generalization, but in Indian society, Patriarchal values are used to maximum advantage against women.*** And Hakari Bai was one such victim.

Hakari Bai was a widow of Pogra village whose husband had expired 8 years back. She had four daughters, all of them married.

She used to stay with her nephew, Narsingh, but later, he started terrorizing her and abusing her. His wife also joined her husband in this game of greed and started abusing Hakari Bai. Hakari Bai was all alone with no support — either financial or physical. Out of fear of losing her land and of physical abuse, she started sleeping in the field, which her husband had left in her name.

A few years back, she became a member of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan, the Association of Strong Women Alone. But Hakari Bai had been oppressed for too long to even hope for freedom. She thought that there was no way out of her misery, and she would have to live with the abuses and insults of Narsingh and his wife.

But after attending the meetings, she realized that she was not alone and the Association would help her. She too had the right to live her life as she wanted, without having to take humiliation or scornful words from any one. So she decided to tell her story to the Association members.

When Pushpaji, an Association member and also a Ward Panch, heard her story, she advised some Association members to keep an eye on Hakari Bai's place. She also decided to pay a visit to Hakari Bai's place herself. On her visit, she found that Narsingh was torturing Hakari Bai and was on the verge of physically assaulting her. Pushpaji immediately intervened. Narsingh was outraged and asked Pushpaji to keep out of their "family matter". Now Pushpaji lost her temper. She challenged him saying, ***"Do whatever you want to do. If you want to kill her, kill her in front of me and then just watch what I would do. I would surely send you to jail"***.

Having said this, she went away, but not before she asked one of the Association members to be in hiding there, and to report to her whatever happened next (just in case Narsingh did not heed her warning and tried to hurt Hakari Bai). But her arrow hit its mark. Narsingh, though he had not admitted it in front of her, was frightened, and went back inside the house. All was quite for that day.

But a few months later, he returned to his original ways. He started abusing and assaulting Hakari Bai. This time, the Association decided that they had given him enough time to mend his ways. They decided to take legal action. A report about Hakari Bai's case and Narsingh's actions was written on behalf of Hakari Bai (since she could not write), by the Association member, Parveen. Many members of the Association put their thumb impression or signed the report in support of Hakari Bai.

The report was given to the Sarpanch. He attested the report, and told them to submit it to the police. The police arrested Narsingh.

Meanwhile, Pushpaji and other local members of the Association of Strong Women Alone, went to the Patwari and asked him to show them the land records. (The Patwari was also "Narsingh's man".) He showed them fake papers prepared by Narsingh, which did not

mention Hakari Bai's husband's name in the land records. Hakari Bai, Pushpaji and the rest of the Association members were stopped short. They had not expected this. Then suddenly it hit Pushpaji that this could be Narsingh's scheme to cheat them.

She looked at the papers closely, and then realized that they were indeed fake. They threatened the Patwari, saying that he would also be sent to jail on grounds of cheating. This did the trick, and he showed them the original papers.

In those papers, Pushpaji found that Hakari Bai's husband had his share of the property, (about 9 bighas of land out of the total 27 bighas of total ancestral property). According to the Hindu Succession Act, Hakari Bai had inherited it after her husband's death. Then Pushpaji got the land registered in (Hakari Bai's) name, and in the names of her the daughters—Shanta, Ganga, Lakshmi and Anita.

Now all Association members were of the opinion that the whole matter should be resolved once and for all. Hakari Bai revealed that she would prefer an out-of-court settlement. After all, she had to live in that village for the rest of her life. Pushpaji went to the police station and met Inspector Mansingh. She told him that they were going to try to solve the matter by mutual understanding, outside the court.

Narsingh now accepted his mistake. He apologized to Hakari Bai and requested her to spare him. He gave it in writing, that he would not torture Hakari Bai and would give her, her rightful share of land.

Hakari Bai got all the property documents. She then decided not to live with Narsingh, as she had done earlier, but to live with her daughter Ganga, who lived nearby. Ganga looks after her and helps her with the farm.

Narsingh and his wife have not dared to come near Hakari Bai. They know that she has the strength of her sisters in the Association with her.

He knows if he misbehaves, he could be sent to jail; his wife also does not abuse her. She knows the Association could file a case of “defamation” against her.

Hakari Bai is finally happy. She says she has no regret of not having a son, as her daughter and son-in-law take good care of her. She stands fearless facing the world.

**Hum Apna Adhikar Mangtay!
Nahi Kisi Say Bheekh Mangtay!**

**We Demand Our Rights!
We Don't Beg From Anyone!**



Owner's Pride Neighbour's Envy

Name : Dhannu Bai
Husband's Name : Khalji Tabiyad
Age : 40 years
Village : Batabalgun
Tehsil : Dungarpur
District : Dungarpur

Life was never a “bed of roses” for Dhannu Bai, who was widowed at an early age. But her in-laws had been fair with her. They all lived together — her father-in-law, brother-in-law, their wives and their children. Dhannu Bai had a son who is married. Her father-in-law had not divided their property but had written his will, and told each one of their shares. Dhannu Bai also had a share in the property. They are a poor family, and live on agriculture alone.

Thus, though stricken with poverty, life was fairly uneventful. But God had other plans. Their neighbor Pannalal Kharadi, a rich man, along with his brother, Somolal, saw an opportunity to seize Dhannu Bai's land. He knew she was alone, uneducated and poor. And even if her in-laws did try to stand up for her, they were no match for Pannalal and Somolal's money power.

The Kharadi brothers would throw stones at Dhannu Bai and her family members. Dhannu Bai could neither read nor write. Pannalal took advantage of this, and said that the land was his, and he had documents and maps proving it. His atrocities did not end here. *Since his house was further up the hill from Dhannu Bai's house, he would roll stones down on top of Dhannu Bai's house from his house!* He even started stealing grass from her farm, and thus made life a living hell for her.

Dhannu Bai's elder brother-in-law was a fair man. He felt sorry for Dhannu Bai. He went to Pannalal's house and said to him: *“You are*

a rich man. Why are you harassing this poor widow? Why do you take away her grass? This is her only source of income. The land belongs to Dhannu Bai and it is in her name.” Pannalal was enraged, and he instigated his family members to do cruel acts. So when Dhannu Bai, her brother-in-law and aunt-in-law went to Pannalal’s house, his daughter-in-law threw stones at them. Like a parrot, she repeated Pannalal’s words: “We have the land map, the land is ours, you will have to move off the land.”

When Pannalal saw that these poor people had dared to stand against him, he came up with a devious plan. He got fake papers of the land made. Then he got some one from the next village to impersonate as the Patwari. He showed the fake papers to Dhannu Bai and her family. The fake Patwari said his rehearsed line that: “The land belongs to Pannalal”.

Dhannu Bai and her family were aghast but did not lose hope. They went to the police station and filed a case against Pannalal. But Pannalal was a rich man. He bribed the Police and the case was closed. What is a little money given as a bribe to the police, when land is at stake!

But Dhannu Bai was not one to give up easily. She got to know about Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan — The Association of Strong Women Alone. She told the Block Committee members her story and asked them to help her. All the members supported her, and pledged their help. Ashaji (a social worker of The Association of Strong Women Alone), advised her to go the legal way to get justice. They decided that first and foremost they needed papers of the land which was in Dhannu Bai’s name — they needed to have in their hands the original and authentic papers.

Thus, Ashaji wrote an application to the real Patwari, requesting him to send a photocopy of the original land documents. The Patwari acted on the application and immediately sent a copy of the authentic

land documents, which clearly showed that the land was in Dhannu Bai’s name.

Emboldened with legal documents in hand, Dhannu Bai and her family members went to the police station and showed them the original papers. But bribery has its roots deep in our legal system. Their soaring spirits dipped as soon as the inspector demanded a bribe of Rs.1000/- for any action to be taken by him! Dhannu Bai and her family could not afford this amount. It was beyond their reach. Disheartened, they went away.

During the Association of Strong Women Alone convention held from 23-26 September, 2003 at Dungarpur, a rally was organized. In the rally, a well-known advocate Mr. Kantilal Shukla was invited. Ashaji discussed Dhannu Bai’s case with him. She showed him the original documents of her land. After Mr. Shukla saw the papers, he said: “These clearly show that the land is in Dhannu Bai’s name. The case would be resolved in her favor”.

Thus with this reassurance, Dhannu Bai’s flagging spirits saw some hope. She told Ashaji about the policeman’s behavior and his demand for a bribe. Ashaji was shocked to hear this. She immediately called the policeman and ridiculed him for asking a poor woman like Dhannu Bai for a bribe. She threatened him that if he did not take action against Pannalal, the Association would take action against him! She said that Dhannu Bai was not alone and that she was a State Level Committee Member of The Association of Strong Women Alone. That caught the Inspector’s attention, and he got scared. He promised to take necessary action.

But Ashaji knew that until the time that the land was not declared officially in Dhannu Bai’s name, she would not be able to live peacefully. There would be many like Pannalal, who would try and take advantage of this helpless widow. Ashaji asked the Inspector to call the Patwari and the villagers in support of this case. The villagers fixed a date for

the meeting and reached the appointed place. In front of the whole village, the police officials and the Patwari, Advocate Mr. Kantilal Shukla declared: “Pannalal has no right over the land. Dhannu Bai’s father-in-law owned the land and as stated in his will, the land will be divided amongst his living sons and the widow of his deceased son. Pannalal cannot illegally occupy the land. And if forcibly he tries to, he would be sent to jail.” It was clear now. Neither Pannalal, nor any one else, could dare to take advantage of Dhannu Bai. Her life was her own. She had hundreds of women backing her. She was not alone — not any more.



Doll’s House.

Name : Jassu Kunwar
Husband’s Name : Manu Pratapji
Age : 45 years
Village : Pasla Bada
Tehsil : Aaspur
District : Dungarpur

When Jassu Kunwar was a little girl, she loved dolls; her favorite pastime would be to play a marriage scene with her dolls. She loved dressing them in bridal finery. So when she heard about her marriage, happiness knew no bounds. *She was ecstatic to learn that now she would get lots of new clothes and jewelry. So on the wedding day, she was ready with all her dolls, and in her finest clothes, waited for her prince.* The prince did come to take his charming little bride. They took vows to spend the rest of their lives together. To be with each other for better or worse. Only, the prince did not live to keep his vows.

Jassu Kunwar’s world came crashing down. Even before she understood what marriage really meant, that it was not a doll’s game, she had to understand what a “widow” meant. She was widowed at an early age. Her in-laws thought and said that she was a bad omen for their family, that she had snatched their son away from them. They hated her and behaved accordingly. Instead of thinking about the mental turmoil of a young girl barely entering her teens, they labeled her a “witch”.

The pain was too much to bear. *Before she could realize that her parents house was now no more her own, now that she had been married off, she experienced that without her husband, her marital house was not her own either — at least not as she had dreamed.* She became numb to whatever was happening. She

silently bore the brunt of hatred that her in-laws had for her. Days passed into months, and months into years.

Jassu Kunwar was now 45. The abuses and hatred had only grown over the years. Her brother-in-law had also grown up into a man now, and had the same hatred towards her. Why not? After all, he had been brought up on a healthy diet of abuses to Jassu Kunwar.

And then one day it got too much. They beat her and threw her out of the house, saying that she had no right to live in the house. The house was not hers and she did not belong there. A broken Jassu left for her mother's place.

What made matters worse, was that Jassu Kunwar's parents were poor people. And now, survival was an issue. The question looming in front of them was: what would happen to Jassu Kunwar after their death. She had no means of earning a livelihood. Who would look after her after their demise? The three spent endless sleepless nights, wondering if there was a way out of their dark tunnel.

One of their well-wishers heard about their sorry state and told them about Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan – the Association of Strong Women Alone. Nathi Bai, one of the active members of the Association, took Jassu Kunwar to their monthly meeting and made her a member of the Association. When Jassu Kunwar told her problem to the Association women, they were appalled by the meanness of her in-laws over so many years.

Thus, some of the Association women decided to go with Jassu Kunwar to the Patwari. They saw the original land documents. When consulted, the Patwari told them that the land was in Jassu Kunwar's father-in-law's name, and she would surely get a share after his death. Jassu Kunwar had a right to the property! For the first time in many years, Jassu Kunwar saw a peaceful and secure future for herself.

But she wanted to resolve the matter in a peaceful manner. Ashaji wrote a letter to Jassu Kunwar's in-laws that now, if they did not treat Jassu Kunwar with respect, the Association would take action against them. They also called for a meeting. The Patwari, some members of the Association, Jassu Kunwar and her in-laws attended this meeting. The Patwari convinced Jassu Kunwar's in-laws to recognize her rightful share. He convinced them that it was their duty to take care of their son's widow. After all, she had nowhere else to go. And legally whatever was her son's share in the property, was passed on to his wife after his death.

All's well that ends well. Jassu Kunwar's in-laws decided to take her back with them into their house. They realized their mistake. Today Jassu Kunwar lives happily at her in-laws place. Her brother-in-law looks after her land. He gives her a just share of the grain and money. Jassu Kunwar leads a life of dignity and self-respect and has now become an active member of the Association that changed her life.



The Old Lady and the Witch

Name : Hagami Bai
Husband's Name : Kanwarji Salvi
Age : 55 years
Village : Neemdi
Tehsil : Kumbalgarh
District : Rajsamand

A woman hiring an assassin to beat her 55-year-old mother-in-law to death! Does this sound unbelievable? Now listen to the motive — ***her mother-in-law wanted to give away her share of land (after giving half the share to her son) to her only daughter's children.*** This was because her daughter was dead and had left behind three young girls, with no one to support them.

After the death of her husband, and then her daughter, many times Hagami Bai wished she were dead. But, she fought back. She knew she had to. For the sake of her grandchildren, for those little girls had nowhere to go, and no one but her. Hagami Bai tried to shut off these memories. But they would not go away. Like an adamant child, the memories forced her to walk with them. With a resigned sigh, Hagami Bai again started down memory lane.....

Like all other girls of her age she was married young. Her husband, Kanwarji, was all that a girl would hope for. Her in-laws treated her like their own daughter. Life was bliss. One year later, they became proud parents of a baby girl. Now they wanted a boy, and their family would be complete. But fate willed otherwise. A few months later Hagami Bai had an accident, which left her physically incapable of bearing another child. Their desire for a boy was so strong that they decided to adopt the male child of their close relative. They loved him like their own son. Both the siblings had great affection for each other. They could not have been happier.

Time passed and both came of age to get married. Both the siblings were married with great pomp and show. They were happy with

their spouses. Suddenly after a short illness Hagami Bai's husband died. He left 16 bighas of land in Hagami Bai's name.

After the death of her husband, Hagami Bai came to live with her son and daughter-in-law. In all fairness, she divided the land in two equal parts, and gave one part to her son. She kept one part to herself. She wanted to be independent. She would tend to the land herself. All was well until one day, tragedy struck. Hagami Bai's daughter who was a widow, died in an accident leaving the responsibility of her three young daughters on their grandmother — Hagami Bai.

Hagami Bai was grief-stricken. Her only daughter was dead. But she knew that she could not afford to lose herself in this pain. She had to look after her three granddaughters. Burying her sorrows inside, she decided to rear these girls to the best of her ability. But before she could come to terms with her daughter's death, she noticed an unhappy change in her daughter-in-law's behavior. Her daughter-in-law would now look at her with suspicion, and did not treat her well.

As time went by, the situation only worsened. Her son and daughter-in-law did not allow Hagami Bai to farm her field. Her daughter-in-law even stopped giving her food! She would torture her physically. Would call her bad names. She could not go to her field. If she tried to, she would be assaulted physically. Hagami Bai was at her wits end. She decided to go to the court.

Fifteen years passed. There seemed to be no end to Hagami Bai's court case. Then she heard of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan, The Association of Strong Women Alone. She told the members about her problem. She said "Now the situation is so bad that sometimes I and my grand-daughters go without food for days." The Association members decided to go with her to her village. They went to her house and decided to speak to her daughter-in-law. Her daughter-in-law did not deny torturing her mother-in-law. She said that she had done so because she wanted to prevent

Hagami Bai from giving away her land to her granddaughters. The members of the Association explained to her that Hagami Bai could not do so legally.¹ Hearing this, she was convinced to let Hagami Bai farm her land. And thus the members thought that the dispute was resolved.

But Hagami Bai's problems were far from over. Her daughter-in-law agreed in front of the Association members, due to their pressure, but returned to her old ways as soon as they left. Hagami bai went back to the Association. The Association arranged 50 kg. of wheat for Hagami Bai from the drought relief fund, since she and her grand-daughters were without food from any source. They called a meeting of the Caste Panchayat. The Caste Panchayat called her son. They asked him to take responsibility of his mother. The Caste Panchayat also called the real brother of Hagami Bai's adopted son. They reprimanded him, saying that his brother's mother was his mother too. If his brother, who had been adopted by Hagami Bai and her husband, did not look after Hagami Bai, then he should take care of her.

The members of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan warned Hagami Bai's son that if he would not let her farm her land, then they would sell Hagami Bai's land and put the money in her name. Thus he'll lose the land forever. Thus, due to pressure from the Association and the fear of losing his land forever, Hagami Bai's son allowed her to plough her field.....

..... Suddenly someone shook her out of her reverie. It was her youngest granddaughter. She was a young girl now. And Hagami Bai realized it was already daylight. She had to go the fields. The worst was behind her. Now her focus in life was to do the best for her granddaughters. The Association of Strong Women Alone had given her life back to her.

¹ The Hindu Succession Act states that land owned by a parent will be divided amongst the remaining spouse and living children. However, if Hagami Bai made a will, she could leave her land to whoever she named, and she could then name her grand-daughter.

Victory Over Devils

Name : Chokli Bai
Husband's Name : Manorji Kharadi
Age : 41 years
Village : Paba
Tehsil : Girwa
District : Udaipur

“Father, let us divide our piece of land. You never know what lies in the folds of the future.” Did Manorji, Chokli Bai's husband, have an intuition about his death? Ten years later, Chokli Bai is still trying to unravel this mystery.

Manorji had spoken these words just two days before his death. His father did not pay heed to his advice then, and even now, 10 years later, he has not divided his land. It hardly matters to him that his decision has done severe injustice to his daughter-in-law – Chokli Bai.

In a cruel twist of fate, her 2 younger brothers-in-law have also turned against her. She has to beg for her rightful share from the boys who have been brought up by her! After the sudden demise of her husband, Chokli Bai has been trying to earn a living out of farming. She is allowed to farm on only 2 bighas of land from her entire share. The rest of the land has been forcefully taken over by her brothers-in-law.

Chokli Bai has 2 sons and 2 daughters. One of her daughters is married. Chokli Bai wanted her sons to grow up and become self-sufficient. She did not want them to suffer or be at the mercy of others. So, even though her life was somewhat turbulent, she sent her sons to study in Udaipur.

Now with innumerable expenses, she was left with only one earning source — her 2 bighas of land. Her greedy brothers-in-law would even take away the grass that would grow on her piece of land!

One day, fed up with all this, she lodged a complaint against her brothers-in-law at the local police station. The police also supported her, and they arrested her 2 younger brothers-in-law. But useless laws weaken necessary laws. The brothers were bailed out in a few days time. Instead of doing any good to Chokli Bai, this whole incident turned the entire village against her. Since we all live in a male dominated society, the men of the village felt insecure that even their women would learn to stand up to them by following in Chokli Bai's foot steps! Now, not only were her family members against her, but the whole village started shunning her.

Chokli Bai was a member of Adivasi Mahila Jagriti Samiti, (The Tribal Women's Awareness Society). When Chokli Bai narrated her story to them, they decided to speak to the villagers about this. Devli Bai, one of the members of this Society, spoke to the villagers. She said, "Chokli Bai has young school-going children. If you do not support her, where will she go?" A meeting of the Caste Panchayat was called. But the meeting yielded no results. Emboldened by the support they received from the villagers, her brothers-in-law now went totally out of control. They started physically assaulting Chokli Bai. Even her father-in-law turned against her and decided to throw her out of his house. He would sneer at her and say: "How dare you lodge a police complaint against my sons; now no one can stop me from throwing you out of this village."

Her brothers-in-law, wounded by Chokli Bai's action of going to the Police, turned hostile. They wanted to avenge their lost pride. It is easy to cross the thin line between man and beast, especially so when your prey is unarmed, weak and alone. Blinded with fury, they beat Chokli Bai for 3 continuous days. The villagers were silent spectators to this inhuman crime. At the end of 3 days, an emotionally distraught Chokli Bai decided to end her life, and jumped into a well.

Fortunately someone saw her and informed members of "The Association of Strong Women Alone". They, with the help of some villagers, saved Chokli Bai's life. In the next meeting of the Association, Chokli Bai told her story. The members of the Association of Strong Women Alone pledged their support to her. They knew that first and foremost they needed the support of the villagers. The villagers were already feeling guilty after Chokli Bai's attempted suicide. An Association member admonished them saying, "She is married into our village and it is our moral duty to look after her." This struck the right cord. The villagers softened towards Chokli Bai. They even helped her to sow the corn crop in her field.

This action did indicate support to Chokli Bai, but her worries were far from over. Her brothers-in-law were still harassing her. Chokli Bai knew that they would go to any length to take control over her land. She had also heard them plotting to drive her away from the village. When she shared her worries with the members in the next meeting of the Association, the members assured her that they were with her.

By now Chokli Bai's brothers-in-law knew that she was not alone. And that she could go to any length to claim her rights. Their male egos were hurt since they had not been able to win against a mere widow.

One day Chokli Bai came to the Udaipur office of "The Association of Strong Women Alone". Her left eye was badly injured. Parveen (a member of The Association of Strong Women Alone) asked her about it. What she said next, gave goose bumps to all present. Her words stand as a testimony of the horrendous crimes committed against women and the state of widows in our time. She recounted this incident —

One night when she was sleeping in her room, one of her brother-in-law came drunk and asked her for water. For some time she lay there, thinking he would go away, but when he refused to budge, she got up and gave him a glass of water. He pulled her to the ground and tried to rape her. Chokli Bai pushed him away. His brother, who was hiding, came and started beating her. ***They kicked her in the chest, neck and back. One of them hit her with his foot, and hit her so hard on her face that her left eye was cut, and it started bleeding. Chokli Bai fell unconscious on the ground.*** The next morning her sisters-in-law took her to the hospital and got her treated.

All the members of The Association of Strong Women Alone were aghast on hearing her tale. They had never imagined that her brothers-in-law would go to such an extent.

Parveen, on behalf of Chokli Bai, wrote an application to the Women's Police Station in Udaipur to file a case against her brothers-in-law. Then Parveen and a member of The Tribal Women's Awareness Society went with Chokli Bai and did the formalities. The Police Inspector there promised Chokli Bai that he would arrest her brothers-in-law. He arrested them, but as usual, they were bailed out in 4 days.

A Village Panchayat was called to solve this case. But they did not allow members of The Association of Strong Women Alone to attend the meeting. They said, "They are outsiders and the decision would not be made in front of them." The members left, but before leaving, they convinced other women of the village to support Chokli Bai.

The Panches gave the decision in Chokli Bai's favor. But one of her obstinate brothers-in-law did not pay heed to their advice. He said that only if Chokli Bai agreed to live with him in his house, would he allow her to cultivate her land.

But this time, all the village women stood firmly in support of Chokli Bai. They said, "This is unfair, and Chokli Bai will not live with you against her wishes." The brothers-in-law had never dreamt of this! The woman, whom they had oppressed till yesterday, today had the courage to stand up against them! They were at their wits' end.

Now there was no way out. They could not have their way. They took the only way out. They apologized and requested that the matter be settled outside the court. Devli Bai, a member of The Tribal Women's Awareness Society, was waiting for this moment. She immediately put in their terms – which were: the land will be equally divided and registered on stamp paper. The brothers would pay Chokli Bai an amount of Rs. 10,000/- for her medicine and court expenses. Now the brothers had no choice. They agreed for an out-of-court settlement.

Today, the situation has reversed. The brothers-in-law have stopped torturing Chokli Bai and they are supporting her in every possible way. They are even helping her to sow seeds in the field. ***They have realized that Chokli Bai has the power of the Association of Strong Women Alone and the Tribal Women's Awareness Society.¹ They cannot just do anything that they feel like anymore.***

¹ In the overall attempt to end the marginalization of widows, where there is a People's Organization (like The Tribal Women's Awareness Society) or NGO or government women's programme, the Association of Strong Women Alone work with them and encourage widows to be a member of both in this case, the local P.O. and The Association of Strong Women Alone.

Lessons Learnt

Name : Rami Bai
Husband's Name : Hajariji
Age : 50 years
Village : Bajad
District : Bundi

“This illness has stuck to you like a leach” said Rami Bai to her husband Hajari ji. Hajari ji who was sick with a prolonged illness, replied “I think it will accompany me to the day I die.” But Rami Bai was confident, that they could win this battle. That night, before going to bed, Hajari ji called for his 3 children - 1 son and 2 daughters and gave them 1 Rupee each. This they were to spend on sweets of their choice. The children were overjoyed to receive this unexpected gift.....They never did spend that rupee. Hajari ji passed away the next morning.

Today, 26 years later, these memories flooded Rami Bai's eyes. And the events that followed next, unfolded one by one. Two years after Hajari ji's death, her son followed his father. And Rami Bai was left all alone with her 2 young daughters. She had no time to dwell on these tragedies. For now, survival was a question. After her son's death, her in-laws threw her out of their house. Rami Bai was on the road. Now she had no place to go and no one to turn to. There seemed no way out. But she had to find a solution. At least for the sake her daughters.

She went to the Village Panchs (leaders) and explained her sorry state. The Village Panchs took pity on her and asked her in-laws to take responsibility for her well-being. They were ordered to give Rami Bai a room to stay in and food grain twice in a year. Rami Bai's in-laws were also warned that if they did not heed their (the Panchs) advice, they would be punished. Her in-laws were left with no choice but to follow, as instructed. But this did not stop them from

inflicting mental torture on Rami Bai. And what could Rami Bai do? She was alone with two little daughters and no other place to stay. She was financially dependent on them. She bore it all silently.

In the midst of all this, Rami Bai heard of the Widow Pension Scheme. She was extremely pleased, as now she would not have to depend on her in-laws. She would be on her own. At last she saw an independent future ahead. A future where she was not a slave — she could be her own person. Where her daughters would be able to lead a normal, healthy life. She filled in the pension form, but it was discarded on the grounds that Rami Bai possessed 22 bighas of land. 22 bighas of land!!!! This was news to Rami Bai. She had no idea that she was the owner of 22 bighas! Her joy knew no bounds. But her joy was short lived. When she inquired about her land from her brothers-in-law, she was told that her land was already sold by her father-in-law to a man named Kripal Singh, for Rs. 25,000/-. Rami Bai went back to the Patwari and demanded to see the land papers. To her relief, she saw that the land was still officially in her name - Rami Bai w/o Hajari Meena.¹

In 1996 Rami Bai filed a case against Kripal Singh for illegally occupying her land. Many long years later, the court finally gave its decision in Rami Bai's favor. Kripal Singh, unable to accept defeat, appealed to the Revenue Court this time. ***He knew that Rami Bai would not be able to stand up against him for long. And he was proven right. Initially Rami Bai would go to all the hearings of the Revenue Court, but then came a day when she could not afford the bus fares, and she stopped going.***

By now she had heard of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan—The Association of Strong Women Alone. She went to one of the Monthly Meetings

¹ Rami Bai Meena is a “tribal”, and legally, no non-tribal can purchase, mortgage, or in any way own land that was owned by a tribal. Kripal Singh is non-tribal.

and became a registered member of the Association. She discussed her case with the members present.

By the year 2000, there was still no end to the case. The Association decided to take up her case with full force. They made an in-depth study of the case and tried to understand all the legal intricacies in it. Rami Bai spoke to the Secretary of Hadoti Hast Shilp Sansthan in Kota, Mrs. Manjula Joshi. She in turn spoke to Mr. Mukesh Jain, a lawyer in the Revenue Board Ajmer. Thus, with an expert opinion to back them, the remaining procedure was done with the help of Hadoti Hast Shilp Sansthan working with The Association of Strong Women Alone. In the next three hearings, a member of HHSS accompanied Rami Bai to Revenue Board hearing.

In August 2001, Rami Bai's case was put before the Rajasthan State Commission for women, and Ms. Rashmi Priyadarshini, IAS, member of the Revenue Board was also present. She advised Manjula ji to speak to Mr. Sudhir Verma, Chairman of the Revenue Board.

Manjula Joshi met Mr. Sudhir Verma and requested him to give a favorable decision in Rami Bai's case. Within the next few hearings, he gave the decision in Rami Bai's favor. The Association of Strong Women Alone, without wasting any time, met with the District Collector, and showed him the copy of the decision. They requested him to make arrangements to hand over the land to Rami Bai, and the District Collector consented. And so, in November 2002, 20 years after Rami Bai started fighting for her right, the decision was made in her favor.

Rami Bai got legal possession of her land.

However – Rami had more difficulties to cross. Kripal Singh would not give up so easily. By March 2003, Kripal Singh had gotten a Stay Order from the Rajasthan Revenue Board. The members of the Association and Manjula Joshi inquired about the case from the Chairman of the Board. ***When they took a strong stand and***

indicated that they would bring many members of the Association of Strong Women Alone to the court to fight it out to the better end, the Chairman got frightened, and referred them to the judicial court.

By May 2003, when the Judicial Court hearing was held, the judge told them that the case had been under process since 1982, and by Section 175 of the Rajasthan Revenue Act, ***the land had gone to the government, and thus, no one would get ownership of this land!!*** The Government owns it. (Section 175 states that if a tribal land owner, accepts money from a non-tribal in exchange for land owned, then the tribal loses ownership rights over the land. And since the non-tribal, according to the Constitution of India and laws of the land, cannot purchase tribal land, then the land goes to the Government).²

Rami Bai's name is nowhere in the land records linked to this land, and there is no way she can get the land according to the present legal situation.

After this case, the Association of Strong Women Alone decided to take a different strategy about getting widows' land rights. Since most of the cases are of women who come under the Hindu Succession Act provisions, in which widows do have legal right to the land and property of their deceased husband, it has been decided that the strategy will essentially be:

- First check with the local revenue / land official that the land is legally in the name of the husband, (or his father if the land is as yet undivided amongst brothers and sisters), or her own name.

² In 2003, the government rented the land to Kripal Singh for one year, for Rs. 90,000. In 2004, the government rented the land to him for Rs. 1,30,000/-. Rami Bai cannot pay these rental prices. The only justice to date, is that the monsoon in 2003 failed, and the monsoon in 2004 was a month late!

- If the husband had legal rights over the land, then approach the Administration (not the Courts) — District Collector, S.D.O., Tehsildar, and make arrangements for the possession of the land to be visibly handed over to the widow.
- Notify the Superintendent of Police, to send a police presence on the day of the handing over of possession of the land, to see that no fights break out.
- Notify and invite members of the village in which the widow lives, especially local self-government elected representatives, and customary village leaders.
- Notify members of the Association of Strong Women Alone to show up with as many members of the Association as possible.
- Notify other women’s organizations in the geographical area to come too.
- Call the widow to the land site at the date and time fixed with the Administration.
- Visibly, physically and in front of everyone assembled, take possession of the land.

While Rami Bai’s case ended unsuccessfully, the lessons learned were important for future successes and victories of widows’ land struggles!

The True Story of “The Heroine and the Villain”

Name : Ghisi Bai
 Husband’s Name : Ratanji Rawat
 Age : 35 years
 Village : Pratappura
 Tehsil : Masooda
 District : Ajmer

This is a success story of determination. Of will power. If you think you can — you can! When a whole village was afraid of one man, this woman dared to stand up against him, against the injustice done to her. And with the help of her sisters of the Association of Strong Women Alone, she achieved what was considered unthinkable. This is the story of Ghisi Bai.

Ghisi Bai is a 35-year-old widow from Pratappura Village, District Ajmer. Her husband died 3 years back in an accident, leaving behind Ghisi Bai, his uneducated widow and a large family of 6 children. He also left her a piece of land (8 bighas) which now became her only source of livelihood. Throughout these difficult times, Ghisi Bai had taken life as it came, and accepted her lot as “God’s will”. She missed her husband, but had focused her life on providing a good education for her children and hoping for a bright future for them.

But no story is complete without a Villain. Here we have her brother-in-law, Jai Singh.

Jai Singh owned the land adjoining Ghisi Bai’s land. Their lands were separated by a mud boundary wall. One day when Ghisi Bai had gone to the next village, he demolished the mud boundary wall. He thought that he would just take possession of her land. After all, she was a mere woman and that too, alone. How wrong he was!

When Ghisi Bai came back and heard about the demolition of the wall, she was angry. She could hardly recognize where her land ended,

and Jai Singh's land began! She went straight to the villagers and told them what Jai Singh had done to her, and asked for their help. But the villagers were afraid of Jai Singh. He was a powerful man and was known for his unscrupulous activities.

But Ghisi Bai was a fighter. She was not going to let any one snatch her land rights. Nor her children's right to a bright future. She knew about Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan — The Association of Strong Women Alone. She went to their monthly meeting and asked them for help. Chaggiji, one of the social workers of The Association of Strong Women Alone, reassured her, and promised her that she would get justice.

Chaggiji acted fast, and formed an investigation team. She sent 5 Members of the Association to Ghisi Bai's village. Chetanaji, of another Association called "Amrit Viklang Sahayata Seva Sanstha" (The Amrit Society for Help and Support of the Handicapped) also went with them and interviewed the villagers. *The villagers repeated what they had told Ghisi Bai, that Jai Singh was a bad character and no one of them would dare to go against him.* But they confessed that Ghisi Bai was right, and Jai Singh did have plans to illegally occupy her land.

With this background, the investigation committee went to Ghisi Bai's farm. There they came to know that Jai Singh had purposefully broken the wall by driving a tractor over it. The members of The Association of Strong Women Alone were furious with him. They unanimously said, "Jai Singh has erred here. *If he thinks that he would be able to get away with this because Ghisi Bai is a widow, he is mistaken. Let him come and we shall send him to jail*"

Their words spread like wildfire in the village. When Jai Singh heard this, he was scared out of his wits. They had "belled the Cat".

To the amusement of all, the Cat turned into a Mouse and ran away! He did not even come to his field! He fled from the village and started living with his in-laws in the next village!

Today Jai Singh's brothers look after his fields. They do not even dare to look at Ghisi Bai's field. They know she is not alone. Ghisi Bai tends to her field fearlessly. The village people look at her with admiration and respect. "We have a new leader in the village who fights against injustice — Ghisi Bai" they say!



New Life in Old Bones

Name : Anar Bai
Husband's Name : Hukumchand
Age : 45 Years
Village : Garda
Tehsil : Kishanganj
District : Baran

One fine morning, when you reach your agriculture land on which you have been toiling for years, and find that instead of you, someone else is working the land — how would you feel? This is what happened to Anar Bai. Anar Bai's husband was given this land by the government in 1994. On his sudden demise in 1995, the land belonged to Anar Bai.

This land was not a fertile piece of land. Anar Bai and her sister worked hard to make the land productive. By June 1995 they cleared it and then ploughed it with the help of a tractor. "I think we have done our job. Let's leave the land as it is till the rains." said Anar Bai's sister. Anar Bai agreed. They had worked very hard to make the land farmable and now it seemed that their efforts would pay rich dividends. So they decided to wait for the rains and then start sowing seeds in their farmland.

As soon as it started to rain, they ploughed the land and started sowing seeds. ***The soil that once seemed infertile was now ready to be productive. Both the sisters stood proudly gazing at the result of their sheer hard work.*** But they noticed that for the past few days, a lot of men would visit their land. They would come and discuss something (without involving Anar Bai and her sister) and would then go back. Anar Bai was still trying to unravel this mystery, when one of these men came to her. He demanded that Anar Bai give him her land! Anar Bai was startled, as she had not expected this. She refused out-rightly, saying "I and my sister have worked very hard to

make this land farmable and this being our only source of income, I shall not give it to anyone." They offered her money but she stood firm on her ground. So the men left, and once again Anar Bai and her sister went back to their work.

But the matter was far from over. One day, when Anar Bai and her sister went to their fields, they noticed someone ploughing their field! Shocked, the sisters ran to see who was doing this, and they found Rampal Jat, a well-known bad character of the village, ploughing their field. When Anar Bai demanded an explanation, Rampal started beating her! He threw Anar Bai in front of the tractor and even tried to run the tractor over her! Luckily his attempt was not fatal, but Anar Bai was seriously injured. She was taken to the hospital and was bedridden for the next two months.

Whoever came to visit Anar Bai at the hospital, would just say one thing "***Rampal Jat is a dangerous man. Forget your farmland or else he would kill you as well as your son!***" Meanwhile, with no one to stop him, Rampal started farming Anar Bai's land.

As soon as Anar Bai was well enough to walk, she went straight to the Patwari and asked him to help her. The Patwari asked her if she possessed any legal documents. When Anar Bai replied that she did not, the Patwari said that he was helpless without any legal documents. (Of course, the Patwari himself could have looked in his records and given Anar Bai a document that showed the land was at least in her husband's name, if not her own.) Not one to get discouraged easily, Anar Bai went to the Tehsildar, but here also she received the same answer.

Then, on the 31st of October 2000, she had filed a form and given it to the SDO, requesting him under section 183 B,¹ to take action, asking the Tehsildar to give a report. The Tehsildar on October 31st itself

¹ Section 183 B of the Rajasthan Tenancy Act empowers the Tehsildar to give legal possession of land to a person.

(Letter No. 282/31/10/2) filed a case and the Patwari was given orders to give a report regarding Anar Bai's land. Next, on the 8th of November, 2000, Anar Bai sent an application to the Baran Collector, wherein she wrote about her grievances and her attempts to get the allotted land, Khasra No. 6, measured by the area Patwari of Tehsil Kishangarh. Orders were given under section 183 B by the Collector to the Revenue SDO.

But even with all this, until July 2002, the Patwari did not send his report. Anar Bai and her son, Shambhu, were by now tired of making rounds of the Kishangarh Tehsil office. Shambhu personally spoke to the Tehsildar but he said that he was helpless till the report came. The Tehsildar was Anar Bai's only hope. He sympathized with the poor widow. But this flicker also died the day Anar Bai heard that the Tehsildar was getting transferred! Anar Bai rushed to the Kishangarh Tehsil office and requested the Tehsildar to give a decision to her case before he left his office. But now all odds were against Anar Bai, the Tehsildar had already given his charge and now he did not have the powers to give any decision. He assured Anar Bai that he would request the next Tehsildar to process her case as fast as he could. So new orders were awaited.

A distraught Anar Bai wrote an application to the District Collector and the SDO. She pleaded with them to help her. She wrote to them how Rampal Jat had forcibly occupied her land, and that now he had started growing Soya Beans there. She requested the officials to get Rampal to vacate the land so that she could take possession of what was legally hers.

But before the Collector or SDO could do anything, they both were transferred and their successors' orders were awaited.

Soon, Anar Bai realized that the new Tehsildar and the Patwari were not following orders, as they had been bribed by Rampal Jat. And

until the land was not measured, (the Patwari is supposed to do this) orders could not be given to register the land in her name. Thus she realized that she was going in circles. Until the Patwari made his report, nothing could be done.

Anar Bai and her son were left with no source of income. And most their time had been wasted in doing the rounds of government offices. When they could take it no more, they decided to do daily wage labor work in order to feed themselves.

One day in July 2003, when Anar Bai was getting back from work, she saw that a lot of women from her village were returning from somewhere. Anar Bai asked Nand Kunwar — one of the women present "Where are all of you coming from?" To this Nand Kunwar replied that they were coming from a meeting of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan — The Association of Strong Women Alone. When Anar Bai heard about the Association and its objectives, she was filled with new hope. She decided to attend the monthly meeting of Association in August.

At the meeting of the Association in August 2003, Anar Bai discussed her case with the Block Committee members. When Nand Kunwar heard about her case, she discussed it with Manjulaji. Manjulaji suggested they see the land documents. But Anar Bai had no proof that the land belonged to her.

An advocate – Mr. Satish Sharma, was appointed to search the land title in the Kishangarh Tehsil. He checked the records of allotted lands of Garda village to know if Anar Bai's husband's name was in the list of names of people to whom land was allotted by the government. From the records, the advocate came to know that in 1994, land was indeed allotted to Anar Bai's husband – Hukumchand: Khasra No. 6, 6 bighas of land in Garda village.

Finally with written proof that the land belonged to Anar Bai, with the help of advocate Mr. Satish Sharma, the case was opened with new zeal. Mr. Sharma wrote an application to the Patwari to get the photocopies of the documents of the land allotted to Anar Bai, and the map of Khasra No. 6. In about a week, the photocopies of the land map and the Khasra number were received

On the basis of these documents, advocate Satish Sharma gave an application to the District Collector. A complaint was made against Rampal Jat that he had illegally occupied Anar Bai's land. He also applied that she should get her land back.

Armed with this application, Anar Bai, along with Block Committee Members of the Association of Strong Women Alone of Baran and Kishangarh Blocks, went to the District Collector. The Collector was surprised when he saw Anar Bai's strength. Last time she was alone, but now she had hundreds of women supporting her.

Then Mr. Satish Sharma gave detailed information about the case to the District Collector and Revenue Board Collector. An appeal was made under L. R. 183 B¹ for quick action to be taken by the Revenue Collector (file number LR/Dos. No. /2280/15/4) and orders were passed to the Patwari for quick action.

When Rampal Jat got wind about what actions were taking place against him, he went to the Patwari and Tehsildar and bribed them again to keep their mouths shut. Thus, no action was taken for the next 15 days. But this time, the Association had anticipated this. They waited for 15 days and then headed straight to the Assistant Collector Development. They informed him that in spite of his orders, no action was been taken. He in turn called the Tehsildar and reprimanded him. He ordered him to send the report within the next 2 days.

¹ Land Revenue (Rajasthan Tenancy Act) Section 183 B to give possession of land to a person.

Thus crippled by the hands of law, the Tehsildar had to take action. The case was out of his control.

On the 27th of February 2004, an order was passed to the Patwari, to measure the land. The Association of Strong Women Alone was also informed of this. They were called on the spot, for land measurement and transfer of possession. Anar Bai and Vidhya Bansal (a member of the Association) along with another 10 members of the Association, went to the site. They even took press reporters and photographers with them!

The land was measured, and the Patwari of Garda area gave the map of the measured land — 6 Bighas Khasra No. 6/92, to the Tehsildar. Rampal Jat could not say a word. He had not expected Anar Bai would ever be able to stand up against him, let alone win against him!

On the 12th of March, 2004, the land documents and map were given to Anar Bai. The crop harvested by Rampal Jat was also handed over to her. Today there is new life in her old bones — Anar Bai will finally reap the fruits of her hard work.



"Headline : A Widow Gets Possession of Her Land"

A Long Battle

Name : Teeja Bai
Husband's Name : Nauratmal
Age : 55 years
Village : Pisangan
Tehsil : Pisangan
District : Ajmer

After the sudden death of her husband, Teeja Bai fought for 14 long years for her rights. Fourteen years had passed – and to Teeja Bai, it only seemed like yesterday when she had come to this house as a bride. Her husband had two brothers, and they all lived together as one happy family. Troubles started when her husband, Nauratmal, died. Her elder brother-in-law was also dead. Now there was only her younger brother-in-law – Ram Chander, and he was the one who was the root of all her troubles.

He threw Teeja Bai out of the house saying that she did not have a son, and so had no right to live in their house! Teeja Bai's husband had built this house! Ram Chander would also not give her, her share of land. Thus, Teeja Bai came back to her mother's house.

At her mother's place, Teeja Bai lived with her handicapped brother. He advised her to take the matter to court. Teeja Bai fought for 14 years in the court. She also exhausted all her savings in the proceedings. And yet, in the end, Ram Chander bribed Government officials and won the case. Teeja Bai lost all hope. This affected her physical condition too. She would now often fall sick.

Ram Chander used to work in the Cooperative Bank and he also owned a shop in town. He was a crook and all the villagers were scared of him. When Teeja Bai tried to talk to the villagers, all of them advised her not to go against Ram Chander. They said, "Ram Chander is a dangerous man. He might even kill you. Its better to stay away from him." There was no one who would dare to stand against Ram Chander.

One day, when Teeja Bai was waiting for her bus, she saw Chaggiji and other members of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan. (The Association of Strong Women Alone). She could not contain her curiosity. She came and asked Chaggiji: "Where are you all going?". Chaggiji replied that they were going to get justice for Mooli Bai, whose land had been illegally occupied by her neighbor. Teeza Bai saw a glimmer of hope. She asked eagerly "Would you help me? My land is illegally occupied by my brother-in-law. I fought for 14 years, but lost at the hands of corruption". Chaggiji assured her that the Association would help her. She invited Teeja Bai to the next monthly meeting of Association.

Teeja Bai's happiness knew no bounds. She went back to her home and excitedly told the whole incident to her brother. After many years, the brother sister duo slept peacefully.

Time crawled by for Teeja Bai, who was eagerly waiting for the day when she could meet with other Association members. Finally the day arrived. Teeja Bai went to the meeting and told the members about her struggle for her rights. All the members unanimously decided that they would do everything they could to get Teeja Bai's rightful share for her.

The next day, Teeja Bai, along with other members of the Association, went to some important people of her village. They spoke to them about the injustice done to Teeja Bai and requested them to help her. But since Ram Chander was a big bully, and every one was still afraid of him, they refused to help Teeja Bai.

Chaggiji thought "Maybe these people are scared of Ram Chander, but surely other people of the village would definitely support Teeja Bai, since what has happened to her today, could happen to anyone else tomorrow." So she decided to call a meeting of all the villagers. Ram Chander was also called in this meeting. But he did not come. To their dismay, Chaggiji and Anar Bai found that the entire village would not dare to stand against Ram Chander. In their hearts, the

people knew that he was wrong, but they did not have the courage to speak against him. They insisted that only the Association could do something.

Now Chaggiji knew that the ball was in her court. She lodged a complaint against Ram Chander in the Police Station. Then they went to the Patwari and demanded to see Teeja Bai's land related documents. The Patwari said that the papers were not available and he would only be able to show them in a few days. When on the decided date, Chaggiji and other Association members reached the Patwari's office, he refused to show them the land papers (for Ram Chander had already visited him with bag full of money).

Chaggiji had anticipated this. She went straight to the Tehsildar's office and requested him to show the relevant land documents. What was written in the documents came as a shock for Teeja Bai and all present there. ***The documents showed that Nauratmal possessed a piece a land. But, after his death, Ram Chander had gotten fake documents made which said that after Nauratmal's death, Teeja Bai remarried, and so she had no share in the land! Thus the land belonged to Ram Chander!***

Teeja Bai was devastated. She had not expected that Ram Chander would go to such an extent. She almost decided to give up the case. But the Tehsildar and Chaggiji convinced her that if she was right, they would support her. Thus, they went to the Sarpanch or Chairperson of the Village Council, to get the Sarjara¹ attested. The Sarpanch refused to do so and her denial surprised Chaggiji and Teeja Bai. But later they realized that her daughter was Ram Chander's daughter-in-law and he had pressured her into not doing anything.

¹ "Sarjara" is a list of close family members - wife, sons, daughters - of a deceased land owner. This list needs to be attested by the Chairperson of the Village Council, "Sarpanch", to affirm that the list of persons' names who can inherit the ancestral and other land, is correct and complete.

So they spoke to the Ward Panch (Ward Councilor). The Ward Councilor supported Teeja Bai and got the Sarjara attested by Upsarpanch or Vice Chairperson of the Village Council.

When Ram Chander heard about this, he decided that he would have to stop them once and for all. His wicked mind started making schemes about how he could scare the Association members, and waited for his chance to strike. After a few days when Chaggiji, along with other women, were going to the Ward Councilor's home, Ram Chander sent some village bullies and beat them up! Members of the Association and the Ward Councilor were badly injured. Without wasting a moment, Chaggiji went to the Police Station and lodged a complaint against Ram Chander. In the investigation that followed, Ram Chander was found guilty. In a surprise twist, the whole village stood in support of Chaggiji! The elected head of the Panchayat Samiti (Block) – Archana Devi, also supported Teeja Bai.

When Ram Chander saw that everyone was against him, he gave up. He confessed that he had made a mistake. He promised that it would never happen again.

Strengthened by this victory Chaggiji and Teeja Bai now concentrated on getting Teeja Bai's land back. Her biggest problem – that of earning a livelihood still persisted. Chaggiji and the other members of the Association went to the SDO² and told him about Teeja Bai's case. Then, in the government camp held to solve land cases, the land was registered in Teeja Bai's name and the documents were handed over to her.

When Ram Chander heard of it, he was baffled. The land that had been illegally occupied by him for 14 years, would now belong to Teeja Bai! He decided to do everything within his means to hold on to

² SDO - Sub Divisional Officer. In the hierarchy of land and revenue matters, the Patwari is the lowest employee at the village level. More senior is the Tehsildar, and more senior still is the SDO. Then comes the District Collector.

it, even now! He would not let the land go out of his hands. He decided to continue to strengthen the story that Teeja Bai and remarried, and so now she had no right over his brother's property.

His continuing allegations enraged Teeja Bai. She had been trying hard to claim her land rights. The battle had taken 14 long years. She had never remarried. On the contrary, Ram Chander had thrown her out of the house that she and her husband had built together! And now, he was living in that same house!

Devastated, she once again went to the Association and asked them to help her clear her name. After a lot of thinking, they came up with a solution. They convinced two members of her in-law's family to testify that she had not remarried. They testified, and so it was proved that Teeja Bai had not remarried.

When even this trick did not work, Ram Chander decided that it was time to speak to Chaggiji. He knew that the Association was the very strength of Teeja Bai. And if he persuaded the Association to remove their support, Teeja Bai would not dare to stand alone against him. Since he did not have the courage to bribe Chaggiji directly, he came with a relative of his, Jamanji. As decided, Jamanji tried to bribe Chaggiji. He asked her to name her price to leave this case! Chaggiji was livid with rage. She threw them out of her room saying, "You cannot buy everything with money. We are working for the poor. I will rest only after Teeja Bai gets her land back".

When Ram Chander saw that nothing was going according to his plans, he fell at Chaggiji's feet. He cried and said "***I am in deep debt. If the land is lost, nothing will be left with me. My son's engagement will break.***" Chaggiji brushed him aside, saying "What can I do? Teeja Bai will get her land rights".

Though Ram Chander went away, Chaggiji felt that there was still a threat from him. She knew that Ram Chander was a man who would

not stop at anything to realize his selfish goals. For although Teeja Bai had the official land ownership papers, Ram Chander still did not allow her to work on her land. He would threaten her whenever he would find her alone. The village community was essentially on her side, but Ram Chander wielded local power. The Association members were solidly with her, but for how long can they camp in her village, lending weight to her efforts to earn a livelihood from her land? She had Legal Title to the land, but not the Possession. The solution to the problem was not easy. Chaggiji met with the SDM and asked for his advice. He echoed her sentiments, and advised her to get a legal point of view.

The Association of Strong Women Alone contacted a young lawyer in Udaipur, who had assisted his father on a number of land of related cases for the poor. After a day-long brain-storming session with him, a number of alternatives were suggested to Teeja Bai.

1. Teeja Bai could accept that she will never be able to work her land and earn a livelihood from it and therefore sell her land. However she would have to accept a low price for it, as it is disputed land, and most people would not want to buy land over which there is controversy.
2. Try for a compromise settlement with Ram Chander — so long as she is alive, the land will feed her. After her death, the land will go to him.
3. Go to court, and try and get possession of the land, by getting a judgment from the court that Ram Chander is in "contempt of court". She had the legal title to the land, and he was not accepting it. Once "contempt of court" is proved (a long procedure that would probably take *at least 2 years*). The police would arrest Ram Chander, but for this alternative, Teeja Bai would have to have money for a lawyer — money that she does not have.

4. She could surrender her land to the state, and be allotted a piece of government land of the same size in another place. Widows are on the “priority” list for persons to whom land can be allotted. Disadvantages are that she must work the land herself; would not get legal land title to it for 10 years and therefore could not sell it for 10 years.
5. As Teeja Bai has no children, Ram Chander has suggested that she adopt one of his sons – a young man aged 20 who would then inherit the land. As he would be legally adopted, he would have the responsibility of supporting Teeja Bai, his mother-by-adoption. If he did not support her, she could file a case for “maintenance”. And if he didn’t pay the “maintenance” amounts, he would go to jail.
6. The Association of Strong Women Alone women could go in large numbers to the village, and make sure that Teeja Bai was able to plough her land and plant her crop. But for how long could the women stay in the village, and protect her rights?

Chaggi discussed all these options with Teeja Bai. She in turn spoke to her brother. After a lot of discussion, they decided that selling the land would be the best option. Luckily for Teeja Bai, she found a good buyer for her land. She sold it for Rs. 2,00,000 and invested the money in the bank in her name. Ram Chander could not do anything.

Teeja Bai had won! Today Teeja Bai happily lives with her brother. From the interest on the bank fixed deposit, she has Rs. 1,000/- per month income! They have enough to support them for the rest of their lives. They are not dependent on anyone. And the Association has a strong supporter – Teeja Bai.

The Beauty and the Beasts

Name : Rukma Bai
 Husband’s Name : Madan Lal
 Age : 45 years
 Village : Picholiya
 Tehsil : Pisangan
 District : Ajmer

Madan Lal died young. His second wife, Rukma Bai, inherited 10 bighas of land and 6 children. Madan Lal had been a lucky man. ***His 10 bighas of land and beautiful Rukma Bai were coveted by many. Now with him out of the way, there were many who wanted to possess them both.***

One of them was Madan Lal’s elder brother. He wanted to kill two birds with one stone. He invited Rukma Bai to become his mistress. If she accepted — once Rukma Bai was his, her land would automatically become his too! But Rukma Bai did not fall in line with his scheme. She had no intention of becoming her brother-in-law’s mistress. This is where her troubles began.

One day, when Rukma Bai was going towards her farmland, her brother-in-law came from nowhere and caught hold of her. He started forcing her to become his mistress. Rukma Bai started protesting. This was happening near their houses.

So when their voices reached inside, her mother-in-law came rushing to the scene of the struggle. When she realized what was happening, she shouted at her son, saying “She is your brother’s wife, equal to your mother, how can you misbehave with her!”. But her son would not listen. He was intoxicated with Rukma Bai’s beauty. He started dragging her inside. Rukma Bai started screaming and all the villagers gathered. Rukma Bai challenged her brother-in-law saying: “You can do anything to me, but I will never give you my land!”.

By this time, a crowd had gathered at the scene. Her brother-in-law had to let her go. But her angry voice rang in his ears. It set him thinking. “This woman is alone; where does she get the strength and courage to fight against a man like me?” And then he recalled something about an Association he had heard about, Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan — The Association of Strong Women Alone. He knew Rukma Bai had been going to the monthly meetings of this Association and was a member. He knew in order to succeed, he had to stop Rukma Bai from going to these meetings.

He took his elder son into confidence. He asked him to find a way out. His son — with young adrenaline running high, thought of a plan to bring Rukma Bai under control. ***The next morning when Rukma Bai went to her fields, her brother-in-law’s son came from behind and held her in his arms! Then he tried to rape her! After all, it was the same chauvinistic blood that was flowing in his veins.*** Petrified, she tried to run away. He maligned her character and threatened her that if she went to the meetings of the Association even once, she would have to face the consequences.

As luck would have it, there was a meeting of The Association of Strong Women Alone the same day. Rukma Bai somehow managed to escape and went straight to the meeting. When the members of The Association of Strong Women Alone heard her story, they were overcome with anger. They said to themselves, “If our member is going through this, what must be the state of other women? We must fight back and teach this father/son duo a lesson that they will never forget.”

Chaggi (a social worker of the Association), said to Rukma Bai and other members of the Association, that they should call a meeting of the Village Panchayat. “We will also call these rogues (Father/Son) there.”

A meeting was called in December 2001, wherein, besides the 70 women of the village, important men like the Sarpanch, Patwari etc. were also present. But when Rukma Bai’s brother-in-law and his son heard about this, they ran away to the next village.

Since the culprits were not present, no decision could be taken, but a distraught Rukma Bai told her story to all present. The villagers were ashamed to hear her story. They were embarrassed that men of their village had treated their real brother’s wife in such an ugly fashion. They promised Chaggi ji and other Association members that strict action would be taken against them. They pleaded with Chaggiji not to take this matter to court. They did not want the whole world to hear such things about their village. They wanted to solve the matter within the village. They said: “Wherever these rogues are absconding, we shall find them and bring them to their senses.” The villagers took it upon themselves to give justice to Rukma Bai. They told Chaggiji that within 10 days, they would bring an end to this matter and Rukma Bai would get her right to property and dignity.

To this date, the Association does not know what happened to the father and son duo. What they do know is that 10 days after the meeting, Chaggiji received a letter from the village that Rukma Bai’s brother-in-law and his son had been given a sentence that they must pay a penalty of Rs.1200/-, to be given to Rukma Bai, and that they have to feed 100 kilos of grain to the pigeons.

A few days later, a changed Rukma Bai visited the Association meeting. Gone was the troubled, scared Rukma Bai. Her place was taken by a fearless and confident Rukma Bai! She had brought sweets for all the members. She thanked the members of the Association profusely. For it was only because of their stand that the villagers saw the injustice that was happening right before their very eyes.

She reported that “My brother-in-law and his son do not dare to look at me. I till my land and live peacefully with my 6 children”. Then they asked “What did the villagers do to your brother-in-law and his son? How did they come to their senses?” She smiled and refused to say.

Well, the Sangathan members were happy that Rukma Bai got justice. “How”, they did not care, and neither do we.....

**Hum Bharat Ki Nari Hain!
Phool Nahi Chingari Hain!**

**We Are Indian Women!
Not Flowers, But Sparks of Fire!**



A Father's Dream

Name : Krishna Devi
Husband's name : Chauthmal
Age : 43 years
Village : Tathed
District : Kota

Krishna Devi's father was a poor man. He arranged her marriage when Krihsna Bai was only age 14, to Chauthmal, who owned 28 Bighas of land. 28 Bighas was a lot of land. He thought that now, his little girl would be able to live a comfortable life. Little did he know that poverty was his little girl's fate. For though Chauthmal owned 28 bighas of land, his land had been illegally occupied by a powerful man called Chitad Lal Dhakad.

Krishna Devi and her husband struggled hard to get their land back, but in vain. Time passed, and soon they had 8 children. In order to take care of their large family, they both worked as laborers. *Months turned into years, and now, getting possession of their land only remained a distant dream for them. A dream, which could never turn into reality.*

Time took its toll. Survival was difficult. Somehow they managed to pull through. Their children grew into adults and they married 3 of their daughters. But they had 5 more! Now they were trying to somehow save enough to marry the other 5, when tragedy struck. Chauthmal died of an illness. It became very difficult for Krishna Devi to feed herself and her daughters.

Krishna Devi became increasingly worried. Her health deteriorated. She even thought of suicide! *Whenever she would think of her father and remember his reason for marrying her to Chauthmal, the irony of the whole situation would make her laugh.* Her unhappiness increased from knowing the fact that they *owned* a lot of

land, but still were unfortunate not to *possess* it. Knowing that they *could be* independent and lead a comfortable life, hurt her the most. Especially now, without the support of her husband. In her heart, she would curse Chitad Lal Dhakad and pray for some miracle to happen.

The miracle did come into her life, in the name of “Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan” – The Association of Strong Women Alone. She heard about it from a friend and decided to attend one of its monthly meetings.

After she gained confidence in the Association, she narrated her problem to the women members in the meeting. All the members sympathized with her situation. They knew that Chitad Lal Dhakad thought: “What can a poor woman do against me?”. And they all pledged to prove him wrong. They decided that it was time to show these rich and powerful people that they could not play with the rights of others. They too also had a right to live.

They decided to take up the matter in the next meeting that was scheduled to be held on May 14, 2001. Mrs. Manjula Joshi (a Social Worker with Hadoti Hast Shilp Sansthan), and the advocate Mr. Rajesh Goswami, were also invited in this meeting. The meeting started on a high note with songs and “women’s strength” (nari shakti) slogans. All the members were in good spirits.

During the meeting, Krishna Devi’s case was discussed. The lawyer went through all the documents of Krishna Devi’s land. From the documents, he came to know that the Tehsildar had recorded the land ownership in Krishna Devi’s name on February 6, 2001, according to the orders of the District Collector. And yet, Chitad Lal Dhakad had refused to hand over the land ownership to Krishna Devi.

The lawyer and Manjula ji told all the women members that the land is in Krishna Devi’s name, so she must get the possession of her land. The spirits of the meeting soared further. All of them assured Krishna Devi that The Association of Strong Women would help her get back

her land. Then they started planning their Modus Operandi, their strategy for action. They asked the lawyer what their plan of action should be. He suggested that they write an application to the District Collector, informing him that his orders of February 6th were being defied by one Chitad Lal Dhakad, and that he, as Collector, should take action to make sure Krishna Devi got “possession” as well as “ownership”.

The Association wrote the application. But when there was no response, 5 women went to the District Collector and gave him a memorandum. Now the District Collector knew that he could not take the Association lightly. He immediately sent orders to the Tehsildar that the possession of the land should be given to Krishna Devi. The Tehsildar handed over the documents of land ownership to Krishna Devi, as the District Collector had ordered.

Krishna Devi and the Association members were elated. They thought they had won the case. But their happiness did not last long. When Krishna Devi and the Association members went with the police to take possession of her land, Chitad Lal Dhakad refused to hand over the land. He claimed that Krishna Devi’s husband had sold the land to him.

The members of the Association refused to accept this. They said that they had seen the legal documents, revealing that the land was in Krishna Devi’s husband’s name, and after his death, it now belonged to Krishna Devi. When Chitad Lal Dhakad showed the papers of sale, Krishna Devi proved that they were fake. Thus it was proved that Krishna Devi was the real owner of the land.

But before Krishna Devi or the Association could act any further, Chitad Lal Dhakad filed a case in the Revenue Board and got a “stay order”.

After a struggle of 4 months, the members of the Association gave a petition and application to the District Collector so that they could get

legal help to get Krishna Devi's land back. Forty members of the Association signed this letter. By now the District Collector was aware of the strength of the Association. He immediately sent orders to the Superintendent of Police and the Tehsildar to stay with Krishna Devi and the members of the Association while they take possession of the land. And to provide them full protection.

The lawyer told Krishna Devi and the Association members that if Chitad Lal Dhakad had not sown anything in the field, then they could plough the field with the tractor. The Thakur (Rajput landlord) of the village, who had been listening to the proceedings of the whole meeting, said, "Krishna Devi is a poor woman. She has shown great courage in her fight for her rights. I would like to help her. I have a tractor. She could take it without any rent to plough her field."

Krishna Devi was extremely grateful. She now knew that God helps those who help themselves. After she decided that she would fight for her rights, she got a lot of support from the Association and individuals like the Thakur.

The members of the Association moved fast. They knew from experience that if there was any delay, "the enemy" would find a loophole in the law, or would get a "stay order" from somewhere. So, they fixed the 17th of May, 2001, as the day to plough the field. The Association decided that about 50 women would go with Krishna Devi to plough the field with the tractor.

Thus, on the planned date, all the members reached Krishna Devi's field. A few sat on the tractor, and a few stood on the ground, and they started ploughing the field.

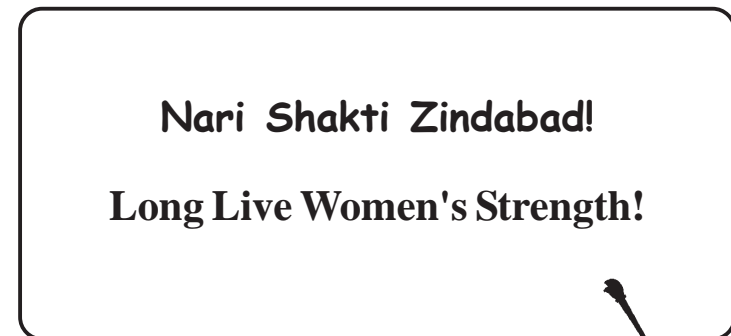
Chitad Lal Dhakad had heard of this. He had already arranged for four "goondas" (bad characters, thugs, and scoundrels) to harass them when they would try to plough the field. The "thugs" came and tried to stop the women from ploughing the field. The women immediately

divided themselves in two groups. One group fought with them and the other went and reported the matter to the Police station. The police returned with them to Krishna Devi's field. When the "bad characters" saw the police, they ran away. After that, the women continued ploughing Krishna Devi's field under police protection.

Now the Association knew that Chitad Lal Dhakad could stoop to any length to fulfill his evil intentions. When they decided to sow seeds, they asked for police protection from the beginning. So after 20 days, the Association members sowed the seeds and Krishna Devi had possession of the land she already owned!

Chitad Lal Dhakad had to accept defeat. He could not stand against so many women. The Association had proved once again that "unity is strength".

And yes. Up there, Krishna Devi's father is smiling — his "little girl" with 28 bighas of land, was finally able to live a comfortable life.



Glossary of Hindi Terms Used in “A Beginning”

Bai	Literally, means “Mother”, but used in Rajasthan as a suffix to the names of married women, or women who have at one time been married.
Bigha	2.5 bighas equals 1 acre. A bigha is a unit of land measurement.
Caste Panchayat	Within one caste or community, the elders who settle disputes meet to solve problems. This group of caste elders, meet as the “caste panchayat”
Collector	The top administrative officer in a District
Ekal	Alone
Khasra	A land and revenue term meaning “registered” in the land records, as in “kasra number” – in the land records, the piece of land is listed by its “registered number”.
Nari	A woman or women.
Panchayat	A group of people, either elected to local self-government bodies, or selected by a community, to make decisions and settle disputes of the community over which the group has jurisdiction.
Panchs	Members of a “panchayat”, either a formal panchayat of the self-government structures, or of an informal, or traditional community structure of elders who are also called “panchs”
Sangathan	Organization, mass-based membership organization
Sarpanch	The elected head, Chairperson or President of the Village Council (Gram Panchayat) in a rural area
Shakti	Strength, Strong
Tehsildar	The government official who holds the senior position in matters related to land and revenue in a geographical area called a “Tehsil”. In Rajasthan, the average size of a Tehsil would be between 150 – 300 villages, depending on the size of the villages.
Upsarpanch	The elected Vice-Chairperson or Vice-President of the Village Council (Gram Panchayat) in a rural area