

Site Visit Report

Nishtha

By

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Nishtha - Night Shelter <https://admin.ashanet.org/disbursement/4836>

Nishtha - Jagaran <https://www.ashanet.org/project/?pid=1018>



My name is Sumanta Biswas. I live in Boston and joined Asha's Boston chapter in December 2025. In December I got the chance to visit Nishtha in Baruipur near Kolkata.

Initiated in the year 1975 Nishtha has come to be known as an organization for the women, by the women! Its primary objective is to help women in crisis and disaster and it operates across 225 villages in West Bengal, Baruipur being one of them. 580 odd women volunteers and 420 odd girl volunteers have been volunteering to keep the work going on in the grassroots without bothering about incentives or remunerations along with many others working selflessly behind

the scenes. Among others Abhyuday Mandal at Asha's Athens chapter has been a driving force behind Nishtha at Baruipur.

I am sure for those who have spent some years in India must have witnessed the struggles of the not so fortunate among us. And so have I. But I had not had the chance to experience it first-hand. So witnessing from close quarters the hard work put in on the ground by numerous strong-willed women was an eye opener to say the least. And this being my first visit I must admit I was overwhelmed.

I was both surprised and impressed with the passion, dedication and knowledge of the women volunteers I met during my visit. Taking on and working daily with the local administration, the judiciary and the police is no mean task. And it seemed to me these women volunteers have all the motivation, courage, spirit and determination to take on this challenge. Above all, a couple of the volunteers' legal knowledge was no less than some of my lawyer friends, which really stood out.

Nishtha volunteers spoke of how gender bias among villagers is the norm with culture and religion being used indiscriminately to brainwash women and how the volunteers try to spread "awareness" about it.

I got the chance to interact with five individuals who Nishtha is helping at present along with a couple of Nishtha volunteers who are helping them. As their cases are sub judice I will not be able to elaborate much. Suffice to say, hearing them relate their real-life stories sure stole my sleep away. They spoke of how Nishtha volunteers have been helping them in every step to ensure justice is meted out. And hearing the volunteers sure showed me these volunteers mean business. When I left the room, my heart felt heavier, but I was also filled with "hope" that the Nishtha volunteers would be relentless in their dedicated efforts.

The volunteers did mention two of their main challenges are, one, how to ensure minority representation in village panchayats and two, how to ensure a paralegal volunteer is present in panchayat meetings.

Next, I visited a girls school nearby run by Nishtha. I was impressed with the neat and clean campus. Classes were going on in full swing with almost full attendance. I spoke both to a few teachers and students which showed the "learning" process is really functioning well. I was told the "drop-out" rate was insignificant and so were the "failure" rates. This truly is commendable as it is no mean task to motivate young girls to keep coming back to school every day and to convince their parents and enlist their support on a regular basis to make all this happen.

I came back with a much better appreciation of what Asha along with Nishtha have been able to do to make a difference in the lives of those women who are in crisis or disaster in far flung villages across West Bengal.

I would like to thank Akshay at Asha's Boston chapter and Abhyuday Mandal at Asha's Athens chapter for making this visit happen.

