

# Rural Women's Entrepreneurship Melava

5<sup>th</sup> January 2008

Five hundred village women gathered together under a colorful tent on January 5, 2007 to celebrate their achievements as entrepreneurs. Swayam Shikshan Prayog - SSP and Sakhi Sanstha hosted a Women's Entrepreneurship Melava for rural women who have successfully improved their livelihoods and made progress towards developing their families and communities. Women Entrepreneurs from the districts of Osmanabad, Latur, Beed, and Solapur congregated at the Bavi Training Center for the event. Forums such as these provide a space for women to share success stories, struggles, inspirations, and goals for future development.



Writer, Yeshodhara Katkar (winner of the 2007 Bahru Ratan Damani Award), was the keynote speaker and publicly inaugurated her latest work with the help of two SHG members whose writings appear in the book. The creation of this book, *Swayam Shikshit Swayam Prakashit (Teaching Ourselves, Enriching our Communities)*, has uniquely approached women's empowerment by creating a new set of women writers. Yeshabhara asked women to write their own success stories which she then compiled along with her own writings on SSP and women's empowerment to create a reading tool that highlights rural women writers and spreads awareness about development through the SHG model. In writing, these women eloquently expressed the struggles of their past and their achievements through working with SSP and starting their own businesses.



The main focus of the melava was on women entrepreneurs. Many entrepreneurs had stalls at the event to sell and advertise their products. Experienced Jyotis, Maya Shiral and Manisha Rode, performed a skit wherein they acted out a typical customer-Jyoti interaction to show how they sell their stoves. Over the past year, Jyotis experienced an unprecedented growth from 30 entrepreneurs in 2006 to 431 entrepreneurs in 2007. SSP staff facilitated group discussions and experience sharing in good business practices. A certain number of high performing women were acknowledged with awards based on the number of products they have sold.

This year marks the tenth year anniversary of SSP. Federation leaders, members of SSP, and village women expressed the positive changes they have experienced during this time through speeches, songs, and slogans. British Petroleum representative, Mukund Devgaonkar expressed his genuine appreciation for the hard work Jyotis have committed themselves to. Both BP and SSP acknowledge the immense potential for growth and women's empowerment through their new partnership. When reflecting on ten years of success and positive movement towards empowering rural women, SSP founder, Ms. Prema Gopalan, noted that we can only hope for 10 more years of progress as successful as what we have witnessed thus far.