

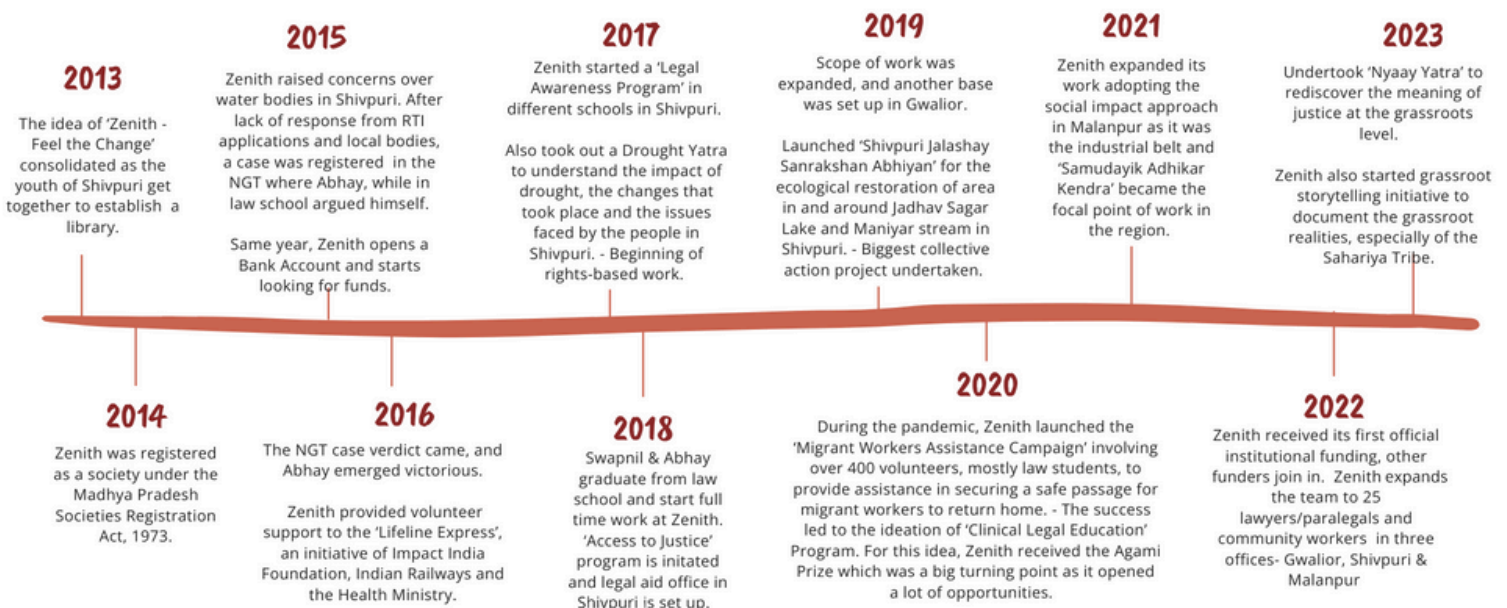
# QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Issue 1 | November 2024



As the Zenith Society team, we are pleased to unveil this quarterly newsletter—a celebration of our journey and the milestones we've achieved over the past decade. This newsletter is your front-row seat to the impactful work we do, the lives we've touched, and the stories of change that continue to shape our mission. Through this newsletter, we aim to deepen our connection with you, our valued readers, as we continue to drive change together.

## Zenith Society for Socio-Legal Empowerment: 10 years and counting!





# FOREWORD

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Zenith Society's quarterly newsletter! We commence this project filled with hope, reflecting on the strides we've made and the path ahead as we continue our mission to support communities to access justice in Madhya Pradesh.

At Zenith Society, we believe in a just society where each person, especially the marginalized, can live a life of respect & dignity. Every effort we undertake aims to create an ecosystem where justice is not a distant ideal but a reality that touches lives - from grassroots advocacy to legal support, from community mobilization to grassroots storytelling.

We work in Northern Madhya Pradesh – Chambal-Gwalior region, where the issues of social justice are borne from the unequal structures (class, caste and gender) leading to violent crimes and extreme discrimination. Justice is inaccessible to the marginalized communities, particularly the Sahariya Adivasis.

In this newsletter, we will share Zenith Society's updates and stories of impact, and resilience that are unfolding on the ground. Each story highlights the collective power of

communities coming together, breaking barriers, and overcoming systemic challenges. From legal aid initiatives and awareness campaigns to community workshops and advocacy efforts, these stories demonstrate how, step by step, we are building a foundation of fairness and equality.

Through this newsletter, we aim to not only keep you informed about our work but also to invite you to be part of this movement. Whether you're a supporter, a volunteer, or someone who believes in the transformative power of justice, we hope that you will find inspiration in these stories, and perhaps, discover new ways to get involved.

As we look ahead, we are filled with excitement about the work that lies ahead. But we also recognize that the journey to justice is long and requires the commitment of all of us. We are deeply grateful for the support of our partners, volunteers, and community members who share in this vision and walk with us in solidarity. Together, we can continue to build a more just and equitable world.

**ABHAY JAIN & SWAPNIL SHUKLA**  
**CO-FOUNDERS**





# MALANPUR

Malanpur, located in Madhya Pradesh near Gwalior, is an industrial town with a focus on manufacturing, particularly in pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and engineering goods. The population in Malanpur is relatively small (> 10,000 people) with most residents connected to the nearby workforce rather than settled communities. Given the limited economic opportunities in surrounding areas, employment is a key driver for migrants into this area. In the context of limited regulatory oversight and welfare systems, Zenith Society has been operating a one-stop worker's community centre called Samudayik Adhikar Kendra (SAK) to avail basic entitlements and schemes for a large majority of informal workers since 2021.



The team has addressed 1967 cases successfully in 2024 leading to a direct monetary impact of INR 3,174,000 and an indirect monetary impact of INR 14,427,200.



SAK is staffed with six employees and around four volunteers. Work undertaken via the service camps and community meeting is highly valuable to Zenith's team and volunteers as well.

For the team, especially the students and youngsters from the community - working on the ground, interacting with people from different walks of life, and navigating complex bureaucratic processes provides invaluable experience. Whether it is understanding the intricacies of legal documents, learning how to communicate complex legal concepts to the community, or gaining hands-on experience in community outreach, the team members grow in their ability to advocate for and serve marginalized groups.



# GWALIOR

Zenith Society has been operating one of two Samvidhi Sashaktikaran Kendras which comprises of a Legal Aid Clinic, Library and Community Centre in Gwalior since 2019. This branch of Zenith Society supports the Access to Justice, Clinical Legal Education and Storytelling programmes. It is supported by a team of 13 staff members and around 5 interns and volunteers.

“ Over the course of 2024, the Gwalior team has held 32 community meetings engaging 2,840 Adivasi individuals with a male to female participants ratio of 49:51. The team has filed 46 RTIs (Right to Information enquiries) and is managing 53 litigation cases. It has also organized 21 service camps, helping 1,775 people with caste certificates, birth records, and welfare schemes demonstrating Zenith Society's sustained efforts in pursuing justice for the community.

Key issues faced by the Adivasi community in this region this past year were land rights, government documentation challenges and livelihood related concerns.



## Resilience in Rudrapura: A Fight for Justice and Hope

In Gwalior's Rudrapura, a small hamlet of the marginalized Sahariya tribe, social and economic exclusion have long been the norm. Kailash Adivasi (name changed) a young Sahariya man, was shot by upper-caste individuals in a brutal act of violence. While such incidents are often ignored, this time was different. The Zenith Society stepped in to support his family and community's fight for justice. For nearly a year, Zenith supported Kailash to pursue justice despite legal setbacks and threats. Their persistent efforts led to compensation for him, marking a victory for the community.





While pursuing Kailash’s case, Zenith’s team found Rudrapura plagued with systemic discrimination, crumbling infrastructure, water shortages, no electricity, and children unable to attend school due to missing documents and limited transport facilities. The team then supported the residents to tackle broader issues, supporting families secure documents to enrol their children in school. Kailash, now a community leader, used his compensation to buy an e-rickshaw, ensuring children could attend school.

However, recently, heavy rains destroyed Rudrapura’s mud-and-thatch homes. With no government aid, families struggled to rebuild, halting children’s education again. Despite this, Rudrapura’s residents remain hopeful to rebuild and Kailash’s leadership reflects the power of solidarity in the pursuit of justice.



**Zenith Society at the 'Justicemakers Mela' in Bhopal**

Mark your calendars! The Zenith Society will be at the Justicemakers Mela in Bhopal, powered by Agami, on November 29-30. This transformative two-day gathering will bring together 600 justice changemakers from the field of law and justice.

We’re thrilled to host our session, “Let’s Reimagine Legal Clinics,” where we’ll explore innovative ways to redesign legal clinics as powerful engines of justicemaking. If you’re attending and would like to connect or collaborate, we’d love to hear from you! Reach out to us at [zenithssle.communications@gmail.com](mailto:zenithssle.communications@gmail.com).

# SHIVPURI

Zenith Society has been operating one of two Samvidhi Sashaktikaran Kendras (Legal Aid Clinic and Anil Dewan Community Centre) in Shivpuri. This branch of Zenith Society supports programs under Access to Justice, Clinical Legal Education, and Storytelling, supporting community members navigate legal and administrative systems. Zenith Society's efforts also extend through the Shivpuri Youth Forum and Kalam Learning Center projects, amplifying youth engagement and educational outreach. With a dedicated staff of 4 members and around 5 volunteers, Zenith Society has been working towards community upliftment in Shivpuri since 2013.

other social welfare schemes aimed at empowering marginalized communities.



“ So far in 2024, the Shivpuri team has conducted 349 consultations, filed 15 cases, submitted 76 Right to Information (RTI) applications. It has also conducted 10 field visits, and organized 2 service camps, and assisted approximately 25 Adivasi individuals in obtaining caste certificates, all aimed at enabling the Adivasi community to claim their rights and access essential services.

Government documents are crucial for adivasis as they formally recognize the beneficiaries as members of the Scheduled Tribes, making them eligible for affirmative action, scholarships, government job reservations, and

## Claiming the Unclaimed: A Battle for Land and Justice

In 2002, 170 Dalit and Sahariya Adivasi families in Mudkheda, Shivpuri District, were given land titles under the Madhya Pradesh government's Bhopal Declaration. Yet, these families received no possession of their land, leaving them with only title papers. Most families, marginalized and resource-starved, didn't know where their land was or its size. A decade later, digitized land records shockingly showed these lands as government-owned. The rightful owners were rendered landless again, unable to benefit from schemes like PM Kisan Samman Nidhi.





Two Sahariya adivasis approached Zenith Society in Shivpuri for help. Investigating their cases, the team uncovered a systematic effort by a local upper caste lobby to suppress original records and continue to illegally encroach on the land. Fighting back, Zenith filed complaints with the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and lobbied district authorities to correct the records. They secured proof of the 170 families' rightful ownership and had many titles restored.

While Zenith has ensured legal acknowledgment of ownership, possession of the land remains elusive, as entrenched encroachers delay justice. The people of Mudkheda continues their painstaking work to ensure the title holders not only reclaim their rightful land but also their dignity. Zenith Society's efforts embody the fight for systemic change, bringing hope to those long denied their rights.





# SAHARIYA SPOTLIGHT

The "Sahariya Spotlight" is a dedicated section of this newsletter designed to offer readers a deeper understanding of the diverse cultural practices of the communities supported by Zenith Society. Through this feature, we also present a unique, Anne Frank-style narrative, sharing the daily life and personal experiences of a member of the Sahariya community, offering a first-hand glimpse into their world.

## Lines of Life: The Artistic Expression of the Sahariyas

The Sahariya Adivasi community of Madhya Pradesh creates vibrant and symbolic artwork that reflects their deep connection to nature, spirituality, and daily life. Their art is characterized by intricate geometric patterns, stylized depictions of animals, and scenes from mythology and folklore, often painted on the walls of homes or community spaces.



These patterns hold cultural significance, symbolizing prosperity, protection, and harmony with nature. Traditionally made with natural pigments derived from clay, charcoal, and plant-based dyes, the designs are often applied using simple tools like twigs, fingers, or rudimentary brushes. Their art is not merely decorative but a living narrative of their traditions and worldview.

*Zenith Society incorporates Sahariya motifs in its design for this section of the newsletter.*



# SAHARIYA SPOTLIGHT

## Education, Service, and Dreams: Ramlakhan Sahariya's insights

Ramlakhan Sahariya is a symbol of progress and hope for his community. In his twenties, he is the first from his village to break barriers through education, a passion that fuels him daily. Fluent in Hindi and holding both a Bachelor's in Education and a Master of Arts from Gwalior, he is the first Sahariya to join the Zenith team and is currently deeply engaged in community empowerment work – addressing one hamlet at a time, while he fights the battle in his own village.

A proud husband and father, Ramlakhan honors his traditions while striving for success. He is an inspiration to Sahariya youngsters as they see him supporting the struggles of his people.



Ramlakhan's journey is one of resilience, determination, and a commitment to uplifting his people through education and service. Stay tuned as we explore his life, the challenges he faces, and the dreams he holds for his family and community.

**On a daily basis, Ramlakhan navigates the complexities of local justice delivery institutions - Jan Sunvayi (weekly meeting at the Collectorate) and Lok Adalats in Gwalior, assisting with legal applications and enforcement of their legal rights.**

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