

Through the Gender Lens



Laadli

Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

Edited by Dr. A. L. Sharada & Nita Shirali

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“I think LMAAGS is an important initiative, as much of the mainstream media ignores women’s issues and the media reportage that does exist is often gender insensitive. In such a scenario, it is imperative to give the right signals and recognize the work of people who are giving the right kind of story and display the right sensitivity. While judging, I came across some very poignant and powerfully written stories as well as some very well researched features that impressed me. ”

– **Ms. Manjul Bajaj** is a writer based in Gurgoan and is the author of the ‘Rangeeli Duniya’ series for children



“At a time when safety of women is THE ISSUE plaguing the country, Laadli awards are a milestone in recognizing the efforts by women who brave all odds to set an example not just for themselves but also for millions of others globally. It encourages others to come forward and be a part of a movement for making the world a place of peace, respect, honour and dignity for women. ”

– **Sunil Jha** is a senior media professional currently associated with ABP News



“Laadli Media Awards are true inspiration for all those who are willing to devote their creative life for the cause of gender sensitization. It gives recognition to the recipients and encourages them to work harder in future. ”

– **Sachidanand Joshi** is Vice-Chancellor of the Kushabhau Thakre University of Journalism and Mass Communication, Raipur

Foreword

Laadli began as an idea that promised to bring about a silent revolution in mainstream media. It promised to push the levers of change to challenge gender stereotypes in everyday television commercials and news reporting. It was not about one-time statements. It was about an ongoing movement that would create a visible shift over time. It was about silent but impactful storylines that would seep into everyday conversations to create a more equal narrative. The shift was barely noticeable to an everyday viewer but the impact was more than perceptible to those who spearheaded this change. Voices that were silenced before now shared an opinion. Roles that were gendered before now broke the mould. The media industry rose to the formidable challenge of portraying a gender-equal society – of creating an ideal would inspire emulation in the real world.

The *Laadli* media awards continue to be a touchstone for gender-sensitive work in mainstream media. With the increasing popularity of the awards, there is a discernible change in the quality of entries received over the years. The submissions clearly reflect that there is better understanding of what constitutes gender sensitive portrayal and reporting. The awards were institutionalized to not only honour those who dared to mirror the complete picture but also to encourage others to join the league.

The following pages applaud the efforts of journalists and media persons by compiling their work in this second edition of the series. Some stories offer resolution while others incite agitation. The narratives portray limitations and allow possibilities for change. The protagonists are as much in the pages of the book as are those who dared to uphold the inconvenient truth as it were.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) strives to address discriminatory practices that impede gender equality. UNFPA India commends Population First for launching the *Laadli* initiative and is proud of its association with it. The journey of creating an equal world is replete with its fair share of tribulations and triumphs. However, committed partners in change make the journey worthwhile. With each passing year, alternate voices gain greater strength, the possibilities of change gain tangible contours and the distant destination ceases to be that far away.



Frederika Meijer

UNFPA Representative, India and Bhutan

Preface

I am very happy to present the second volume of award winning entries of the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity. *Through the Gender Lens* is a compilation of a few select award winning entries from 2011-2014 covering the fourth, fifth and sixth rounds of awards. While all the award winning entries deserve to be in the book, we had to make a difficult choice of putting only a few in this collection which reflect the different gender perspectives in journalistic writing.

I greatly appreciate the effort put in by Dr. A. L. Sharada, our Director and Nita Shirali in putting this collection together. I hope you enjoy reading the book as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.

We see a definite change in the way media is covering gender issues in the last five years. Their role in reporting violence against women and changing the way the country perceives heinous crimes like rape and sexual violence is praiseworthy. Yet, at the same time, there is a need to work towards making Gender Sensitivity a core value of journalistic writing and programming. There is an urgent need for the media professional bodies, networks and regulators to promote Gender Sensitivity as an integral part of journalism, both as a calling as well as an industry.

The last few years have seen many women centric films which succeeded at the box office as well, breaking the myth that women centric movies are not commercially viable. Their success also proves that audiences are ready for such movies.

I see encouraging signs ahead of Media and Advertising projecting women and gender issues with more sensitivity. The *Laadli* Media Awards will continue to be part of this transformation with your support and guidance.



S. V. Sista

Executive Trustee, Population First

From the Editor's Desk

The last nine years were quite exciting and challenging for us. Working closely with media and advertising, we were often overwhelmed by the positive response from leaders in these fields. Rarely did we encounter any resistance or opposition which proves that the media and advertising fraternity is willing to be part of the change that we want. The fact that the number of entries has reached from 100+ in 2007 to 1700+ in 2014, shows the growing gender sensitivity in the media. We have also observed a discernible improvement in the quality of entries which once again reflects the concerns of the new generation media and advertising persons with regard to gender issues. It is also heartening to note that a majority of our winners are below 35 years of age.

This book is divided into five segments: Decoding Gender, Writing on Current Events, Reporting on Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination, Analysing Policies and Programmes and Interpreting Research. Each section is accompanied by a conceptual note on how the selected entries enhance gender understanding.

The writings reflect the commitment and hard work put in by the journalists. Many of the stories had a positive impact with the Government Agencies, the Police and the Judiciary responding to the stories and initiating action to mend the situation or provide succour to the survivors of violence.

The stories make riveting reading and expose the various dimensions of gender inequality and violence that prevail in the country.



Dr. A. L. Sharada

Director, Population First

Scope of *Laadli* Media Awards

- Covered 28 states and 6 union territories of India
- 13 languages
- Entries increased from 120 in 2007-08 to 1700+ in 2012-13.

Media

Advertising: Print, TV, OOH, Radio, Digital, Direct Mail

Print: Newspaper, Magazine and Feature Service

Electronic: TV, Radio

Web

Other Media

Categories

Service, Product and Public Service

News Features, Features, Investigative Reports, Editorials, Op-Eds and Columns

News Features, Features, Documentaries, Serials, Radio Plays, Topical Programmes and Issue-based Programmes

News Features, Features, Articles, Blogs and Columns

Dance, Dance-Drama, Theatre, Feature Films, Cartoons and Multi-Media

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Deconstructing Gender

Gender sensitivity in media is often assumed to involve women-centric writing. Yes, it is about women but is written seeing the issues through a gender lens. It is also about the social construction of what it is to be a man or a woman and what happens when one does not fit into this dichotomy; the power equations between the various genders; and the restrictions imposed on them by the gendering process. The stories in this section highlight a few such dimensions of gender and how they are being challenged and redefined.

S. Vijay Kumar's story on a transgender athlete and Sindhuja's photo feature on the Kithadavar transgender festival of Koovagam highlight how those not fitting into the gender dichotomy of male and female are marginalized in society. Both write-ups succeed in highlighting the need for putting in place more gender inclusive systems and institutions.

Aditi Bhaduri and Banesh highlight the stories of women who are quietly breaking into the male bastions of the occupation of railway porters and masonry work in Chattisgarh and Kerala respectively. While on the one side the women porters break the myth that women cannot carry heavy loads, the women masons are proving that they can do a lot more in construction work than merely carrying loads.

Yet another group which is often neglected in gender discourse is the single woman. The near universality of marriage and the dominance of family often relegate single women to the background. Vaidehi's feature focuses on the struggles of single women to assert themselves in a patriarchal society.

Breaking the silence around harmful social practices that increase the vulnerability of women, undermine their dignity and equality and bringing those issues into the public domain is yet another aspect of gender sensitive writing. Lina Chacki's writing on the exploitation of and violence against the baulins in a so called egalitarian and liberal Baul community, Nishat Shamsi's feature on bride bazaars in Maharashtra, Rina Mukherji's feature on menstrual taboos and Debarshi's feature on the practice of female genital mutilation in the Bohra community in India, point to the ways and means by which various institutions and cultural practices work to restrict the freedom and rights of women.

The under-valuing of women's contribution as a home-maker and the double burden of working women is an important aspect of gender roles which is highlighted in a lighter but effective manner by Swathi Sharma while Amita Bade focuses on the menial job of rag picking and unravels the caste and gender underpinnings of the occupation.

Print and Web Media

'Weaker Sex? You Must be Joking!'

March 11, 2011

This feature is about women porters in Chattisgarh's Raipur railway station who have stormed yet another male bastion. Their saga of courage and optimism inspires the author to document their journey so far. These women have overcome a lot of restrictions and barriers to break into this domain.

As the train slowly chugged into Chhattisgarh's Raipur station, my eyes beheld a scene I had never imagined to find in a state that is considered one of India's least developed. A sari-clad porter was hurtling down the station with bags on her head.

For a moment I was unsure whether she was indeed a porter. But then she most definitely wore the signature red jacket and on her head was the rolled up piece of cloth that porters use to cushion themselves from the heavy luggage they carry.

Determined to find out more, I set out to meet this woman. And what a saga of determination and optimism her life turned out to be.

Born and brought up in Rajnandgaon, the pleasant looking and always smiling Parasai Sahu (36) studied till Std. 10. When she turned 18, her parents got her married. Her husband worked as a bus conductor, earning about Rs. 2,000 a month, but the fragile state of his health meant that Parasai had no option but to look for a job to provide for her two children – a son and a daughter – and her parents-in-law. So she turned to her uncle, a porter, who helped her get a sweeper's job at Raipur railway station.

She worked as a sweeper for four months, earning Rs. 2,400, which helped to supplement the family income. Then her husband gave up his job as a conductor and began working at the village cycle repair shop. This meant a decrease in income. From then on, Parasai was in search for a more paying occupation.



Aditi Bhaduri, WFS

Aditi Bhaduri is an independent journalist and researcher, who writes for both the Indian and international media. She also acts as a consultant to various organizations on issues of foreign policy, conflict resolution, and gender. She won the award for the Best News Report at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12.

Opportunity came in the form of Maanbai (30). Never in her life would Maanbai have thought that one day she would inspire another woman to seek a better future. But Maanbai, even if she did not acknowledge it herself, had already established herself as an unusual woman. A year ago, she was appointed as the first woman porter at the Raipur railway station.

Maanbai had been married to a porter working here. When her husband fell ill and died, the station authorities gave her his job. The work was arduous, without doubt, but as the sole earning member of her family she had little choice but to carry on with all the courage she could muster.

Unknown to her, she was also quietly playing a part in transforming someone else's life.

Parasai says, "When I worked as a sweeper, every day I would see Maanbai working as a porter. She seemed so confident and in control, I wanted to emulate her." So, she mustered the courage to approach the station authorities and ask if she could do similar work. To her huge surprise, they agreed. She was given a form that she filled up with the help of her uncle and finally, in October 2010, Parasai – like Maanbai – started working as a station porter.

She is currently in her training period which will last another two months. Her work will then be evaluated by a station officer. The training has not exactly been a cakewalk. She's had to undergo a medical test to get a fitness certificate that entailed running a distance of 400 metres and walking for 200 metres within five minutes while carrying a weight of 40 kilos. She did it.

However, life as a porter has its challenges. It was not the punishing work as much as the jealousy of male porters that has occasionally queered the pitch. These men reportedly waste no opportunity to harass the two of them. Rues Parasai, "I don't think many of the male porters liked it when Maanbai and I began working as porters". They felt we were intruding in their territory and would always pass snide remarks about us. Sometimes they even dissuaded willing passengers from hiring us. We are pleasant with passengers, but even that has been misinterpreted by our male colleagues, who float rumours that we flirt with the passengers!"

Things came to a head when a male porter physically threatened Maanbai and Parasai. The women were forced to report this to the station master who –

fortunately – stood by them. Things have been more peaceful since and both the station authorities and the passengers have generally been supportive.

“Once I saw three VIPs. I don’t know who they were, but when they saw us – me and Parasai – they were so encouraging. They gave me Rs. 10 as baksheesh (tip),” recalls Maanbai.

The main problem they now encounter is that passengers are often reluctant to hire them. “Sometimes they feel sorry for us and prefer a male porter to carry their luggage; sometimes they are worried that by making a woman carry their luggage they would be committing a sin. “Paap chad jayega, they say,” reveals Parasai. She adds, “What they don’t understand is that they are helping us when they make us work and that we need this work to survive.”

She recalls her first encounter with a passenger. “I was nervous on the first day. I fervently wanted my work to be appreciated. It was a family that hired me and paid me for the first time. I earned Rs. 30 on that occasion and I am grateful to that family to this day.”

For now, Maanbai and Parasai are the only women porters at the Raipur station. They are daily wage earners, earning Rs. 100 each day on an average. The official rate for the services of a porter here is Rs. 20 for every 40 kilos of luggage.

Sometimes, however, passengers tip them a few extra rupees. They get no free days, but have to apply for leave when they want the day off.

By Choice, Not Chance

For Maanbai, working as a porter was an imperative, but for Parasai it was totally a matter of choice. So what does her family think about her unconventional job? “They do not mind it. My husband is encouraging. Until now I have earned about Rs. 3,000-4,000 a month, which is more than what he does.” Yet, it is her husband who remains the decision-maker in the family. Parasai hands her entire earnings to him every day. From this sum, he gives her money to travel to work and to get something to eat. He also decides how the money is to be spent. “We rarely buy anything for ourselves. We buy what the children want. We don’t have a TV, so we are saving up for that,” she says.

Parasai leaves home at six in the morning. It takes her about four hours to commute to the station and back. This means that she is home only around

eight at night. So, who looks after the house? “My daughter and my mother-in-law cook, clean and manage between themselves. I wash the clothes,” she says. Her husband does not, of course, contribute to handling the daily chores.

The tough work schedule of these two women could faze many a strong man. But neither Maanbai nor Parasai regret being porters. Explains Parasai with great enthusiasm, “We are village women. We are strong and used to hard labour. I do not find the work tiring. I am very happy to do this work and enjoy it. I just want to complete the training. Then, I can continue to work with confidence, knowing that my job is permanent.”

First it was Maanbai who inspired Parasai. Now she in turn is inspiring others. “Today the women in my village ask me if they can also apply for such a job,” she says with a smile.



Dance performance at the Thiruvanthapuram event during the 2011-12 Ladli Media Awards.

Where Protectors Couldn't Transcend Gender

May 21, 2013

This report is about the gender discrimination faced by transgenders. Citing the story of a famous athlete who was denied a job in the police force because of being transgender, the author says how in spite of the Constitution providing for social justice, they are denied their basic rights. There is a very urgent need for a support system to educate and empower transgenders and to mainstream them into society with equal opportunities and rights.

Joining the police force was a dream come true for this promising athlete from Villupuram district in Tamil Nadu. But the joy did not last long as she was dismissed from service a couple of months later. Reason: it was found during a routine medical check that she was a transgender.

Hailing from a poor family – her father works as a scavenger in the local municipality – the constable tried her best to convince police officials that she would produce results on a par with their expectations, but in vain. The department made it clear that the force could accommodate either men or women, but there was no place for the third gender.

She had a good track record in sports, NCC and academics. She performed well in the written examination, physical test and personal interview and was selected for the post of Grade-II police constable. “Women police recruits have to undergo a medical check for pregnancy. During this exercise, it was found that this particular constable was a transgender. She had qualified based on the physical standards set for women. After a preliminary enquiry, the person was dismissed from service,” a senior police official told *The Hindu*.

The woman participated in State-level athletic meets and bagged several medals. On hearing the news, her shocked parents appealed to the Superintendent of Police not to make public the reason for her dismissal.



S. Vijay Kumar, *The Hindu*

S. Vijay Kumar is with *The Hindu* in Chennai. He won the award for Best News Report at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Southern Region.

This is not the first time that a transgender who made it to the force was unable to function. “Santhi Soundararajan, who made the country proud by winning a silver medal at the Asian Games in Doha, also qualified for appointment in the police department. Despite repeated reminders from the Police Training College, she did not join duty. Perhaps, she was scared that her gender might cost her the job someday...,” the officer said. Santhi had failed a gender test and lost her silver medal.

V. Suresh, advocate and human rights activist, said it was grossly unfair that a person who qualified for a post should be denied the opportunity and penalised for what nature had given to that person. “This is also arbitrary and goes against Constitutional principles. Article 15 provides for social justice in the context of people suffering discrimination. Transgenders squarely fall under this category, though the term was not used when the Constitution was written. The very spirit of Article 15 is to undo discrimination by providing reservation.”

Saying that Tamil Nadu was in the forefront in devising social policies, Dr. Suresh, who is also the national general secretary of PUCL, wanted the state to take a stand on the issue of transgenders and render justice by accommodating them as a category in education and employment.

According to Vikranth Prasanna, founder of ‘Chennai Dost’, which supports the LGBT community in Tamil Nadu, there was a need for a support system to educate and empower transgenders. “We appreciate the initiative of the Dindigul Collector who gave a job to a transgender in a Government Hospital. We hear that students were sent out of colleges when their gender transformation became visible. Even in a popular IT firm, a well-qualified transgender was asked to leave,” he said.

This kind of discrimination would only force transgenders to indulge in commercial sex or resort to begging. “If livelihood is not guaranteed even to the qualified ones, where will they go?” he asked.

Taboos Take their Toll on Women

April 25, 2011

This feature talks about some taboos that simply refuse to go away. She focuses on the taboos associated with women's menstrual period. By conforming to regressive practices relating to menstrual period like using cloth instead of disposable pads, not being given nutritious food, not being allowed to enter the house and use toilets etc, women undergo a lot of difficulties. Basic hygiene takes a back seat and they become more susceptible to infections and prolonged reproductive health problems.

The recently-concluded 4th South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN) has ended with the Colombo declaration, which puts emphasis on promoting menstrual hygiene all over South Asia to accomplish the Millennium Development Goal (MDG 7) of making available water and sanitation for all by 2015.

The statement has called for including in monitoring mechanisms specific indicators for high priority measures such as Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in schools, handwashing and menstrual hygiene. The declaration has sought to build and strengthen capacity for sanitation and hygiene implementation, including investing in higher education facilities, development of curricula, research and development, knowledge exchange and partnership development.

This is most edifying for a region where menstrual taboos have, time and again, put women at risk. Fortunately, the last few years have seen an increased consciousness on the matter and specific initiatives have been taken to address the needs of women and girls in India.

In India and other countries in the region, menstruation is associated with being unclean.

As revealed by a UNICEF survey done under the aegis of the Sanitation, Hygiene, Education and Water Supply in Bangladesh programme, drying



Rina Mukherji /www.justfemme.in

Rina Mukherji was recently awarded the Robert Bosch Stiftung Media Fellowship to report on Euroscience Pen Forum (ESOF 2012) Dublin. She contributes for www.justfemme.in

She won the award for the Best Feature at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Eastern Region.

menstrual rags in dirty, hidden corners of the house results in women using wet rags most of the time, particularly in the monsoon. Such a practice caused teenaged Monira to suffer from severe vaginal itching due to bacterial infection.

In the case of Shahana, an adolescent Bangladeshi girl, drying her menstrual rag on a bean tree in the garden proved fatal. An insect that had settled on the cloth which was drying in a shady grove away from bright sunlight found its way into her vagina. The resultant infection proved fatal, and caused her an untimely death.

The problem is compounded by the low priority given in families to women's health. The 2004 Bangladesh Family and Health Survey found that a husband's decision determined whether or not a woman would seek medical help for a serious gynaecological infection. Even when a husband decides in favour of medical consultation, long distances to be travelled to district hospitals and the time consumed prevents women from the poorer sections in India and other countries in South Asia from opting for medical help.

The use of sanitary napkins is being stressed on in countries like India. However, buying napkins can end up quite expensive for poor households. The government has taken to distributing sanitary napkins free of cost in many districts. Besides, a low-cost sanitary napkin machine is enabling women from self-help groups to make and sell sanitary napkins at Rs. 2 apiece in many parts of southern India. For easy disposal, incinerators are now in use in many schools all over the country to get rid of used napkins.

But the practice of using sanitary napkins will take time to catch on. In fact, a recent A. C. Nielson-PLAN India study on "Sanitary Protection, Every Women's Health Right" revealed that only 12 per cent of Indian women used sanitary napkins. Unhygienic and unsafe practices and traditional taboos cause 70 per cent of Indian women to suffer from reproductive tract infections, according to the study.

Hence, the UNICEF, along with local grassroots organizations in Bangladesh, has embarked on enlightening young girls on the dangers inherent in the practices followed. Young schoolgirls are told to perceive this as a natural process, and made aware of the significance of hygiene during menstrual periods. They are taught to wash their menstrual rags in adequate water, and to dry them in sunlight. During the rainy season, when drying outdoors

becomes difficult, they dry the rags by placing them on overturned baskets placed on earthen stoves that continue to be warm after the cooking is done .

At the same time, improved sanitation is being stressed on; with emphasis on building latrines that have a small raised platform to facilitate washing of menstrual cloth by girls and women.

As matters stand, barring Sri Lanka and the Maldives, most countries in South Asia remain off-track to achieve the millennium development goal of providing improved sanitation to their populations by 2015. In fact, sanitation coverage is as low as 5 per cent in war-ravaged Afghanistan, while Nepal has achieved 43 per cent, Bangladesh 54 per cent, and India 68 per cent. Even Sri Lanka, which boasts 85 per cent sanitation coverage, has yet to provide adequate coverage in its northeastern provinces, which are slowly recovering from three decades of civil strife, while Maldives lags behind in providing sanitation to its smaller islands.

Evidently, a lot remains to be done to achieve full sanitation coverage, as also solid and liquid waste management. Until incinerators are installed in every school, and girls and women weaned to using sanitary napkins, it would be well to impart the knowledge of menstrual hygiene. For this, it is important that menstrual hygiene become a part of school curricula all over the region, so as to override customary taboos which stand in the way of a healthier life for women.

Mr. and Mrs. Koovagam

June 27, 2012

The story is an attempt to change the misconceptions surrounding the village Koovagam in Tamil Nadu and its transgender Koothandavar Festival which is generally thought of as a place for radical sexual expression and an avenue for sexual fetishes. A visit to the festival, she feels, challenges one's paradigms of gender identity, sexual orientation and gender diaspora. It creates awareness about the struggles of transgenders for social and economic inclusion in society.

“Why wouldn't you shoot me naked? Don't you find me attractive?” asks Ruby, flaunting her newly acquired bustline while pushing the helm of her saree down to show off the tattooed scorpion on her navel. I am at Koovagam village in Villipuram district in Tamil Nadu, to witness the annual Koothandavar temple festival.



Sindhuja Parthasarathy, *The Alternative*

Sindhuja Parthasarathy is a freelance travel and social documentary photographer. She contributes for www.thealternative.in. She won the award for the Best Photo Feature (Web) at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Southern Region.

The previous day, I had checked into the least seedy lodge Villipuram had to offer – in a dingy room that was once painted green, and decorated thereafter by spit. (Or is it bodily fluids?). The dustbin is overflowing with used condoms, cheap makeup and filth that is nauseating to say he least, and the atmosphere reeks of cigarettes mixed with arrack.

My sleep, if it can be called that, is interrupted frequently by constant knocks on the door by pimps. Initially, I answer the door to confirm that I am a woman and yes, a full woman. A photographer. And no, not available.

Time hangs heavy around me. The corridors outside ring aloud with claps, noisy chatter and unprovoked screaming. I eventually slip into sleep that is full of nightmares.

I wake up the next morning to see women walking around in their padded bras and velvet petticoats (some found petticoats alone sufficient); brushing, combing and getting dressed. Others were chatting up with seemingly male like men.

I walked down to find Ruby, my neighbour, who had unpacked her bags by now. She treats me to a display of silk sarees, evening gowns, wigs, lingerie, jewellery and stillettoes, all that would be used up for the beauty pageant. She adds, “I have been saving up for this all of last year.”





I get free beauty tips and am advised to wear sunscreen every time I go out to shoot in the sun. "...men love glowing skin, the whiter, the better," declares Ruby. She moves on to discuss sex and her demanding clients. On seeing me getting uncomfortable, she smirks. "It is to put food on the table. It is a job, just like yours. The better you are, the more money you get."

A man walks in, and I prepare to leave when Ruby said that I would be safe around him and winks impishly. She confirms in a whisper that he is homosexual and explains that I would meet aravanis (transgenders), kothis (feminine homosexuals) and panthis (so called straight male clients of kothis) at the festival.

I continue to walk all day on the hot streets of Koovagam, trying hard not to second guess people's identities or their sexual orientations.

It is the day of the pageant – time to select Ms. Koovagam.

The show starts with a talent contest which includes dancing to sexually coloured songs. I hold my breath as I watch them dance in frenzy and wanton fury.

And then starts the beauty pageant organized by the Villupuram District Transgenders' (Women's) Welfare Association, which also doubles up as a forum to build awareness around HIV and other sexually transmitted

diseases. 84 transgenders walk the ramp, each trying to outdo the other in their glitzy costumes and flashy jewellery. The audience cheers with hoots, whistles and thunderous applause.

Winning the title means quite a lot admits Ruby, disappointment writ large on her face post her elimination. We start rooting for Chayya Singh, a contestant from Hebbal, Bangalore, a brilliant conversationalist who charmed everyone with her chutzpah.

Harini from Tiruvanamalai wins the crown with Chayya coming in runners up. Harini tells TV channels, "I spent Rs. 1 lakh for my costumes, accessories and grooming. This is the first time I am participating. Tamil Nadu has given me refuge and support. I left my house in Kochi at the age of 14."

Chayya too has run away from home in Dharmapuri at the age of 14 with the help of the then local collector. She had scored 400/500 in her 11th grade and had won many debate contests back in school. Her parents were inconsolable when they learnt that their brilliant boy now wanted to be girl.

"Over the years, they have come to terms with it, or maybe they have resigned themselves to their fate. I wish I had graduated, got a decent job and then got the sex change operation done. I hurried in my insecure teens and like many others, moved to Mumbai," she says. This is a common thought and regret shared by many.





She now supports herself as a bar dancer in Bangalore. I quiz her on her present condition. “Well, atleast I don’t spend every night with a new man nor do I beg at traffic signals,” she adds with a smile.

I wish her good luck for the impending wedding the next morning.

D-day at the festival. Ruby and Chayya are dressed in their finest traditional kanchipurams, and are heading out to the koothandavar temple.

In the Mahabharata, it was prophesized that the Pandavas would win the battle of Kurukshetra only if they sacrificed a ‘perfect’ male from among themselves to please Goddess Kali, who is the keeper of the Kurukshetra grounds. Prince Aravan, a son born out of an illicit relationship Arjuna had with a certain Naga princess, offered himself up, provided a few conditions of his were satisfied.

For one, he wanted to consummate with a partner before being beheaded; since no woman was willing to marry him and be widowed the next day, Lord Krishna took the form of Mohini to marry him.

The following morning, Aravan was beheaded and his head left on the grounds of war for him to watch the rest of the war, the other of his conditions. He saw his widow Mohini beating her chest and wailing inconsolably, bemoaning his death.

This tiny village of Koovagam has a temple dedicated to Lord Aravan, the prince warrior who is deified here. And it is here that the transgender community assembles on the first full moon day of the Tamil month of Chittirai to marry their Lord.

The marriage ritual is followed in letter and spirit, and for that one day, they attain a position the human society continues to refuse to them, the status of a wife.

On the temple grounds, thousands of Aravanis (as they call themselves) are dressed in their best sarees and jewellery, all lined up to get married.

The sanctum sanctorum allows a very narrow strip of light to penetrate through and is presided by the local priest or pujari. He makes an offering of coconut and bananas, offers camphor to the deity, and recites various mantras to invoke the spirit of the Lord. He then ties the thali.

“This yearly marriage and revelry brings us huge solace, it is this gaiety that we await all year long,” says Sonika, an acquaintance. Soon enough, she excuses herself to celebrate her wedding night.

There are countless men-panthis, lined up along paddy fields and coconut groves. Sex is regular fare here. I see shadowy figures of copulating couples at night while I am rushing back home.

I run into Sonika much later in the night, only for her to plead with me, “Can you buy me dinner? The cheapo gave me just Rs.100 and didn’t even use a Nirodh (a brand of condom).” She hurls a few abusive Tamil words. I cringe. I pay.

On the last day of the festival, a procession of the Aravan effigy travels all around the village before being ceremonially beheaded and consigned to flames.

What follows is a tragic event that would make any ancient Greek philosopher proud. Lord Aravan’s death is mourned through a high pitched wail emanating from the transgenders who have just lost their coveted status as a wife. They cry, they weep, they scream, they whimper; bangles are broken, the sacred sindhoor is washed off their foreheads, the string of flowers gets yanked from their hair and finally, the thali is torn off their mortal bodies.



I stand amongst the Transgenders and try to capture all the frenzied action through my view finder. The broken glass bangles and thali fall on me. They sing songs about their ill-fated life, and wish their sexual status was only incidental. They cry over their birth, their mixed identities and their craving to find a soulmate. I sense that these tears however go much deeper.

All the self-flagellation rends my willpower to be objective about the shoot. I fail to separate myself from what is going on, I draw in the pain of the place and people. I wail.

The Koovagam festival is an eye opener for anyone interested in understanding the transgender community. Over the years, transgenders have gone through continuous discrimination, humiliation, oppression and continue to live on the fringes of society.

Most members of the community live in slums, eking out their livelihoods by begging at traffic lights or through sex work. They continue to be hated and feared for their sexual non-conformity and outrageous sexuality. Equally disturbing is the violence and exploitation within the community. For instance, the strong belief and practice of “Nirvana” – voluntary surgical removal of male reproductive organs by a dhai/ mid wife without anesthetic and how the date of Nirvana determines the seniority, power and respect to a TG in their community.

Legal victories such as revoking of Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code and the Election Commission's inclusion of "Others" in its electoral rolls and voter identity cards have done some good to the community. However, there are many issues of inclusivity, sensitivity, gainful employment etc. that needs addressing. But such societal changes will take a lot of time, and call for persistent deliberate effort from all stakeholders to the system.

As for you and me, we can begin by making an attempt to educate ourselves about the community and work towards changing our attitudes towards people with gender-non conforming appearance or behaviour.

Before I bid goodbye and leave Villipuram, I ask Ruby, "What did you pray for?"

She smirks. "Year after year I ask koothandavar for just one thing. Love."



ಅಪ್ಪಾ ಕೊಲಿಸಬೇಡಪ್ಪ

September, 2011

Hussain Pasha's column in Kannada "Appa Kollisabedappa" on Father's Day portrays an ideal father who is sensitive enough to take care of his girl child. This column highlights the responsibility of the father to take a stand on sex selection and save the daughters.

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Hussain Pasha, Mahila Loka, Koppal

Hussain Pasha is a freelance journalist whose poems, short stories and articles have been published in leading Kannada dailies. The above column appeared in Mahila Lok. He won the award for Best Column at the Laadli Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Southern Region.

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yá°{éáá° Ä»», yÖxá, ÉáYá}è de³avÖvá ° ±ááéááÖgá°Áá ~Ö{áÈÖÈ vé© Aká páÇè Ögá E}á¶á°D %záÈ-áòxÉÁÖgá ° ÁÖpá yá{á¶|| m³}Ö 3}è pá ÁÁÖ pá{á°{á° %-áá }áÁá W}á°Q de³¶|| Éáí è¶vá-áá U^a± hé³¶Í áÇè uÖgá/» pá³-á{á¶|| Áé³Ögáí è¶á°.

વાત સિંહ-તીપડાઓ સામે પંજા લડાવી લાડકવાયાને બચાવનારી માતાઓની

મોત સામે માતૃત્વનો વિજય

The message in Gujarati for Mother's Day has been expressed through the article which has four stories. They are about four mothers in rural Gujarat who have shown immense courage in saving their children from wild animals and thus overcome adversity. These women are not aware about Mother's Day but by showing courage and defying the gender stereotype, they have set an example.

ગીર-ગીરકાંઠાના ગામડાઓમાં સિંહ, તીપડાના હુમલાઓની કોઈ નવાઈ નથી. ક્યારેક હુમલા પછી જોકે સિંહ-તીપડાઓ પારોઠના પગલાં ભરવા પડે એવી સ્થિતિ પણ આવે છે. એવા કિસ્સાઓ પણ ઘણા બનતાં રહે છે. પણ કેટલીક વખત એવું બન્યું છે કે પોતાના લાડકવાયા સંતાનને સિંહ-તીપડાના પંજામાંથી બચાવવા જનેતાએ લડત આપવી પડી હોય. ત્મધર્સ ઉત્ત્ નિર્માહ વાત કેટલીક એવી માતાઓની જેમની સામે સિંહ-તીપડાએ હથિયારો હેઠા મૂકી તીધા હોય...

મધરાતનું ટાણું છે.

રાત્રીનો વિધિવત્ ધારંભ થઈ ચુક્યા પછીનો ધહર ચાલી રહ્યો છે.

ઘડિયાળનો કાંટો રાતના બે આસપાસનો સમય બતાવે છે.

એ વખતે જ એક તીપડો અંધારુ ચીરતી નજર સાથે કાંટાળી વાડ ઠેકીને ખેતરમાં ધવેશે છે.

સૌરાધટ્રમાં સતાધાર પાસેની સીમનું એ ખેતર છે.

ત્બાતા પગલે આવતા તીપડાને જોયા વગર કોઈ રીતે તેની હાજરી પારખી શકાતી નથી. માટે અહીં પણ ખેતરમાં નિંદ્રાધિન માલધારી પરિવારને તીપડાનું આગમન છેક સુધી કળાતુ નથી.



Lalit Khambayata

Lalit Khambayata won the award for the Best Human Interest Stories at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Western Region.

એક બાજુ માતા અને એક બાજુ બહેન વચ્ચે સુતેલા હીરાને તીપડો નિશાન બનાવે છે. કોઈને ખબર પડે એ પહેલાં જ પોતાના જડબામાં સાડા ચાર વર્ધાના હીરાનું માથું ત્બાવે છે અને આવ્યો હતો એવા જ પગલાંએ પરત ફરે છે.. ગણતરીની સેકન્ડમાં જ શિકાર તીપડાના હાથમાં આવી જાય છે.

તીપડાના તંત ભીંસાવાથી હીરો ચીસ પાડી ઉઠે છે. એ વખતે જ બાજુમાં સુતેલ્લી માતા જાગી ઉઠે છે.

અંધારુ છે, મધરાતનો સમય છે, ખુલ્લાં ખેતરમાં લાઈટ હોવાનો તો કોઈ સવાલ નથી, પણ ધકાશ ફેંકી શકાય એવી બેટરી પણ શોધવાનો વખત નથી.

વળી અહીં, આ ખેતર માલધારી પરિવારનું ઘર નથી. એમનું વતન તો છેક ખંભાળિયા પાસેનું વચલા બારા ગામ. અહીં તો પસાર થઈ રહેલી તેમની વણઝાર રાતવાસો કરવા રોકાઈ છે. કોઈ જાતના તંબુ કે આવાસનું બાંધકામ એ વણઝારોના ઉતારામાં હોતુ નથી. ખુલ્લાં ખેતરમાં ઢેફાઓ વચ્ચે સામાન પાથરી તુલ્લવાનો એટલે થઈ જાય એમનું આશિયાના.

એ સંજોગોમાં તીપડા જેવા શિકારી પશુઓનું કામ વધારે સરળ થઈ જાય. હીરાની ચીસના આધારે જ તેના માતા જીવાબાઈ સમજી ગયા કે સિંહ કે તીપડાએ તરાપ મારી છે. અંધારામાં ઓળાના આધારે ખબર પડી કે તીપડો છે અને હીરાને મોઢામાં પકડીને ભાગી રહ્યો છે. વણઝારના બીજા સભ્યો ઉઠે, તીપડાને અટકાવે ત્યાં સુધીમાં ઘણું મોડું થઈ જાય. એ જ ક્ષણે જીવાબાઈ તીપડા પાછળ તેડ્યા અને હીરાના પગ પગડી લીધા. હીરાનું માથું તીપડાના મોઢામાં હતું, પગ જીવાબાઈના હાથમાં. ખેતર હતું એટલે ઢેફાની કોઈ કમી ન હતી. જીવાબાઈએ એક પછી એક ઢેફા ઉપાડી બે-ત્રણ ફીટ તુલ્લ રહેલા તીપડા પર ધહાર કરવા માંડ્યા. તીપડાને આ રીતે વળતો હુમલો થશે તેનો અંતજ ન હતો. પરિણામે તીપડો પણ હતભ્રત બની ગયો અને થોડી વાર જોર કર્યા પછી આખરે હીરાનું માથું છોડી તીપડું. ત્યાં સુધીમાં વણઝારના બીજા સભ્યો પણ આવી પહોંચ્યા હતાં, એટલે તીપડો શેઢો ઠેકીને અંધારામાં અલોપ થઈ ગયો. રક્ત ટપકતા માથા સાથે ઘાયલ હીરાને તત્કાળ સારવાર માટે વિસાવત્તર અને પછી જૂનાગઢ લઈ જવાયો એટલે આજે એ સલામત છે.

આ ઘટના જુલાઈ ૨૦૧૨ની છે. વણઝાર લઈને ફરતો એ કાફલો અત્યારે બગોત્તરા અને લિંબડી વચ્ચે ખેતરમાં પડાવ નાખીને વરસાત્ થાય ત્યારે વતન તરફ જવાની રાહ જુએ છે. ધરતીનું પાથરણું અને આભનું ઓઢણું કરી રહેતા લખમણભાઈના એ પરિવાર માટે એ

ધસંગ બહુ મહવનો નથી, કેમ કે એમને તો કેટલીય મુશ્કેલીઓનો સામનો કરવાનો થતો હોય છે. નાનકડા બાળકના ગાલે ખંજન જોઈને આપણને એ બહુ પ્યારું લાગતું હોય છે, પણ સાડા પાંચ વર્ષના હીરાના ગાલે ખંજનને બત્લે તીપડાના નહોરના નિશાન એ તીપડાના હુમલાની યાત્ અપાવતાં રહે છે.

ત્રમિયાન હુમલો કરનાર એ તીપડો ત્તિ-ધતિત્તિ ખુંખાર થઈ રહ્યો હતો. એટલે થોડા ત્વિસ પછી તેને પાંજરે પુરી જૂનાગઢ સરબાગમાં આવેલી તીપડાઓ માટેની ત્જેલત્માં મોકલી ત્દ્ધવામાં આવ્યો છે. એ તીપડો ત્યાં સળિયા પાછળ આંટા મારી રહ્યો છે, પણ એની આંખમાં ત્દ્ધખાતો ખૌફ ભલભલાને ડરાવવા માટે પુરતો છે.

૨૨ જાન્યુઆરી, ૨૦૦૯

જૂનાગઢ પાસે ગીરનારનો ઢોળાવ પુરો થાય ત્યાં આવેલું ચોકલી ગામ.

સવાર સમપ્તિની ક્યારની ઘોષાણા થઈ ચુકી છે અને હવે તો બાપોરના આગમનનો સમય છે.

સતત ધમધમતા રહેતા જૂનાગઢ અને ભેસાણને જોડતા એ રસ્તા પર બહુ બહુ તો મોડી રાત્રે ગિરનારમાંથી પગ મોકળો કરવા નીકળતાં જનાવર(સિંહ)નાં ત્શન થઈ શકે. પણ આજે તો સવારના ત્સ જ વાગ્યા હતાં ત્યાં એક સિંહણ એ રસ્તે ચાલી આવતી હતી.

રસ્તા કાંઠાના ખેતરોમાં મજૂરો કામ કરતાં હતાં. નાનકડો રાહુલ પણ તેની માતા સાથે ખેતરમાં કામ કરતો હતો. તેના મમ્મી રેખાબેન અહીં મજૂરી કરતાં હતાં.

ખેતરના છેડે રાહુલને એકલો જોઈ સિંહણની ત્તઢ સળકી. એ આમેય શિકારની શોધમાં જ નીકળી હતી. વળી સિંહણને કોઈનો ડર હતો નહીં એટલે જ તો ઘોળા ત્વિસે મગરૂરીથી ડામર પર પંજા પછાડતી ચાલી આવતી હતી.

રસ્તેથી ચિલો ચાતરી સિંહણ ખેતરની વાળની આડશ લઈ એકલા રાહુલ સુધી પહોંચી ગઈ. ચારેક વર્ષના રાહુલને હજુ તો સિંહણના હુમલાનો અંત્દ્ધશો આવે એ પહેલા સિંહણને તેને કમરેથી પકડી લીધો. ડરી ગયેલા રાહુલે બ્રુમ પાડી એ, સાંભળી ખેતરમાં કામ કરતા બધાનું ધ્યાન સિંહણના હુમલા પર ગયું. પણ સિંહણ સામે થવાનો કોઈને વિચાર આવે એ પહેલાં જ રેખાબેને રાહુલને બચાવવા સિંહણ સામે મોરચો માંડી ત્તીધો.

રાહુલને ખેંચી લેવામાં પહેલા તો રેખાબેનને સફળતા મળી ગઈ, પણ સિંહણ આસાનીથી શિકારને છોડી તુદ્ધવાના મૂડમાં ન હતી. કાખમાં તેડેલા રાહુલ પર ફરી સિંહણે પંજો ઉગામ્યો. રાહુલ અને રેખાબહેનના શરીર પર થોડા ઉજરડા થયા. એ ત્રમિયાન રેખા બહેન સમજી ગયા કે સિંહણ રાહુલને જ નિશાન બનાવા માગે છે. ખેતરમાં કામ કરતાં બીજા કામતરો હજુ તુદર હતાં. એ મતુદ્ધ આવે ત્યાં સુધીમાં કતચ મોડુદ્ધ થઈ જાય. પંજામાં ધૂપાયેલા સિંહણના નહોર હવે બહાર નીકળી આવ્યા હતાં. રાહુલ માટે એ એકાત્તુ નહોર પણ જીવલેણ સાબિત થઈ શકે એમ હતો. સમય-સંજોગો પારખી રેખાબહેને તત્કાળ નિર્ણય લીધો અને રાહુલને જમીન પર ઘા કરી પોતે માથે સુઈ ગયા. ભુરાઈ થયેલી સિંહણ માટે હવે શિકાર રેખાબેદ્ધન હતાં. સિંહણે નવ-ત્સ ઈંચ સુધી ફેદ્ધલાતો, બબ્બે ઈંચના નહોર ધરાવતો પંજો રેખાબહેનના થાપાના ભાગે ગોઠવી તીધો. નહોર શરીરમાં ખૂંપતા જતાં હતાં, લોહીની ધારાઓ વહેતી જતી હતી. સિંહણ વધારે આક્રમક બની રેખાબહેનને વિખવાનું શરૂ કરે એ પહેલાં ટોળુ ત્યાં આવી પહોંચતા સિંહણે પંજો પાછો ખેંચી લઈ વગડાની વાટ પકડી... ત્યાં સુધીમાં સિંહણ સામે માતૃત્વનો વિજય થઈ ચુક્યો હતો.

મા-તીકરા બન્નેને ઘણા ટાંકા આવ્યા હતાં. રેખાબહેન હજુ પણ ખેતરોમાં મજૂરી કરે છે, જ્યારે સિંહણે છોડેલા નિશાન રાહુલના શરીર પર જોઈ શકાય છે.

નવેમ્બર, ૨૦૦૫

વિસાવત્તર, ધારી, બગસરા ત્રણેય તાલુકા વચ્ચે ટેકરીઓથી ઘેરાયેલુ મોણવેલ ગામ.

ડાહ્યાભાઈ મકવાણાના ખેતરે એ સવારે માણસો ઘણા હતાં.

આગલી રાત્રે ખેતરમાં ભજીયાનો ધોગ્રામ હતો. માટે મોડે સુધી બરાબર ભજીયા તબડીને જુવાનિયાઓ પાસપાસના ખેતરોની ઓરડીઓમાં આડા પડ્યા હતાં. તેલમાં તળાતા ભજીયાની તડતડાટી, વાતોના ગપાટા, ઠામણાનો ખખડાટ.. એ બધા અવાજ વચ્ચે બેએક શેઢાવા છેટે આવેલી ભેખડમાં એક પાકટ વચનો તીપડો મોકાની તલાશમાં રાહ જોઈ રહ્યો હતો. જો ટોળકીમાંથી કોઈ એકલ-તેકલ અલગ પડી ઓરુ આવે તો તીપડો તેના પર ઘાત લગાવવા તૈયાર હતો. પણ મોડી રાત સુધી એવી તક મળી નહીં. તીપડાએ ધિરજ ગુમાવી ન હતી. રાહમાં ને રાહમાં સવાર પડી..

સવારે ઓપનેર ચલાવવાનું હોવાથી ડાહ્યાભાઈનો અઢારેક વરસનો તીકરો ભાવેદ્દશ વહેલો જાગી ગયો હતો. સાતેક વાગે એ ઓરડીમાં પોતાની માતા સાથે શિરામણ કરી રહ્યો હતો. એ મા-તીકરને ખબર ન હતી કે તેમની ત્રેક હિલચાલ પર એ ઓરડીમાં જ કબાટ અને ત્વાલ વચ્ચે ખાંચામાં ધૂપાયેલો તીપડો નજર રાખી રહ્યો છે. આ ઓરડીમાં કોઈક તો આવશે જ એ અનુભવી તીપડાને ખબર હતી. અને અંતર આવ્યા પછી એ શિકારને છટવાનું પોતે મુશ્કેલ બનાવી ત્દ્દશે એવો તીપડાને પોતાની ધહારશકિત પર વિશ્વાસ હતો.

જેવી તક મળી એ સાથે જ તીપડાએ ભાવેશ પર હુમલો કરી તીધો. ત્યાં હાજર તેમના મમ્મી પારવતીબેન જુવાનજોધ તીકરા પર તીપડાનો હુમલો જઈ તીપડા સામે જે હાથમાં આવ્યું એ લઈ ધહાર કરવા તેડ્યા. ઓરડી બહુ નાની હતી એટલે તીપડાનો પક્ષ મજબૂત હતો. તીપડાએ પહેલા ભાવેશને અને પછી તેની માતા પર હુમલો કરી તીધો. ભાવેશના મોઢા પર પંજાના ધહારથી એક આંખ અડધી બહાર નીકળી ગઈ અને ત્દ્દખાતુ બંધ થઈ ગયું. પારવતીબેને તીપડાને વાર્યો એટલે તીપડો તેમના પર તૂટી પડ્યો અને પંજાના એક પછી એક ધહાર કરી ખોપરીમાં તિરાડ પાડી તીધી. હાથ, પગ, પેટ જે હાથ લાગ્યું એ ચીરી નાખ્યું.. રાતથી રાહ જોઈ રહેલા તીપડાની ભૂખ હવે બેકાબૂ બની હતી એટલે કોઈ તેને અટકાવે એ પોસાય એમ ન હતું. વળી એ કત્તવર પણ હતો એટલે સરળતાથી અટકાવ્યો અટકે એમ ન હતો.

થોડી વારમાં આસપાસમાં સુતેલા લોકો આવી પહોંચ્યા અને તીપડાને ભગાવવા ધયાસ કરવા લાગ્યા. તીપડો ઓરડીમાં અંતર હતો એટલે કેટલાકે છત ઉપર ચડી, નળિયા ઊચકાવી ઉપરથી પણ તીપડાનેદ્દ આહુતિઓ આપવાનો ધયાસ કર્યો.. એમાં તીપડો ઓરડીની બહાર નીકળ્યો અને બહાર જે સામે આવતા ગયા એ બધાને આગલા પંજાથી લાફા મારતો ગયો. વળી તીપડો અંતર ગયો.. બહાર.. અંતર-બહાર કુત્તકુત્ત કરી અને એ તરિયાન ઘણાને ઘાયલ કર્યા..

એકાત્ ડઝન માણસોને જોઈ બાજી હાથમાંથી સરી જતી લાગી ત્યારે તીપડો રવાના થઈ ગયો. ત્યાં સુધીમાં તીપડાએ અડધો ડઝન લોકોને સારવાર લેવી પડે એવા ઘાયલ કરી નાખ્યા હતાં. બીજા કેટલાકને નાની-નાની ઈજા થઈ હતી. સૌથી વધુ ચીરફાડ પારવતીબેનના શરીર પર થઈ હતી...ભાવેશની આંખમાંથી પણ લોહી વહેતું હતું. તત્કાળ સારવાર માટે બધાને ત્વાખાનાભેગા કરાયા.

તીકરાને બચાવવા પારવતિબેને પોતાનો જીવ તૂડવો પડ્યો. લાંબી સારવાર, નાના-મોટા ઓપરેશન, જ્યાં-ત્યાં ટાંકાઓ અને ઠેરઠેર પાટાપિંડી પછી પણ પારવતિબેન માટે ખાટલામાંથી ઊભા થવાનું મુશ્કેલ હતું. એમનું એ અવસ્થામાં જ થોડા મહિનાઓ પછી મોત થયું. જોકે તેમને ભાવેશ બચી ગયો તેનો સંતોષા હતો. માતાએ જીવ આપીને પોતાના કંઘોતરને બચાવી લીધો હતો. ભાવેશ હજુએ એ ખેતરમાં કામ કરે છે. જે ઓરડીમાં તીપડાએ હુમલો કર્યો હતો, એ ઓરડી તોડી પડાઈ છે, કેમ કે ત્યાં રહેવાનું કોઈનું મન ન હતું, હિંમત પણ ન હતી. તીપડાએ માનવ ટોળકી પર છેલ્લા વધાાદ્રશ્માં કરેલો એ સંભવતઃ સૌથી મોટો હુમલો હતો.

૨૦ જાન્યુઆરી, ૨૦૦૮

ધારીથી વીસેક કિલોમીટર તૂદર બે-ત્રણ ગામની સીમના ત્રિભેટે એક ખેતરમાં ત્હાડિયો પરિવાર સુતો હતો.

પરોઢ થવાને હજુ થોડી વાર હતી..

એ વખતે જ આ વિસ્તારમાં કુખ્યાત થયેલો જાંબો નામનો સિંહ આસપાસમાં શિકારની શોધમાં જમીન પગતળે કરી રહ્યો હતો.

ખુલ્લા ખેતરમાં સુતેલા બાલાભાઈ વાઘેલાનો પરિવાર પર સિંહની નજરે ચડી ગયો.

લુચ્ચાઈ માટે કુખ્યાત થયેલા જાંબોએ ૧૩ વર્ષના હરેશને પગેથી ત્બોચી લીધો. જાંબોને ખબર હતી કે આ નાના શિકારને લઈને ભાગવામાં સરળતા રહેશે.

હરેશનો પગ મોઢામાં લઈ જાંબોએ પારોઠના પગલા ભરવા શરૂ કર્યા..હેબતાયેલા હરેશે બુમ-બરાડા શરૂ કર્યા. એ સાથે જ બાજુમાં સુતેલા માતા મંજુબેનની નિંત્ર ઊડી ગઈ. વધુ વિચારવાનો વખત ન હતો. તીકરાનો પગ સિંહના મોઢામાં હતો.. જો વધુ વાર કરે અને એક વખત સિંહ ત્યાંથી ત્તેટ મુકે તો તીકરાના હાડકા સિવાય કશું હાથ ન આવે એ વાત પણ ની હતી.

જાંબોને ત્યાં જ રોકવો રહ્યો..

મંજુબેન હાથમાં જે આવ્યું એ લઈ સિંહ પર ધહાર કરવા માંડ્યા. સિંહે પગ પકડ્યા હતા, તો બાકીનું શરીર પકડવામાં મંજુબેને હતુ એટલુ જોર અજમાવી તીધું. ત્રમિયાન આજુબાજુમાં સુતેલા બીજા આત્મીઓ જાગી ગયા.

પોતાના પર હુમલો થાય અને પોતે ઘાયલ થાય એ પહેલા શિકારને પડતો મુકી સિંહ રવાના થઈ ગયો..

ત્યાં સુધીમાં હરેશના પગમાં સિંહના ચાર નહોર હાડકા ચીરીને આરપાર પેસી ગયા હતાં. તો પણ મોત સામે એ માતૃત્વનો વિજય હતો.

એક બાજુ જન્મતાં બાળકોને રેઢા મુકી ત્વડ્ધતી ત્કુંતાઓત્તની પણ આપણા સમાજમાં હાજરી છે, જ્યારે બીજી બાજુ ત્રવાજે આવેલા મોતને પરત ફરવા મજબૂર કરતી બાંકી માતાઓ પણ છે. આ ચારેય માતાઓને મધર્સ ડે એટલે શું એ ખબર નથી, પણ એમને એ ખબર રાખવાની જરૂર પણ નથી !

અમ ત્વડ્ધશની એ આર્ય રમણી : હીરો ત્તીપડાનો શિકાર બન્યો હતો, જ્યારે રાહુલ (નીચેની તસવીર)ને સિંહણે કમરેથી ઊંચકી લીધો હતો. બન્ને કિસ્સામાં એ સંતાનોની તારણહાર તેમની માતાઓ જ બની હતી. ત્તીપડો અને સિંહણ સામે બાથ ભીડનારી ત્ત્રેક માતાના કિસ્સામાં શિકાર બની રહેલુ સંતાન તેમનું એકમાત્ર સંતાન ન હતું. તો પણ માત્ર સંતાન હોવા ખાતર એ માતાઓએ મોતને પડકાર આપવામાં જાજો વિચાર કર્યો ન હતો..

થોડું વધુ સ્ત્રી વિષે

Maulika Derasari in her blog in Gujarati 'Maanrangi' focuses on gender inequality in everyday life and the burden on the working women. She writes about how education plays an important part in a woman's life and how an educated woman impacts her family members and surroundings. While acknowledging the need for men and women to maintain their individuality, she urges readers to challenge gender stereotypes and redefine them to bring in more gender equality in the family.

ભણેલી સ્ત્રી પરમ મિત્રરૂપે સુખદુઃખની વાતો કરવાની લહેજત વધારે છે અને દુઃખ દૂર કરે છે. એ પ્રિયારૂપે રસભર્યુ સુખ વધારે આપ્યા કરે છે. જ્યાં કેળવણીથી સરખાપણું શોભતુ હોય છે ત્યાં જ સ્ત્રી પુરુષનાં મન એકબીજાં સાથે મળે છે. કેળવણી પામેલું સ્ત્રી-રત્ન કદી પોતાનું તેજ ખોતું નથી. જેમ સ્ત્રી વિના સંસાર સૂનો છે એમ કેળવણીરહિત સ્ત્રીથી સંસાર સિંહ-વાઘના વાસવાળું ભયંકર રાન છે અને ભણેલી સ્ત્રીથી સંસાર રમણીય બાગ છે. આવું દોઢસો વર્ષ પહેલાં નર્મદે કહેલું.

સ્ત્રીનું વ્યક્તિત્વ શોપિંગ, ફેશન, ગોસિપ, ઈર્ષ્યા, નેઈલ-પોલિશ, મેક-અપ, બંગડીઓ ને બિંદી કે આંસુઓમાં જ સમાઈ નથી જતું. એથી વધીને ઘણું બધું છે, જિંદગીમાં કરવા જેવું.

છાપાં કે મેગેઝિનોમાંય સ્ત્રી વિષયક કોલમ હોય એટલે સુંદર દેખાવા ને સારી વાનગી બનાવવા માટેની ટિપ્સની ઝિક્મઝિક્ક જોઈને કંટાળો ને વધુ તો ગુસ્સો આવવા લાગે છે. સ્ત્રી શબ્દ નેટ પર સર્ચ કર્યો અને અહા. સ્ત્રીએ આકર્ષક દેખાવા અને બદનનાં અંગોને સુડોળ રાખવા માટે, કે પછી પાર્ટનરને વશમાં રાખવા માટે શું શું કરવું જોઈએ એવી સલાહોની ભરમાર ખૂલી. આ બધું કોણ નક્કી કરશે? સ્ત્રી ખુદ કરશે કે આ માટેય એણે લોકોની સલાહો લેવી પડશે? જોકે એ વાત અલગ છે કે ઘણીખરી સ્ત્રીઓને ખુદને પણ આમાં જ બધું



Maulika Derasari

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સુખ દેખાય છે. પણ. હવે હવા બદલાઈ છે યાર.. આમાંથી બહાર નીકળો અને જુઓ અને ન જોઈ શકતા હોય એમને બતાવો કે સ્ત્રીઓ આ સિવાય પણ કેટકેટલું કરે છે.

વર્ષો પહેલાં ચાણક્ય ભલે કહી ગયા હોય કે સ્ત્રીઓની તાકાત તેમનું સૌંદર્ય, યૌવન અને તેમની મીઠી વાણી છે પણ, જરૂરી નથી કે આજેય એમ માનવું. હરીફરીને વાત-વાતમાં સ્ત્રીઓની બુદ્ધિ કે એના ચારિત્ર્ય વિષેની વ્યાખ્યાઓ ફેંકાતી રહે છે પણ હવે આવી વ્યાખ્યાઓ બદલવાનો સમય પાકી ગયો છે.

લિંગભેદ આખી દુનિયાની સ્ત્રીઓને લગભગ ક્યાંક ને ક્યાંક સ્પર્શે છે.

ફક્ત એક સ્ત્રી હોવાના કારણે જ એ અમુક રીતે પાછળ કે વંચિત રહી જાય છે.

કોર્પોરેટ વર્લ્ડ હોય કે સામાજિક, પણ સ્ત્રીએ બધે જ ભેદભાવનો સામનો કરવો પડે છે.

કદાચ સ્ત્રી પોતે આ ભેદભાવને યોગ્ય રીતે પડકારવાથી દૂર રહેતી હશે અથવા વિરોધ સામે સરેન્ડર કરતી હશે. એ પણ એક કારણ છે કે આવા ભેદ હજુ ચાલતા રહ્યા છે.

સ્ત્રી અને પુરુષ એક જ પોઝિશન પર એક જ સમયે દાખલ થયાં હોય તો પણ સ્ત્રીનો પગાર પુરુષ કરતાં મોટે ભાગે ઓછો જ હોય છે. પણ આનું કારણ કંપનીઓની એક માનસિકતાથી અલગ વિચારીએ તો ખુદ સ્ત્રી જ છે. મોટે ભાગે એ ખુદ જ ઓછો પગાર સ્વીકારી લેતી હોય છે. સુંદરતાથી ખેંડાઈ શકે એવા પ્રદેશોમાં સ્ત્રી બે-ઝિલ્ક જઈ શકે છે પણ બુદ્ધિથી ખેંડાઈ શકે એવા પ્રદેશોમાં જતાં એને ઝિલ્ક થાય છે. આ મુદ્દે સમાધાન ન કરીને એ અડગ રહે તો કદાચ ચિત્ર કંઈક અલગ જ ઊપસી શકે.

હમણાં હવા ચાલી છે એક 'વાદ'ની.. 'નારીવાદ'.

નારી શબ્દથી મને કંઈક અણગમો થાય છે. આ શબ્દ 'નર' પરથી સીધો જ ઊતરી આવ્યો હશે. પણ, સ્ત્રી એ સ્વતંત્ર શબ્દ છે, એક અલગ ઓળખ બનાવે એવો.

આ વાદ એવો છે જેમાં પોતાને સામાન્ય કરતાં કંઈક અલગ દેખાડવા માટે સ્ત્રી પોતે અને એ સ્ત્રીને કંઈક અલગ દેખાડવા માટે પુરુષો પોતપોતાના ઝંડા લઈને કૂદી પડે છે.

સ્ત્રીને પહેલો પ્રેફરન્સ આપો. સ્ત્રીને અલગ ઓળખ આપો. સ્ત્રીને અલગ સ્થાન આપો. અનામત આપો વ..વ.

અરે આ અનામત પ્રથાનો જ સજ્જડ વિરોધ થવો જોઈએ. કેમ કે મને એ જ નથી સમજાતું કે સ્ત્રીને અમુક ટકા જ અનામત શા માટે? દેશમાં દરેક જગ્યાએ સ્ત્રી અને પુરુષનો એક સમાન હક હોવો જોઈએ, ૫૦-૫૦ ટકા.

બિઝનેસ કે નોકરી કરતી સ્ત્રીને વર્કિંગ વુમન કહેવાય છે પણ, સ્ત્રી બહાર કામ કરે કે ના કરે વર્કિંગ વુમન તો પહેલેથી જ છે. હવે તો એને ડબલ વર્કિંગ વુમન કહેવી જોઈએ. કેમ કે એની બિઝનેસ કે જોબની સાથે સાથે ઘર અને બાળકોને સંભાળવાની જવાબદારી તો હજી લગભગ એટલી જ છે. એમાં પુરુષોએ ભાગ પડાવ્યો નથી હજી.

હજી પણ પુરુષોને પત્ની તો સુંદર અને ગોરી ચામડીની જ જોઈએ છે. બુદ્ધિ ખપતી નથી, એમને. હા, પ્રેમિકા હોય તો પાછી બુદ્ધિશાળી જોઈએ. પત્ની તો કદ્યાગરી જ હોવી જોઈએ, કોઈ દલીલ ના કરે એવી.

સ્ત્રીએ નોકરી પછી ઘરે આવીને ટીવી ઓન કરી, સોફા પર પગ ચડાવીને ચા-કોફીની ફરમાઈશ નથી કરવાની, બલ્કે એણે રિલેક્સ પણ થયા વિના રસોડે જોતરાવાનું છે. સાસુ-સસરાનું, બાળકોનું નાનું-મોટું કામ પતાવવાનું છે. અનાજ-મસાલાની સિઝન હોય કે પછી કોઈ સામાજિક વ્યવહારો હોય. કોઈ માંદગીના બિઠાને હોય કે બાળકોની સ્કૂલમાં એક્ટિવિટીઝ હોય, આ બધાંમાં જેટલી મહેનત સ્ત્રી કરે છે એમાંનું કંઈ પણ, ભાગ્યે જ પુરુષના ભાગે આવે છે. વહેંચણી હંમેશાં સમાન રીતે થવી જોઈએ એ નિયમાનુસાર ચાલીશું તો આવી ઘણી સમસ્યાઓના અંત પણ ઝડપથી આવશે.

આ માટેનું દરેક કદમ ઉઠાવવાની શરૂઆત સ્ત્રીએ જ કરવી પડશે. પોતાના દીકરાઓને ઘરનાંય દરેક કામ શીખવાડવાં પડશે. છોકરાથી આ ન કરાય અને છોકરીઓએ આ બધું જ કરવું પડે એવી માનસિકતાના ફેલાવમાંય સ્ત્રીનો જ મોટો ફાળો છે. છોકરો સાવરણી પકડે તો તરત જ કહેવાઈ જાય છે કે તું રહેવા દે. શા માટે પણ? આ બધું હવે મગજ બહાર ફેંકવું પડશે. તમારા દીકરાઓનેય નાનપણથી જ દીકરીની જેમ બધાં જ કામ શીખવાડો. અત્યારથી જ એના વિચારોનું આ રીતે કંડીશનિંગ ન કરો કે પુરુષ આ કામ ન કરે. દીકરી કરી શકે તો દીકરો કેમ ન કરી શકે?

પત્ની થોડા દિવસ માટે ઘરથી બહાર ન જઈ શકે. શા માટે? પતિને જમવામાં બહુ તકલીફ પડે.

દીકરાઓને રસોઈ પણ શીખવાડો કે જેથી એમણે આખી જિંદગી જમવા માટે પત્ની પર આધારિત ન રહેવું પડે. કેમ કે હવેનો યુગ એવો નહીં આવે કે જે અત્યાર સુધી ચાલતું રહ્યું છે. હવેની પત્ની ૧૦-૧૫ દિવસના કોઈ કલાસિસ માટે, પ્રવાસ માટે, ટ્રેકિંગ કે ટ્રેનિંગ માટે કે પછી બિઝનેસ માટે બહાર જશે તો ઘર, બાળકો કે ઘરડાં માતાપિતાને પતિદેવે સંભાળતાં શીખી લેવું જ પડશે.

દીકરીને પહેલેથી જ પારકી માની લેવાનો રિવાજ છે અને જ્યાં પરણે છે એ ઘર માટે તો પારકી હોય જ છે. જ્યાં સુધી પ્રેમથી બન્ને પક્ષે ચાલે છે ત્યાં સુધી તો વાંધો નથી આવતો. પણ જ્યારે સાસરા પક્ષમાં કંઈક તકલીફ થાય છે ત્યારે નાદૂટકે સ્ત્રીએ જ સમાધાન કરવું પડે છે. કેમ કે, પિયરમાં એ પારકી છે હવે; અને સાસરે એને પોતાની ગણવા તૈયાર ન હોય ત્યારે એણે શું કરવું? યક્ષપ્રશ્ન છે આ. આવે વખતે સમાજ પણ સાથ નથી આપતો. સરવાળે એ ખુદ એક પણ બાજુની નથી રહેતી. હા, એકલી સ્ત્રીને નબળી ગણનાર મદદગારો તૈયાર જ બેઠા હોય છે. પણ, આવું કંઈ બને ત્યારે જો સ્ત્રી સ્વતંત્ર અને પગભર હોય તો એ ટટ્ટાર ગરદને સમાજ વચ્ચે જીવી શકે છે, લોલુપ નજરોને બેધડક તમાચો મારીનેય

અંતે ખરા અર્થમાં સમાનતા લાવવા માટે સડેલી, જર્જરિત માનસિકતાઓમાંથી બહાર નીકળીને સ્ત્રીએ ખુદ મક્કમ કદમ્બે એ દિશામાં આગળ વધવા માટે પ્રતિબદ્ધ થવું પડશે.

வழிகாட்டும் ஒளி!

March, 2012

'Vazhikattum Oli' in Tamil is about an NGO promoted by a group of women who faced male chauvinism and social injustice in their life. She portrays the strength and capability displayed by these women to face the discrimination, and their efforts to create a support system for destitute women to fac life with hope. Emphasizing that the life of a single woman is not inferior to any other way of living, Vaidehi goes on to describe how it can be equally fulfilling.

உதாரணமாகவும் உதவிக்காகவும் ஒரு அமைப்பு!

அப்பா, கணவன், மகன் பிறந்தது முதல் சாகும் வரை ஏதோ ஒரு ரூப தில் பெண்களின் வாழ்க்கையில் சிலபல ஆண்கள்... இணையாக இறுதி வரை வருபவர்களைவிட, இருப்பையே வெறுக்கச் செய்கிற ஆண்களே அதிகம். சிலருக்கு ஆண் துணையில்லாத வாழ்க்கை இம்சை. பலருக்கோ ஆணுடனான வாழ்க்கை நரகம்!

திருமணமாகாதவர்கள், கணவரைப் பிரிந்தவர்கள், இழந்தவர்கள், விவாகர தானவர்கள், குடும்ப தாரால் கைவிடப்பட்டவர்கள் என தனிமையில் தவிக்கும் பெண்களுக்கு ஆறுதலையும், வாழ்க்கையில் வெளிச்ச தையும் காட்டுகிற ஒரு அமைப்பு 'வழிகாட்டும் ஒளி'.

'வழிகாட்டும் ஒளி' யை ஆரம்பி து, வழினட தும் பிரேமா, ரேவதி, சுஜாதா ஆகிய மூவருமே வாழ்க்கையில் வஞ்சிக்கப்பட்டவர்கள்.

"கால துக்கும் கூட வர்றதுக்கு ஒரு துணை வேணும்னுதான் எல்லாரும் கல்யாணம் பண்ணிக்கறோம். என்னோடது காதல் கல்யாணம். பதினஞ்சு வருஷ கல்யாண வாழ்க்கையில் ஒரு நாள் கூட சந்தோஷமோ, நிம்மதியோ இல்லை. அர் தமே இல்லாத அந்த வாழ்க்கையிலேருந்து வெளிய வர வேண்டிய கட்டாயம் எனக்கு. பிரிஞ்சு போன கணவர் ரூப துல மட்டுமில்லாம,



Vaidehi Ranganathan, Kungumam Thozi

Vaidehi Ranganathan works with Kungumam Thozi, Tamil Nadu. She won the award for Best Campaign at the Laadli Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Southern Region.

சமுதாய துலேருந்தும் எக்கச்சக்க பிரச்சனைகள். தனிமை பயமா இருந்தது. என்னைச் சுக தி இருந்த நல்ல மனசுக்காரங்களோட ஆறுதலும் அரவணைப்பும் என்னை தனிமையிலேருந்து வெளிய கொண்டு வந்தது.

ஓரளவு மீண்டு எழுந்தபோது, மிகப்பெரிய விப துல சிக்கி, கிட்ட தட்ட மரணப்படுக்கைக்கே போயிட்டேன். அந்த விப துலேயே என் வாழ்க்கை முடிஞ்சிருக்கலாம். இ தனையும் தாண்டி, நான் உயிரோட இருக்கேன்னா, அதுக்கு ஏதோ ஒரு காரணம் இருக்கணும்னு உணர்ந்தேன். குணமாகி வந்ததும், 'சேம்'னு ஒரு அமைப்பை ஆரம்பிச்சேன். ஆர்வமிருந்தும் படிக்க வசதியில்லாத பிள்ளைகளுக்கும், மாற்று திறனாளிகளுக்கும் முடிஞ்ச உதவிகளைச் செய்யற அமைப்பா 'நேசம்' வளர ஆரம்பிச்சது. அதுக்காக கள துல இறங்கினப்ப, நாங்க சந்திச்ச பெண்களோட நிலைமை ரொம்பப் பரிதாபமா இருந்தது. அப்பா, கணவன், மகன்னு எந்த ஆணோட ஆதரவும் இல்லாம தவிக்கிற பெண்களோட கண்ணீர் கதைகளை தினம் தினம் கேட்க ஆரம்பிச்சோம். தனிமையில தவிக்கிற பெண்களுக்கு ஏதாவது செய்யணுங்கிற வைராக்கிய துல 'வழிகாட்டும் ஒளி' அமைப்பை ஆரம்பிச்சேன். ஆண் துணை இல்லாம அலைக்கழிக்கப்படற எந்தப் பெண்ணும் இந்த அமைப்புல உறுப்பினராகலாம். அவங்களோட படிப்புக்கும், தகுதிக்கும் ஏ தபடி அவங்களுக்கு ஒரு எதிர்கால தை உருவாக்கிக் கொடுது, சொந்தக் கால்கள்ல நின்னு, வாழ்ந்து காட்ட முடியும்னு ஒருநம்பிக்கையைக் கொடுக்கிற அமைப்பா வளர்ந்

திட்டிருக்கு..." - கண்ணீரை துடை தபடி சொல்கிற பிரேமா, 'வழிகாட்டும் ஒளி' யின் தலைவி.

பார்வையில் கனிவும் மா—ாத புன்னகையுமாக அமைதியாக இருக்கிற ரேவதி, இந்த அமைப்பின் செயலாளர். துயரங்களின் உச்சம்பார் தவர்தான் இவரும்.

"பெரியவங்கதான் பார் து கல்யாணம் பண்ணி வச்சாங்க. எனக்கு வந்தவருக்கோ, படிச்ச பொண்ணுங்க எல்லாம் தப்பானவங்கன்ற எண்ணம். தினம் தினம் அவரோட சந்தேகப் பார்வையாலேயும், அசிங்கமான கேள்விகளாலேயும் கூனிக் குறுகி நிப்பேன். அந்தச் சூழல்ல என் குழந்தை வளர்ந்து பிடிக்காம, வெளியே வந்தேன். 'நீ வாழ்ந்துடுவியான்னு பார்க்கறேன்' னு அவர் சவால்விட்டார். மூணு வருசுக்

குழந்தையோட வெளியில வந்தப்ப, எனக்கான ஓரே

நம்பிக்கை என்னோட எம்.ஏ படிப்பும், டீச்சர் வேலையும்தான். இன்னிக்கு என் பையனை எம்.பி.ஏ படிக்க வச்சு, ஒரு நல்ல அந்தஸ்துல உட்கார வச்சிருக்கேன். என் பையந்தான் எனக்கு உலகம். பெண்களை எப்படி நட தணும், மதிக்கணும்னு அவனுக்கு சொல்லிக் கொடு து வளர் திருக்கேன்.

என் அண்ணன் கூட பேங்க்ல வேலை பார்க்கற பிரேமாவோட அறிமுகம் கிடைச்சது. அனுபவங்களைப் பகிர்ந்துக்கிட்டதுல, நான் தனியாள் இல்லைங்கிற நம்பிக்கை தெரிஞ்சது. நாங்க அனுபவிச்ச வலி, இனிமே எந்தப் பெண்ணுக்கும் வரக்கூடாது, 'வழிகாட்டும் ஒளி'ல என்னையும் இணைச்சுக்கிட்டேன்".

வலிகளை தாண்டி, வெற்றி பெற்ற பிறகும் கூட, கடந்த கால நினைவுகள் கண்ணீராக வழிகின்றன ரேவதிக்கு.

படப்படப் பேச்சும், துருதுரு பார்வையுமாக இருக்கிற சஜாதா, சோகங்களின் புதைகுழியில் சிக்கி மீண்டவர் என்றால் நம்ப முடியவில்லை.

"மதுரையில் என் மாமனார் குடும்பம் ரொம்பவும் பிரபலமானது. சின்ன வயசுலேயே கல்யாணமாயிடுச்சு. கணவருக்குக் குடிப்பழக்கம் இருந்தது. வேலை எதுவும் பார்க்காம, 24 மணி நேரமும் போதையிலேயே இருப்பார். எப்போதும் சண்டை, பிரச்சனைன்னு குடும்ப துல நிம்மதியே இல்லாமப் போச்சு. போதை தலைக்கேறினதுல, ஒரு நாள் நடுரா திரி வீட்டை விட்டு வெளியே தூர திவிட்டார். ஒண்ணேகால் வயசுல மகனையும், ப தரை வயசுல மகளையும் வச்சுக்கிட்டு வழி தெரியாம நடு தெருவுல நின்னேன்.

நான் ப தாவதுக்கு மேல படிக்கலை. உலகம் தெரியாது. 'நீ தற்கொலை பண்ணிக்கிற அளவுக்கு உன்னை டார்ச்சர் பண்ணுவேன்' னு மிரட்டின கணவருக்கு முன்னாடி, என் பிள்ளைங்களுக்காகவாவது வாழ்ந்தே ஆக வேண்டிய கட்டாயம். ஸ்கூல் தோழி மூலமா, 'ஆல் இந்தியா பியூட்டிஷியன் அண்ட் ஹோர் டிரெஸ்ஸர்ஸ் அசோசியேஷன்'ல வேலை கிடைச்ச, இப்ப பி.ஆர்.ஓ.வா இருக்கேன். அப்படியே எம்.ஏ. முடிச்சேன்.

ஒரு மீட்டிங்ல பிரேமாவை சந்திச்சேன். வந்தவங்க பெயர்களை லிஸ்ட் எடு திட்டிருந்த நான், பிரேமான்னு சொன் நதும்,

இனிவதியல்லு கேட்டேன். 'ஜஸ்ட் பிரேமா' ந்னு சொன்னாங்க. கணவனோட இனிவதியல் இல்லாம பேரை சொல்றதே தப்புங்கிற நினைப்புல வளர்ந்த எனக்கு, அது அதிர்ச்சியாகவும் ஆச்சரியமாகவும் இருந்தது. அவங்களோட 'நேசம்' அமைப்புல என்னையும் இணைச்சுக்கிட்டேன். அதுக்கப்பு—ம்தான் கணவன் மட்டுமே வாழ்க்கை இல்லைங்கிறது புரிய ஆரம்பிச்சது. மகனையும் மகளையும் நல்லபடியா வளர்த்து, ஆளாக்கிட்டேன். நடந்ததை நினைச்சு இன்னிக்கும் நான் ஒரு சொட்டு கண்ணீர்கூட விடறதில்லை. 28 வயசுல நடந்தது 40 வயசுல நடந்திருந்தா? என் உடம்புலேயும் மனசுலேயும் தெம்பிருக்கிறப்பவே நடந்ததையும், நான் ஜெயிச்சதையும் நினைச்சு

சந்தோஷப்பட்டுக்கறேன்" என்கிற சுஜாதா, 'வழிகாட்டும் ஒளி' யின் பொருளாளர்.

"தனிமை வாழ்க்கைக்கு தள்ளப்பட்ட எந்தப் பெண்ணும், 'வழிகாட்டும் ஒளி' யில் இணையலாம். 'கணவனோடு பிரசனையா, பெ த பிள்ளைங்க விரட்டறாங்களா, உடனே விட்டுட்டு வந்து எங்க அமைப்புல சேருங்க' ள்னு நாங்க சொல்லலை. பிரசனை உள்ள யாரும் முதல்ல எங்களை அணுகினா, அவங்களுக்கு கவுன்சலிங் கொடு து, பிரியாம இருக்க முயற்சிகள் செய்வோம். உளவியல் நிபுணர், வக்கீல்லு எங்க அமைப்புல நிபுணர் குழு இருக்கு. அவங்க முயற்சிகள் எல்லாம் பலனில்லாமப் போனா, அடு து என்ன பண்ணலாங்கிறதுக்கான வழிகாட்டலும் எங்கக்கிட்ட கிடைக்கும். எங்க மூணு பேருக்கும் நடந்த கொடுமைகள் எங்களோடயே போகட்டும். கண்ணுக்கெதிரே அது இன்னொரு பெண்ணுக்கு நசிக்கிறதைப்பார் துக்கிட்டு, நாங்க சும்மா இருக்க மாட்டோம். நாங்க இருக்கோம் உங்களுக்கு... உதாரணமாகவும் உதவிக்காகவும்னு காட்ட தான் 'வழிகாட்டும் ஒளி.'"

வலிகளைக் கடந்த தோழிகளின் பேச்சையும் அனுபவங்களையும் பார்க்கும்போது இப்படி தான் எண்ண தோன்றுகிறது.

'தனியாக இருக்கும்போது ஒன்றுமில்லாதவர்களாக இருப்பவர்கள், சேர்ந்திருக்கும்போது எல்லாமுமாகவும் ஆகிறார்கள்!'

Electronic Media

Pennu Kettiya Veedu

M. S. Banesh's documentary in Malayalam *Pennu Kettiya Veedu* narrates the story of a group of women engaged in construction of houses without any assistance from men. It depicts their life amidst rocks and cement. It also talks about Ettumanoor Women's Centre where these women are trained. The work done by this women's group and training centre sends out a very positive image of women's empowerment.



M. S. Banesh, Jeevan TV, Kerala

M. S. Banesh has won the award for Best Documentary at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Southern Region.

Linga Tharathaamy

The radio jingle in Kannada *Linga Tharathaamy* expresses a mother's anxiety in sending her daughter out to play for fear of her being kidnapped. But support comes for the little girl from her two brothers who persuade their mother to allow her to play. The jingle ends on a positive note with a message '*Let us condemn discrimination against women and lead a happy life.*'



Maya Raman, AIR Dharwad

Maya Raman has been working in AIR, Dharwad for the past 22 years and has produced many programmes, features, jingles, radio reports and musical features on harassment of women and other features. She won the award for the Best Radio Jingle at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Southern Region.

Yaha Lagti Hai Dulhan ki Mandi

The Vedhu Samaj of Nanded District of Maharashtra follows the tradition of putting a price for daughters in a specially put up marriage market (mandi). This is done in front of the local Panchayat and is the only approved way of marrying. The programme in Hindi was a ground report investigation of this practice of selling women like commodities. The programme contradicted the claim of the Government that such practices had been eradicated.



Nishat Shamsi, IBN-7, Maharashtra

Nishat Shamsi is with IBN 7. He won the award for Best Investigative News Feature at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Western Region.

Khirki Mehendewali

Khirki Mehendewali is a thirty episode radio show in Hindi of 13 minutes duration each, targeted predominantly at a rural women audience with the objective of addressing gender issues. Through the struggles of Mehendi, an unwanted girl child and her mother who is punished for her inability to produce a son, the programme tackled various issues related to women. Using an innovative approach of drama, music, jokes and testimonials, it made the audience introspect and ask themselves: “Isn’t there anything we can do to spare our women this kind of suffering?” Each of the episodes also imparted life saving information on maternal and child health.



BBC Media Action, AIR, Patna

BBC Media Action won the Best Radio Programme at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Eastern Region.

Writing on Current Events

Reporting on the current events is the core of media writing and reporting. Does the responsibility of the media persons stop at filing a factual report on events, incidents and political developments? Should they look at only what is perceived to be of interest to the reader or important for the TRPs? Or should they go beyond to unravel the layers and hidden dimensions of the events? The selection of writings under this section brings to you stories which report on current events but from a different perspective.

Aditi Tandon's story on the trafficking of young girls to Delhi during the Commonwealth Games is one such story which cut the clutter of news coverage on the event by exposing the underbelly of the games – the trafficking of young girls to Delhi to meet the demands of the floating population gathered to witness the games. Her story was instrumental in the rescue of some of the trafficked girls.

Similarly, while reporting on honour killings and the role of khap panchayats in promoting the same, Sukhbir Siwach has gone beyond merely reporting on incidents of honour killings and looked into the political positioning of the Chief Minister who opposed the law to ban honour killings and attempts to clip the wings of the khap panchayats.

There are three stories on Kashmir in this section. With the changing political scenario in the valley with comparatively peaceful times, there is increased coverage on the concerns, troubles and challenges being faced by its women. While enough has already been written about the violence, militancy and separatist movements, it is riveting to read stories about violence and destruction from women's point of view. How do women cope with disability caused by landmines, with hardly any support or compensation from the government? How do the constant exposure to violence, bereavement, insecurity and restricted movement impact the emotional, psychological and physical health of women? These are the issues raised by Ashutosh Sharma and Freny Maneckshaw in their features. The new social and political environment also means that more women are accessing jobs, institutions and public spaces and are increasingly being exposed to new threats, like eve teasing, acid attacks and other forms of violence which were unknown in Kashmir in the past. Sana Altaf reports on the first case of acid attack on a woman in Kashmir and the response from various groups to the same.

Tongam Rina's report from Arunachal Pradesh once again draws attention to the increasing violence against women and children even in geographies which were considered to be safe for women and highlights the need to take immediate steps to stop them.

Print and Web Media

Dark Underbelly of Games

October 9, 2010

This article was written during the Commonwealth Games in Delhi when the author noticed that there was a considerable increase in trafficking of girls, especially minors. Some NGOs stepped in to rescue the girls.

While Delhi was being dolled up ahead of the Commonwealth Games, red-light areas were also busy planning to welcome the visitors and tourists. Investigations by The Tribune reveal that trafficking of girls, especially minors, has risen considerably in the past two months. Most children are being brought in through fraudulent placement agencies for domestic work and used for commercial sex in rented residences in semi-posh Delhi localities, including East of Kailash, Kalkaji, Govindpuri Extension and Tuglakabad Extension. Over 121 girls have been rescued from traffickers from New and Old Delhi Railway Stations alone in the past two months. This number, as per documented data with registered anti-trafficking NGOs, was much lower in the past two years until August 2010.

Police records of these rescued girls show they worked as sex slaves, fetching for their “masters” anywhere between Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 30,000 an hour. Records of Shakti Vahini, active in the G. B. Road red-light area, alone confirm 75 rescues of minors in past two months. “Of these girls, 50 per cent were rescued from forced sex. There’s a definite surge, around 50 per cent, in trafficking,” says Rishi Kant of Shakti Vahini. In 30 cases, the FIRs have been lodged for kidnapping and rape.

Another NGO Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) last month detected 39 minors trafficked from MP on Paschim Express which halted at Nizamuddin train station. “This is shocking. There is a whole sex business going on around the Games. Trafficking in the past five years has never been so high despite regular surveillance of the police and anti-traffickers at destination points,” Rakesh Sanger, national secretary of BBA admits.



Aditi Tandon, Tribune News Service

Aditi Tandon is with the Tribune News Service, Delhi and is the recipient of the 2005-06 British Chevening Scholarship for her report on Kashmir. She won the award for the Best Gender Sensitive Reporting in 2008 and won the *Laadli* Media Award for Best Investigative Reporting for the above story in 2011-12.

Call details of Childline India's five Delhi helplines tell a similar story. Of the 432 trafficking complaints recorded in the past one year, 70 per cent came in the past three months. "This surge is unprecedented and marks an eight-fold increase from the previous years. Ahead of CWG, we have also observed frenetic activity of traffickers not just in the GB Road area but also around railway stations." Sumit Kumar of Childline says.

Analysis of trafficked cases reveals 90 per cent of the rescues happened on Jharkhand Sampark Kranti, Northeast Express, Brahmaputra Mail and Awadh Assam Express, and most girls came from West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam and Bihar. This despite the Home Ministry's "Advisory for Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking during the CWG" issued to Bengal, MP, Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar, UP and New Delhi on September 10.

Case histories of trafficked girls indicate that they were being sourced for jobs in the name of the Games, a fact revealed by the MHA advisory, which says: "Certain fraudulent placement agencies, involved in trafficking, were promising jobs to young girls in the Capital ahead of the Games. Minor girls are the main targets. Some are even injected with oxytocin to attain puberty at a younger age."

In 30 per cent cases, where minors were sold for sex, they were first put in homes. A 13-year-old girl from Mumbai was rescued on August 3. She was brought to Delhi through a Shakarpur-based placement agency by an agent named Pappu, who first sent her to work in Punjabi Bagh, then tried to sell her for prostitution. He is under arrest. "We have conducted unprecedented number of rescues in recent days," admits Surinderjit Kaur, SHO, Kamla Market police station, which covers G. B. Road. Along the G. B. Road, condom sales have also risen sharply. Where the Delhi AIDS Control Society provides four lakh a month, it is now supplying six lakh.

(Names of the girls have been changed to protect their identities)

Hooda Opposes More Teeth to Tackle Honour Killings

April 21, 2011

Sukhbir Siwach's series of stories on khap panchayat brings out the facts of this illegal but widely prevalent practice of honour killings in Haryana. While these killings do happen in a few other states in northern India, it is much more deep-rooted in Haryana. The Central Government has proposed new laws to combat this. But this story has exposed how the Chief Minister has raised objections on this new law to combat this.

CHANDIGARH: Even as yet another honour killing rocks Haryana, with two women lynched in public in Bhiwani recently, the Congress government in the state led by chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda has raised objections to all the Union home ministry proposals to draft a law to counter honour killings. Information accessed by TOI under the RTI Act has revealed how Haryana has resisted the proposed law on honour killings, saying that the existing law is adequate to deal with the problem.

The proposals have been sent to a group of ministers (GoM), headed by Union finance minister Pranab Mukherjee, set up by the Centre last year to consider changes in criminal laws to counter such killings. In a letter to Mukherjee on September 30, 2010, Hooda said: "To deal with unlawful assemblies or the offence committed by them with a common object, the existing provisions in IPC are adequate for all circumstances and eventualities including 'honour killing'." Fifteen states have reportedly sent their views to the GoM, with Haryana opposing the proposals to amend the IPC, even as Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have supported the move.

The Hooda government feels that honour killing can be contained by strengthening law enforcement machinery, improving standards of investigation, building credible prosecution, sensitizing judicial officers and expediting trials. "Certainty of punishment holds the key," the state government said in its communication. It has opposed every clause, right



Sukhbir Siwach, TNN

Sukhbir Siwach is with the Times of India, Chandigarh. He won the award for the Best Issue Based Investigative Story at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Northern Region.

from adding a section on honour killing in Section 300, which deals with culpable homicide, to opposing a proposed section to tackle a crime like stripping of a woman in public. The move has come in for sharp criticism both from legal experts and social activists.

"Haryana government's response is legally and culturally regressive. The comments of the state government are clearly aimed at legitimizing the resurgence of khap panchayats in Haryana and justify their demand to amend the Hindu Marriage Act and ban marriages within the same gotra. It is shocking that any government in the 21st century can advance such views," says Punjab and Haryana high court lawyer Anupam Gupta.

Woman activist Jagmati Sangwan is also not impressed with the government's viewpoint. "There is certainly a need of a special law to tackle honour killings as this problem has not been curbed despite existing provisions in the law," says activist Jagmati Sangwan, who is vice-president of All India Democratic Women Association.



Sense and Sensitivity, a compilation of award winning entries of Laadli Media Awards being launched.

Kashmiri Women's First Brush with Acid Attack

January 26, 2013

This feature is about the case of an acid attack on a woman in conflict-ridden Kashmir. The first such case in Kashmir, it has shocked people across the valley.

Her face is burned. Her eyes damaged. Her sense of herself irreparably damaged. Arifa (name changed), 28, lies silent on the corner bed of a ward at Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital, Srinagar.

She hides her face from other patients and attendants as her acid-burned face has now made her centre of public interest. Her tragedy gagged headlines as she became the Valley's first victim of acid attack.

The New Year had just marked its presence. It was January 2, when Arifa, a teacher at a preparatory school, was attacked with acid by two men. They perpetrated this heinous assault because she had refused to consider a marriage proposal from the accused, a man named Riyaz Ahmad Nath. Reveals Arifa's brother, "Nath has been after my sister for quite some time. It was out of anger that he got acid thrown on her since she was not willing to have anything to do with him."

On the fateful day, Arifa was on her way to school when Nath, along with another boy named Mudasir, followed her on a bike. He held her arm, threw acid on her and fled from the spot. A group of bystanders had watched the incident unfold, but no one came forward to help the girl – a testimony to public apathy.

"Fortunately, my cousin lives nearby. He had heard her screaming and rushed her to the hospital," says her brother. Arifa has not been showing any signs of improvement since. She is to be shifted to Delhi for treatment.



Sana Altaf, Deccan Herald

Sana Altaf has been consistently reporting from the conflict area of Jammu and Kashmir. She has touched upon various problems like domestic violence, lack of educational opportunities, issues related to migration for jobs, etc faced by women with a special focus on how these problems get aggravated because of the conflict in the area. Her stories are on the impact of conflict on women. She won the award for Best Reporting from Conflict Area at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Northern Region.

“Her face is getting from bad to worse as the acid does its damage. Her left eye is badly affected. She cannot see,” he adds. Had life not turned so tragic, Arifa would have been preparing for her forthcoming engagement ceremony that was scheduled to take place a few weeks later. “She dreamt of being a bride, decorating her hands with henna and celebrating her big day. But all her dreams have been shattered now. The happiness has been turned into mourning,” says her heart-broken brother.

The accused in the case has been arrested by the police and charged under Sections 307, 341, 325, 254 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). The other accused, Mudasir, has denied having any knowledge about Nath’s true intention. “Mudasir is now ready to stand witness to the crime,” says Arifa’s brother.

While this case is possibly the first acid attack on a woman in Kashmir, in 2009, a teenager, Romana Javed, was run over by two car-borne male attackers in the state capital. That incident evoked widespread public condemnation. It shocked people across the Valley, who had never heard of such incidents earlier.

This time, women, social activists and even politicians across the board have condemned the acid attack. Professor Hameeda Nayeem, social activist and chairperson of the Kashmir Centre for Social and Development Studies (KCSDS), terms the incident as “a wake-up call for the Valley”.

“We need to come out united in protest. The perpetrators of this beastly act deserve the harshest punishment so that it can deter others who may contemplate doing such crimes,” says Nayeem, observing that this heinous crime takes away the right of the assaulted person to live a life of dignity. She also demanded that all cases of violence against women be tried in fast-track courts. Syed Aasiya Andrabi, Chairperson of the separatist movement, Dukhtaran-e-Milat, was also prompt with her response, calling the incident “a barbaric and criminal act”.

Women politicians have added their voice to the general condemnation. While talking to the local media, Mehbooba Mufti, president of the opposition, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), attributed the spurt in crimes against women in the state of Jammu and Kashmir to “corruption and misuse of power”. She felt that the situation is grim and people think that “if you have money or influence, you can get away with even committing any crime”.

According to Mufti, the recent revelation that more than 250 lawmakers across the country are involved in molestation and rape cases is an indicator of how the politicians, who are meant to be role models, have turned into criminals.

Of course, the incident has greatly disturbed young women. Says Maira, a Srinagar-based college student, “This incident has to be taken seriously by government as well as the civil society. It is a signal of our degrading morals and values.” According to Maira, the rise in eve-teasing, molestation and other crimes against women is making every woman on the street in the state insecure. Her friend, Beena, agrees. She believes that such crimes will end only when the authorities start taking them seriously and ensure stringent punishment to the guilty.

Parents, too, are anxious. “Hearing about such things makes me worry about my daughter. One cannot judge who is up to what,” exclaims Masooda, a Srinagar-based homemaker.

The worry is that the incident reflects a larger malaise. Mohammad Sultan speaks for many parents when he says, “If we want safety for our daughters, we will all have to stand by them where ever possible. Things are taking a bad turn in Kashmir too.”

Survival Diaries: Kashmiri Women Fight Disability

June 1, 2013

Innocent women and children, who have nothing to do with militancy in Kashmir, have been suffering immensely just because they happen to be related to known militant. The article also talks about conflict-affected women who have now become incapable of earning their livelihood.

Srinagar: In the border village of Pukharni in the highly militarised Nowshera sector of Jammu & Kashmir, an eerie silence fills the air, punctured occasionally by the sound of cowbells, the chirping of birds and gunshots from the nearby firing range. Under a clear sky, in the dusty courtyard of her mud house, Safia Begum, 35, is busy working in the kitchen. She kneads dough and then expertly makes rotis on an earthen 'chulha' (stove) – and she does it all, literally, single handedly. Safia lost her left hand to a landmine blast when she was just six.

As she hurriedly finishes cooking, her sons, Baag Hussain and Yasar Irafat, who are in Class IV and III respectively, troop in. Back from a hectic day at school, her younger boy is tired, so Safia helps him change his clothes. Yasar too has lost his left hand while fiddling with a stray landmine in March 2011.

In the absence of any monetary relief from the government so far, this brave mother has courageously been struggling to raise her sons. "Besides a little bit of farming, my husband and I do various menial jobs to sustain the family," she said. For Safia, educating her boys is her top priority. "Come what may, I won't let my children's education suffer. I have faced many hardships in life as I was illiterate and disabled. But my children study in a private school and I want them at least to have a dignified life," she adds.

While Safia is being able to make ends meet, in Pukharni there are women like Naseem Akhtar, 23, and Sharifa Begum, 22, both of whom lost one of their legs as children in separate landmine blasts near their homes. They now stitch clothes for survival and are very worried about the future.



Ashutosh Sharma, Kashmir Times

Ashutosh Sharma is an independent journalist based in Jammu & Kashmir, India, who writes and reports on conflict, human rights, development, culture and environmental issues. He won the award for the Best Investigative Story at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Northern Region.

In the remote border regions of Jammu & Kashmir, there are hundreds of women, who are not just victims of conflict but of official apathy and social indifference too. For them, words like emancipation and empowerment hold little meaning. After being maimed or widowed or affected by conflict in some other unfortunate way, they have to battle on each day of their lives.

Rural folk largely depend on herding cattle and agriculture for their livelihood. Physically disabled persons can do neither. Imagine then their situation in the absence of any social protection or government support. The reality is that a sizeable number of conflict-affected women, who cannot earn a livelihood through physical labour, have taken to begging on the streets.

Sitting near a sewage drain at the general bus stand in Poonch, Fatima Jaan, 40, is busy hammering nails into her dilapidated artificial leg with the help of a stone. After she is done, she swats off the flies buzzing around with her dupatta and the next moment raises her begging-bowl to passersby hoping they will drop a few coins into it.

Every morning this resident of Guntrian village, located near the Line of Control (LoC) in tehsil Haveli of Poonch district, hurriedly finishes the household chores, sends her three children off to school and then heads out towards Poonch town. She treks for nearly four kilometres and then boards a bus to reach her 'workplace', the general bus stand.

"A year after my husband disappeared, I started begging here. It has been 13 years now," she states. With tears in her eyes she continues, "My husband, Noor Mohammad, went missing after he was taken by some Army personnel in 1998. No one ever saw or heard of him after that time."

Fatima was grazing her cow near the house when she unknowingly stepped on a landmine. She lost her left leg in the blast. She does not recall the year of the incident but says with certainty that "it happened some years after my marriage". Then, as she looks at her amputated leg, she breaks down into loud sobs. Asked why she comes so far to beg and she replies, "If I beg in my area it is likely to bring disrepute to the family's name. In a few years I will also have to arrange for the marriage of my daughters."

Her case was taken up with the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) by a noted local activist, Kamaljeet Singh. Taking cognisance of her difficult situation, the SHRC in its final judgment of April 2011, recommended that

the government provide suitable financial assistance to her without delay. This recommendation has not been followed up.

Gulkhar, another widow, is living with severe hardships. This mother of six daughters lost three buffaloes – the only family asset and source of income – when the cattle wandered over to a landmined pasture in a village near the LoC in the Bala Kote area of Poonch district last October.

“Despite reporting the matter to the local administration, I haven’t got any relief yet,” complains Gulkhar, whose family ironically is categorised as Above Poverty Line (APL), as a result of which she does not get a widow’s pension. Normally, widows get a monthly pension of Rs. 200 whereas those who are above 64 years or fall in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category are given a monthly pension of Rs. 400 by the government.

“Most of our land is landmined; the rest is rocky and arid. Only a small portion is cultivable,” she says. These days, there is one question that keeps haunting her: “How will I marry my daughters? After losing our livestock we don’t have any source of income.”

Gulkhar also talks about Razia Bi, 65, and Sakina Bi, 65, who are her neighbours in the village. “Razia and Sakina lost their husbands to shelling from across the border. Neither of them received any financial assistance from the government. Their families are also facing severe economic hardships,” she reveals.

Innocent women and children, who have nothing to do with militancy in the state, have been suffering immensely just because they happen to be related to known militants. Haseena Begum, a mother of a 12-year-old, is one such half-widow. Years ago her husband had reportedly joined the ranks of the militants and there has been no news of him ever since.

“I was 20 when I was married off by my parents. Two years later, my husband disappeared. My son was one year old at that time,” whispers a pale and tired Haseena, who has turned prematurely old and infirm by the age of 33 because of the daily deprivations that mark her life. She lives in a small hut-like house with her only son on the periphery of the district headquarters of Doda, working in half a dozen houses as a domestic help to keep her home going. “My parents have passed away now. Since the disappearance of my husband, I feel socially ostracised,” she reveals, stroking the head of her son sitting by her side even as tears roll down her sunken cheeks.

A few months ago, state Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had endorsed the recommendations given by the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), which asked for assistance to be provided to all the women affected by the conflict. Abdullah called for all concerned to contribute towards “formulating the operational module”. The recommendations, however, are yet to be translated into action.

Moreover, compensation to landmine victims, provided by the Ministry of Defence, is given only after the cases are processed on the recommendation of the District Development Commissioner. A disabled person normally gets a monthly pension of Rs. 400 from the state’s social welfare department.

There are several ‘invisible’ women victims of conflict whose plight calls for an immediate humanitarian response. All they want is a better future for their children. Is that too much to hope for?



Singer Shubha Mugdal performing at the National LMA, 2011-12 in Mumbai.

The Silence of Decay

September 4, 2013

The story is about the increasing cases of violence against women in India and more specifically in Arunachal Pradesh. Also mentioned is about a child sexual abuse case in an Arunachal school which has shocked people all over.

Everyone watched in horror as the Delhi Paramedic gang rape case unfolded last year. The unthinkable violence inflicted on the young lady numbed everyone and the country erupted in protest forcing tougher laws against rapists.

Many had hoped that with tougher laws, situation would change for better. It was not to be. Every day there are reports of rape from every corner of the country.

What is extremely horrifying is that barely eight months later, another rape case has come.

In Mumbai, dubbed the "safest city" in India, a photojournalist was gang raped. Because of intense media coverage, rapists have been arrested and identified. One of them is reported to be a Police informer.

While we read reports of rapes happening elsewhere in India, a shocking case of rape and molestation was to unfold at our own backyard.

No one had any clue while a teacher at Green Valley School, Likabali abused children for three long years.

After initial shock, there is anger. The school authorities as well as parents were obviously unaware of what was happening and young children had no idea how to deal with the monstrous paedophile. The trauma these children had undergone will last a lifetime.



Tongam Rina, The Arunachal Times

Based in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, Tongam Rina is with The Arunachal Times. She is one of the most dependable voices of political and developmental analyses, largely through her column *Ringside View*. She has written on a number of issues ranging from gender to politics of hydropower to dilemmas of environment and development and even issues like rainwater logged streets. Although she was attacked, harassed and opposed for her views, Tongam continued to speak and write and publish on issues related to discrimination, violence and exploitation. She won the award for Best Reporting from Conflict Area at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Eastern Region.

It is important for the parents, authorities, society at large to ensure that they are not traumatised yet again when they testify against the offender. The police and judiciary need to be sensitive to the fact that these are young children, emotionally scared. Parental as well professional counselling of the young ones is very essential.

The case has to be fast tracked and a maximum sentence should be given because it would be too dangerous to let out a paedophile in the guise of a teacher.

While we grapple with what happened, one also is reminded of the fact that this is not the first time, such a heinous act has been carried out in schools in Arunachal, which points to systematic failure on the part of everyone involved.

Many parents, in search of better education send their children to boarding school when they are as young as 5 years old. There are horrifying tales of abuse but these tales rarely go out of our living rooms. At best, parents take out their children from the school but no one wants to talk about it any more.

Saddening but many children are not safe even in their own homes. It invariably is an uncle or an aunt, cousin, a household worker or a friend's relative who target children and sexually abuse them. The psychological scar remains but then we simply do not have the environment where any one can share these horrifying experiences. We live in a society that is judgemental and have a false sense of honour.

We have to let go of the collective silence and start responding to the issues that we are confronted with.

According to Arunachal Pradesh Police website, 49 rape cases were registered during Sept. 2012-Sept. 2013. East Siang Police registered 9 cases, followed by Lohit with seven while Upper Subansiri reported 6 cases. The numbers of cases indeed are alarming.

The National Crimes Record Bureau (figure of 2011) says a woman is raped in India every 20 minutes. Statistics could be much higher as marital rapes and molestations by family members are rarely reported to the police.

No one wants to deal with societal pressure little realising that in the long run, our choice to keep quiet is going to eat into the very core of our society and decaying its very soul.

Traumatized by Violence

May 24, 2011

Women in Kashmir do not physically encounter violence as much as men do, but their feelings of helplessness and subsequent guilt resulting from the violence around them is taking a toll.

"I see several women every day. Many of them are employed, and earning fairly well. But I have yet to encounter someone who can confidently state 'Yes, I am happy, I am content.' The peace has gone from our hearts," says Dr. Zahida Shah, director of a health care and fitness centre for women in Srinagar.

Sociologists like Dr. Bashir A. Dabla have pointed out how militarisation and prolonged conflict in the Kashmir Valley has had an effect on every aspect of life in this region - social, cultural, psychological, economic and educational. Women have been particularly vulnerable to these effects, and this has impacted on their health and well being in many direct and indirect ways.

Deaths and enforced disappearances of male members from the 1990s, either because of the militancy or operations by security forces, have left many women heading and providing for families single-handedly. The precarious position of "half widows" or women, unsure of the fate of their husbands, is particularly poignant. They cannot inherit property or claim widow benefits, and according to Islamic law must wait for at least seven years before they can marry again. The majority of them have chosen not to remarry. Apart from issues of livelihood they must live with the haunting trauma of wondering what happened to their loved ones.

Parveena Ahangar, who heads the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, and whose 16-year-old son disappeared after he was rounded up by security forces, recounts the aching loneliness of Magli, a woman who was



Freny Maneckshaw, www.indiatogether.com

Freny Maneckshaw is an independent journalist based in Mumbai. She won the award for the Best Web Article at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Western Region.

divorced and whose son was forcibly disappeared. "In the last few years before her death Magli was reduced to talking to her *hookah* as she grappled with painful memories," says Ahangar.

Mental Distress

Undoubtedly the most distressing repercussions of the conflict and high levels of exposure to violence for women are with regard to mental health. The international medical aid group *Medicins Sans Frontiers* (Doctors Without Borders) published a report, titled *Conflict and Health*, based on a study in villages of Kupwara and Budgam districts in 2005 to assess confrontation with violence and its consequences on mental health and socio-economic functioning. Over one-third of the respondents in this study were found to have symptoms of psychological distress expressed through symptoms like nervousness, tiredness, being easily frightened and complaints of headaches. Women scored significantly higher. During periods of turmoil and curfews women were unable to step out of the home and enjoy simple pleasures like a walk.

There was also a high prevalence of suicidal ideation with one third of respondents saying they had contemplated ending their lives. (The rate of suicide, according to MSF for both males and females is twice the rest of India's average).



The study also says that for women most of the psychological distress was associated with feelings of powerlessness, dependency on others for daily living and witnessing killing and torture. Women had lower confrontation with violence being confined to the homes but, the study notes, feelings of helplessness and guilt caused by witnessing violence was often more traumatic than experiencing it.

Last summer's uprising, in which thousands took to the streets in angry protests and operations by security forces left 123 dead and thousands injured saw a resurgence of psychological distress. Dr. Muzaffar Khan, a clinical psychiatrist in Srinagar, explains how Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), formally recognised as a psychiatric disease in the 1980s, has manifested among his patients especially among the youth in feelings of depression, fears of the unknown and palpitations. He says he has seen young women from villages exhibiting PTSD symptoms of panic attacks and reporting feelings of impending doom and shivering fits.

Dr. Khan, who also runs the de-addiction clinic under the state's police at the control room in Srinagar, says there is a definite link between prescription drug misuse and PTSD. Drugs that are misused include painkillers like Spasmo proxyvon, codeines, sedatives and other painkillers.

Although women have not attended the de-addiction centres because of fears of being stigmatised, there is evidence to show that the problem is not restricted to men. After an education programme on drug addiction in Pattan there were inquiries by girl students who asked if they could visit in a group. However there are no facilities as yet to treat women in addiction.

Lifestyle Changes

Besides these obvious psychological disorders women's health has been affected by the lifestyle changes necessitated by the conflict situation. Dr. Zahida Shah points out how prolonged low activity because of inability to freely move about and lack of recreational facilities has led to obesity and its attendant ailments of diabetes, hypertension and arthritis.

"During curfews or periods of unrest even taking a walk was not possible. Typical social activities like picnics or going to the parks or gardens were curtailed. One rushed to be back home by 5 pm.

This shift in lifestyle was accompanied by a change in eating habits with an increased uptake of fast foods. All this coupled with baseline stress because of the curfews, protests and disruption of normal life has resulted in the region's women suffering from high cholesterol levels, angina and even myocardial infarction at a much earlier age than before."

Reproductive Health

Women's reproductive health has also been affected. Dr. Bilquees, a gynaecologist, says that stress along with factors like being overweight, has seen a significant increase in polycystic ovarian disease among young Kashmiri women. PCOD has symptoms like irregular menstrual cycles, central obesity and glucose intolerance. It can consequently lead to infertility, obesity, diabetes during pregnancy, early menopause and early aging. Stress, she says, has also contributed to menstrual irregularities and certain menstrual abnormalities. She has observed an increasing trend towards early onset of menstruation.

The breakdown of social infrastructure and lack of medical facilities has also contributed to pregnancy mishaps. She narrated instances of how the lack of transportation – especially during shutdowns and curfews – has led to women with foetal distress reaching the hospital too late, and newborns dying before they got necessary attention as a result.

Electronic Media

Hello, Mike Testing

October 9, 2010

This article was written during the Commonwealth Games in Delhi when the author noticed that there was a considerable increase in trafficking of girls, especially minors. Some NGOs stepped in to rescue the girls.

Shefali's 'HELLO MIKE TESTING' campaign in Hindi for Ranchi based FM Station Radio Dhamaal was a great example of how a medium dedicated to entertainment can be effectively used to draw attention to the plight of young victims of social bias and injustice in a backward and tribal dominated state like Jharkhand. Shefali spoke to as many as 100 children to identify and present 7 cases involving a range of social evils from child labour to child marriage. The first hand poignant narration of all that the young victims have gone through in life accounts for the huge impact of the programme.



Shefali Chaturvedi, Radio Dhamaal

Shefali is currently working with BBC World Service Trust as Associate Producer, Radio and Mobile. She won the award for the Best Radio Feature Award at the *Laadli Media Awards* for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Eastern Region.

Reporting on Gender-based Violence and Discrimination

Violence is used universally by patriarchal societies to control women and reinforce male dominance, with a large majority of women facing some form of violence or discrimination in their lives. However, what is reported is a miniscule of the reality. The framing of the story, sensitivity towards the rights of the survivors, the vigour of investigation, the doggedness to follow up the story till its logical conclusion are what make reporting on violence and discrimination such a challenging task.

There is a thin line between crime reporting and reporting on violence and discrimination. The latter moves beyond a specific incident of crime to delineate the broader socio-cultural, political and economic factors that justify, promote and perpetuate violence to control and subjugate the vulnerable. This section has an amazing set of writings which explore the various facets of violence and discrimination.

Trafficking of women, for labour, marriage or sex is one of the most inhuman forms of violence against women. Unfortunately, it is operated by powerful brokers and networks with often the police and the government officials being involved in some way or the other. The stories by Priyanka Dubey, Ranjita Biswas and Syed Nazakat bring out the grim reality of trafficking across state and national borders.

Post Nirbhaya there has been tremendous media attention on rape. The Section 376 campaign by The Week was informative and educative covering a wide range of issues related to rape. Deepa Ranganathan and Shwetha Kannan take the obverse view and explore sexual violence on men by men and argue that men are also victims of sexual violence but the prevailing gender norms do not provide them any succour. They, in fact, restrict them from seeking support and justice.

While reporting on gender violence it is important to bring out the inspiring struggles of the survivors who fight against all odds to pick up the pieces of their life and move on, seeking justice and new meaning in their lives. Sadia Azim and Nikhita Doval present two such inspiring stories – of a teen who fought to bring the panchayat leaders to book and an acid attack survivor.

In a very thought provoking piece of investigative writing Ratnadeep raises questions about manufactured news raising a few pertinent questions on media ethics.

Aruna Burte in her editorial argues against the use of the term female foeticide to denote pre-birth sex selection as it criminalizes abortion which is a legal entitlement for women under certain circumstances. Neetu Rana, on the other side, explores how the new reproductive technology that enables surrogacy is being used to exploit poor women.

Violence inflicted on widows and devdasis and the harassment for dowry are dealt with by Padma Vengapally, Swaroopa Potla Pally and Rakhi Ghosh in their documentaries. The fact that some of these stories have led to action on the part of the police and the Government indicates how sensitive media reporting on violence and discrimination can bring support and succour to the survivors of violence.

Print and Web Media

The Missing Girls of Lakhimpur

September 28, 2013

On an average, 40 girls disappear from this district in Assam every month. Priyanka Dubey tracks how it has emerged as the new hub of human trafficking.

This article is about the rising cases of trafficking in Assam's Lakhimpur District. As many as 40 girls go missing every month from the district. Many of the missing girls end up as prostitutes or bonded labourers in metros like Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Chandigarh. Some girls return after having been exploited for years. The traffickers are shielded by the police as well as the politicians and they all profit from it.

With its tea gardens and paddy fields, Assam's Lakhimpur district, located between the Brahmaputra and Subansiri rivers, is a picturesque place. But this pleasant picture hides a chilling reality. With around 40 girls going missing every month, this district with a population of 10 lakh has emerged as a hub of human trafficking. An investigation by TEHELKA has blown the lid off a multi-layered network of illegal placement agencies based in New Delhi and Mumbai, and their local agents who have been luring girls from the district into a quagmire of exploitation with promises of jobs, money, marriage, a life in the city or simply "a trip to Delhi".

Almost every village in Lakhimpur has its share of stories of girls who went to Delhi and never returned. TEHELKA went to 10 villages and talked to girls who had returned after being exploited for years, and to the families of those who had died or are still missing. While some were pushed into prostitution, others were raped by their employers or by the owners of placement agencies.

Serophena Barla, 45, from Dulhat Bagan village under the Laluk Police Station, says her 15-year-old daughter Sonali* went to Delhi with a local agent, Samuel Tarki, in March 2008. Serophena's husband used to work in a



Priyanka Dubey, Tehelka

Priyanka Dubey is an independent journalist based out of New Delhi. She has previously worked with *Hindustan Times* and *Tehelka Magazine*. Among others, she now contributes long form reportage for *Yahoo Originals*. She is currently working on her first non-fiction book on rapes in India. She won the award for Consistent Writing on Gender Issues at the *Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2013-14, Northern Region*.

tea garden. “We were miserable after the tea gardens closed down. That’s when Samuel took her to Delhi, saying she would earn money and return after a year,” she says. “It’s been four years since I last spoke to her on the phone. Samuel says he doesn’t know where she is. It scares me to imagine what might have happened to her.”

At nearby Dolpa-Pathar village, Safeera Khatoon has been waiting for her daughter Shanu Begum since 2010. “Shanu had just turned 16 when Haseena Begum, who used to live in our village, asked me to send her to Delhi with her. I refused as there were other girls here who had gone to Delhi and did not return,” she recalls. “But one day, Haseena’s sister took my daughter to her place and from there Haseena took her to Delhi.”

Safeera went to Haseena’s house several times to ask about her daughter, but her family refused to say anything. “I went to the police but they refused to register a complaint. Haseena hasn’t returned from Delhi either,” she says. With Shanu’s photo in her hand, she pleads, “Please bring my daughter back!”

The endless wait of mothers like Serophena and Safeera is only half the tragedy. Many girls who have managed to return say they were raped and tortured while working as bonded labourers in Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Chandigarh.



Vanishing Act: Many of the missing girls from Lakhimpur district end up working as bonded labourers in metros across the country. **Photo:** Vikas Kumar

Rabia Khatoon of Lukumpur village, who returned from Delhi after four years, is facing a social boycott that has made life difficult for her. She was 15 in 2009 when Anita Beg, a local agent, took her to Delhi, where she found herself trapped in a web of sexual, mental and financial harassment. “My mother had told me not to go. But one day when she wasn’t home, Anita came and told me I could go with her for a trip to Delhi,” says Rabia. “There were other girls with her who said they pay well in Delhi for very little work. I went along thinking I would be back soon.”

In Delhi, Rabia was taken to a placement agency in Shakurpur Basti run by Mahesh Gupta. “I was sent to work as a maid at a bungalow in Punjabi Bagh. Whenever I asked to go home, I was told that I couldn’t go anywhere for one year. After a year, I was sent to Gupta’s office again. He didn’t pay me anything and sent me to a bungalow in Ahmedabad,” she says. “When I told my new employer that Gupta didn’t pay me and that I wanted to go home, he gave me Rs. 11,000 and sent me back to Gupta. Of that, Gupta let me keep only Rs. 2,000 and sent me to Guwahati.”

That was not the end of Rabia’s ordeal. Though she returned home at the end of 2011, she was trapped once again by the traffickers. A man called Walson Godra tricked her into believing that he was friends with Gupta and could help her get her money back. “He said it would take just one day,” she says. Godra took her to another agency in Delhi run by two men, Imran and Mithun. “When I called Walson, he said he had reached Assam and would come back soon. The next day, I was told that Walson had sold me off for Rs. 10,000. I was forced to work at a bungalow in Rohini. I ran away after a month.”

Rabia went to the agency’s office and asked to be sent home. “But Imran called Mithun and three others and told them to take me away and do what they liked,” she recalls. “Mithun threatened me that if I didn’t agree to work, he would send me to a worse place. I had fever. On the pretext of taking me to a doctor, they took me to a brothel. When I refused to be left there, they took me to another place and sexually abused me for a week. Then they left me at the Old Delhi Railway Station. An auto driver helped me reach an ashram from where I was sent to Assam.”

“Everybody knows about it now. My mother has suffered a lot of humiliation. I won’t even get married now,” she says in a breaking voice. “I haven’t



In the Dark: The daughter of Dafli, a blacksmith, has been missing since 2011. **Photo:** Vikas Kumar

recovered completely. My abdomen hurts all the time. I'm afraid I will never be fine again."

In 2009, Suman Nagasiya of Silonibadi village was taken to Delhi by a local agent, Stephen, when she was only 15. "Suman died two months ago, just a month after she returned," says her father Mahanand Nagasiya, 50. Women from the neighbourhood told TEHELKA that Suman was sexually assaulted in Delhi.

"Suman was a student in a nearby school. Stephen, who has taken several girls to Delhi, wanted to take her there too. When I and her mother refused, he told Suman that other girls from the school were also going with them," recalls Mahanand. "One day she went on a picnic with her friends and Stephen took her to Delhi from there. Later we were told that she worked at a bungalow in Gurgaon."

Suman was seriously ill when she returned home this year. "Her employer sent her back with Rs. 15,000 when she fell ill. We spent it on her treatment but she didn't survive," says her father. "They had done something terrible to her in Delhi. She couldn't even stand on her feet." A boy from the neighbourhood told TEHELKA that Stephen had also taken his 11-year-old sister, Julia Khadiya, to Delhi four years ago. She hasn't returned home.

Another girl from the village, Lalin Horo, was 16 in 2010 when she was taken to Delhi. She returned after two years. “We were in dire straits as there was little work in the tea gardens. Along with some other girls, I went with an agent Vijay Tirki to Delhi,” she says. “He took us to Umesh Rai’s office in Shakurpur and I was sent to Shalimar Bagh to work as a maid for Rs. 2,000 per month.” But she wasn’t paid even after two years. “Umesh took all the money. They were not letting me leave and didn’t even allow me to speak to my family,” she adds. Fortunately, Lalin’s father went to Delhi looking for her and managed to bring her back.

In 2011, Shivangi Khujoor and her sister Elema of Dulhat village, who were 16 and 17 then, were taken to Delhi by a relative, Kusma Tarki. “Kusma took us to Sri Sai Enterprises run by Srinivas. Elema was given work at the office while I was sent to a house in Malviya Nagar, where I worked for four months,” says Shivangi. “My sister left after Srinivas sexually abused her. I learnt of it later when they asked me to work for him. He made advances at me too. I went to the police, who sent me home but didn’t arrest Srinivas.”

While Article 23 of the Constitution bans human trafficking and bonded labour and there are strict provisions against trafficking under the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1986, it was only in March that a clear definition of the crime was written into the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Following the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, based on the Justice Verma Committee’s recommendations, Section 370(A) of the IPC defines human trafficking as follows: “If a person recruits, transports, harbours, transfers, or receives, a person or persons, by using threats, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or inducement for exploitation including prostitution, slavery, organ removal, etc., he will be committing the crime of human trafficking.”

The horror that girls like Sonali, Shanu, Rabia and Suman have faced is a reminder that we are still a long way from ending human trafficking. A confidential report released by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in response to an RTI filed in July last year backs the harrowing tales of these girls. It confirms that a large number of 10 to 15-year-old girls brought from the Northeast to Delhi and Mumbai are victims of trafficking.

According to the report, “Most of the girls are made to sign papers written in English, which they don’t understand. Their pay ranges from Rs. 2,200-4,500, but the entire amount is kept by the placement agency. These

agencies are not legally registered and function under the Partnership Act. These girls are not allowed to talk to their parents nor are they given permission to visit any of their relatives in Delhi. Many of these girls also become victims of rape and sexual violence. There is evidence that in most cases the local police are aware of these incidents of trafficking and the plight of these girls.”

Walter Fernandes, director of the Guwahati-based North-Eastern Social Research Centre, sees a connection between the closing down of many tea gardens in the Northeast between 2005 and 2010, and the rise of human trafficking from the region. “Families of the tea garden workers who lost their livelihood became easy prey for traffickers,” he explains. “Poverty compels them to look for work elsewhere and they trust anybody offering them an opportunity to earn money.”

According to the NHRC report, a growing network of agents in the region is the main reason for the rise in trafficking. Agrees Joseph Minj, a Lakhimpur-based lawyer who takes up cases of missing girls: “There is an agent in every village,” he says. “The lure of easy money makes many locals take up this illegal activity.”

Lakhimpur Superintendent of Police P. K. Bhuyan, however, denied there were any instances of trafficking in the district. “This indifferent attitude of the police is also responsible for turning Lakhimpur into the capital of human trafficking,” says Kailash Satyarthi, founder of Delhi-based Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA).

In February, the BBA started a nationwide awareness march against the growing incidents of human trafficking in the Northeast. The BBA also petitioned the Supreme Court on missing children and in a landmark judgment in May, a Bench headed by the then Chief Justice of India Altamas Kabir directed the police to register all cases of missing children with the assumption that they could be victims of kidnapping or trafficking.

“The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act and the Supreme Court’s decision make it mandatory for the police not only to register cases of missing girls but also to probe the functioning of local agents and placement agencies under Sections 370 and 370 (A) of IPC,” says Satyarthi.

Replying to a question during this year’s Budget Session in Parliament, Union Minister of State, Development of North Eastern Region, Paban Singh

Ghatowar, agreed that an increasing number of children have gone missing from Lakhimpur. "But the police have traced many of them," he said. "We have issued a notice that a complaint should be registered every time a child goes missing."

But Satyarthi points out that traffickers are still shielded by politicians and the police. "Nobody wants female trafficking to stop. They all profit from it," he says.

Though the government and the local police don't have data on trafficking in Lakhimpur, TEHELKA talked to nine traffickers who revealed that as many as 40 girls go missing every month from the district. They confessed to having taken around 187 girls to Delhi since 2005.



1. Silvester

A resident of Lakhimpur's Tunijan village, Silvester took as many as 45 girls to Delhi between 2005 and 2010 as an agent for the Sai Placement Agency run by one Srinivas in New Delhi's Shakurpur locality. "When I started this work, I was being paid a commission of Rs. 3,000 per girl," he admits. "By 2010, the commission had increased to Rs. 6,000. Today, the rate is Rs. 10,000." Silvester says there are hundreds of placement agencies in Delhi – more than 200 in Shakurpur itself.

Srinivas had told Silvester that they could make a lot of money if they sent the girls to foreign countries. "I think the girls are sent mostly to Arab countries as the demand there is high," he says. "Srinivas got Rs. 2 lakh for every girl sent abroad. I never did it myself, but I know that local agents get Rs. 50,000 for it."

Silvester quit working for the trafficking network in 2010. "Srinivas didn't pay the girls and their families came complaining to me. Then one also had to deal with the police," he says. However, he admits that the number of local agents in Lakhimpur has gone up over the years.

2. Vijay Tirki

Vijay Tirki, 45, is one of the most active agents in Lakhimpur. Some of the girls he sent to Delhi are still in the clutches of placement agencies while others returned empty-handed after toiling hard for years. “I started trafficking girls three years ago. Many local agents were making a lot of money by taking girls to Delhi. One of them gave me Srinivas’ card and I contacted him,” he says. “So far, I have taken a total of 13 girls to Delhi.” Three of the girls he took to Srinivas’ agency haven’t returned yet. “Srinivas didn’t pay anything to two girls and I can’t contact the others. One of them was sent to Chandigarh. They are not letting her go either,” he says. Later, he worked as an agent for another placement agency in Shakurpur run by one Umesh Rai. “One of the girls is still there,” he says.

3. Ajanta

Ajanta, 23, is the youngest of the traffickers who spoke to TEHELKA. “I went to work in Delhi for the first time when I only 15 or 16,” she reveals. “A local agent had taken me to Srinivas. He made me work for a year. I came back with Momin, an agent, and went to Delhi again with another agent Kusma. I worked there and made some money, so I started taking other girls along. Now I don’t work. I don’t like working. I only send the girls to one Sushant in Govindpuri. Some three months ago, I sent three girls aged between 15 and 22.”



4. Samuel Tarki

Samuel Tarki admits to having sent around 35 girls to placement agencies in Delhi between 2003 and 2012. He started trafficking girls after getting in touch with Srinivas’ placement agency in Delhi. According to him, there are agents in every village and at least 60 girls are trafficked every month from the district. He told TEHELKA that the number of agents has gone up since the closing down of tea gardens in the region in 2003. “Fear of the police, though, has made their operations more secretive,” he says.

5-6. Kusma Tarki and Jewel Khujoor

The NHRC report mentioned in the story discloses that between August 24, 2008 and April 19, 2010, Kusma Tarki trafficked 53 children to Delhi by promising them jobs. A resident of Dulhat Bagan, she admits that she and her brother Jewel Khujoor did take these children to Delhi. "I used to work for Srinivas but left when my son fell ill. Srinivas paid me only Rs. 5,000 for a year's work, but told me that if I brought others from my village, he would pay me a commission," she says. Kusma reveals that besides local agents, girls already working with placement agencies are also asked to bring other children from their village in lieu of a commission. "There are so many of them who haven't returned home. Srinivas used to talk to Jewel about sending girls out of the country. I'm sure they do that. Perhaps that's what they did with my neighbour Sonali Barla who hasn't returned home," says Kusma.



7. Stephen

Three years ago, Stephen used to send boys to Sister Jocelyn and Mahendra Nayak of Munirka in Delhi to be hired as security guards. "Then I started sending girls to Babita Enterprises in Shakurpur run by one Pravin," he confesses. "So far, I have taken about 22 girls to Delhi." (Stephen was later arrested from Sonapat, Haryana in a case of trafficking.)



8-9. Vishwajit and Anita

In 2010, Vishwajit had brought a 17-year-old Suhani Lohar from Dulhat Bagan to Umesh Rai's agency in Delhi. Later, Suhani was among six girls who were rescued during a police raid at Rai's office. Suhani told the police that Rai had sexually abused her. Vishwajit has spent three months behind bars. Anita admitted to having sent 10 girls from her village to Srinivas' and Mahesh Gupta's agencies in Delhi.

'The asking rate for a girl is Rs. 40,000'

Pretending to be members of a middle-class family looking for a domestic help, TEHELKA spoke to several placement agencies in Delhi. A hidden camera recorded a conversation with Rakesh Kumar, who runs Uttara Placement Agency in Shakurpur. (Edited excerpts)



*Rajesh Kumar, placement agent, Delhi.
Photo: Hidden camera grab*

Please suggest a place where there is no hassle in getting a girl and the matter is fixed at once.

Yes, absolutely, you will get a good response from Panna Lal. He returns the amount if the girl doesn't suit you. In Shakurpur, there are many who send the girl, take money and then help her flee. With Panna Lal, it's not like that.

Ok. What is Panna Lal's address?

There is a Shamshan Ghat to the left of Britannia Chowk. Take the turn next to it. It's right there in front of Barat Ghar. He always has girls.

Where does he get the girls from? Jharkhand?

He has girls from Jharkhand, Assam and Odisha. He buys girls from more than half the agencies.

How much is he going to charge? What about the girl's pay? She will have to do everything.

His rate is a little high. He takes around Rs. 35-40,000. If the girl is 'semi-trained', it would be Rs. 5,000 for her.

Is his rate the highest around here?

Yes. He's the kingpin here. More than half the agencies sell girls to him.

Earlier, we had brought a girl from Chirag Delhi. We paid Rs. 30,000 for her. But she ran away within three months...

We are not like those who provide the girl, take the money and then help the girl flee...Shakurpur is full of such cheats. Subodh, Montu Misra, Aalam, Anil, Umesh Rai and Pravin are all like that.

The Chirag Delhi guy told us about Umesh Rai and Pravin. Can we get girls from them?

They are crooks. All of them in Shakurpur are crooks.

Where is their agency?

Umesh's office was at M-680, right above my office. But he closed it down and went to some other place in the city. But Pravin still lives there. Let me tell you, if you come after the 20th of this month, you can take the girl from me. I will have girls after the 20th.

You are from Mathura, UP, isn't it? How did you get into this business?

I used to work as a scrap dealer in Himachal Pradesh. My uncle knew Panna Lal. Panna Lal often said that he wanted to open an office there. He asked me to work with him. So I joined.

So, he sends girls to Himachal as well?

They are sent everywhere; mostly Himachal and Srinagar. Shambhu is the one who sends them abroad. He prepares agreements of two years. Panna Lal operates within the country.

Tell me of someone who could send a girl abroad. My sister needs someone to take care of her kid.

The one I mentioned is good. Choose a girl and he will take care of all else. He has contacts. Otherwise you can wait. Before the 20th, you won't find a girl anywhere else.

Why?

There is police from Jharkhand, Bihar and Assam here. Around 5,000 girls the agents brought have gone missing. They haven't returned home yet.

Where do they go?

Arre, it's nothing. The agents bring them and the agencies place them somewhere. Then we lose track of them. No one knows where they go.

The Yin, Wounded

December 5, 2011

The feature focuses on the extremely sensitive but hardly spoken about issue of female circumcision prevalent among the Bohra Muslim community. The story has been backed by interviews with social activists, doctors as well as Bohra Muslim women who have found the courage to speak out.

A Cutting Tradition

- Female circumcision, now widely referred to as female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Dawoodi Bohra Muslims are Ismaili Shias and trace their origins to the region in and around Egypt, from where they might have adopted the practice besides other local customs. Now intrinsic to their identity
- Most of the community lives in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Population: 10 lakh. Are prosperous traders and well educated
- Most Bohras are under the control of the clergy, headed by the Syedna. Those who question the clergy's authority find themselves excommunicated
- Bohra girls undergo genital mutilation when they are seven years old. It is a clandestine ritual unlike male circumcision that is publicly celebrated. No other Muslim sect in India observes this ritual
- The hood of the clitoris is cut off. This is followed by application of an antiseptic and an indigenous medicine called abeer that cools
- The crude mutilation of the clitoris exposes the nerve endings and is meant to discourage masturbation and limit possibility of sexual pleasure from clitoral stimulation
- The procedure is called khatna, it is carried out by select elderly women of the community and often without medical supervision, using just a razor



Debarshi Dasgupta, Outlook

Debarshi Dasgupta is a correspondent with Outlook since 2007, and writes primarily on developmental issues. He won the award for the Best Issue Based Feature at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Northern Region.

- Little details are available of the extent of this practice, given the secrecy. There are claims, though, that some choose to go to hospitals to get it done
- Justified in the name of community traditions and religious sanction. Critics, however, say there is no mention of it in the Quran
- Online forums like Rage of Bohri Women are encouraging women of the community to speak up.

It has been 53 years since she was subjected to the agony. But as Zenab Bano, a retired political science professor in Udaipur, recounts the horror of that day, the wound is laid bare all over again – still raw, still unhealed. Barely seven years old then, she was told to go with her friend and her grandmother to a function for children at the end of which she would get a gift. “Before I realised what was happening, there was this woman pulling down my undergarment,” she says. “I had no idea what she was doing. It hurt a lot and I cried.” What Bano describes is the female circumcision ritual called khatna that most Bohra Muslim girls in India had to go through then. And which is still a rite of passage for many even today. What happened to Bano was never openly talked about within her household. “Whenever I asked my mother about it, she would say it’s nothing and that it’s done to all,” she says. The efforts of a 42-year-old Bohra woman from Mumbai, however, may finally bring the taboo subject to light, despite the cold indifference of orthodox members. Tasleem (who doesn’t want to reveal her surname), the mother of a 19-year-old girl, launched an online petition this October to try and get Bohra high priest Mohammed Burhanuddin to put an end to this archaic ritual. She sent her campaign material, including a large cardboard blade embossed with a photograph of a wailing girl being circumcised, to Burhanuddin’s office, but got no response. This campaign has now been picked up by Indian Muslim Observer, a website dedicated to Muslim affairs, for broader dissemination amongst other Muslims. According to Tasleem, khatna is still widely practised. “It still happens among rich, poor, the middle class,” she says. “I’d say 90 per cent still practise it.” Bohra reformist and scholar Asghar Ali Engineer too acknowledges that female circumcision is still very much prevalent. “But it would be difficult to ascertain the scale as it is a very hush-hush affair. In big cities like Bombay, it is done in hospitals right after birth and in smaller towns it is done around the age of six.”

Khatna is a tradition the Bohras trace back to their origins in Africa, one they continue with because they see this as an attempt to stay true to their faith. However, most Bohra women and men even today would rather keep this practice a secret rather than question a custom that is now universally seen as a gross violation of a woman's body.

"There has to be zero tolerance for something downright degrading like this," says Tasleem. "One can argue that there are certain health benefits to male circumcision, but for women there is nothing but pain. In fact, it's pure gender bias because it's meant to suppress a girl's sexual desire (see info box). You don't really castrate a man, do you? He can go on raping, that's fine, but a woman must be under control."

Tasleem herself was lucky to have had parents who spared her the pain and indignity, something her daughter can also thank Tasleem for. Very few Bohras have signed up so far for Tasleem's campaign; most who have are non-Bohra Muslims and Hindus. It is an uphill task, for it's not just conservative women who force circumcision on their daughters but, in at least one instance according to Tasleem, even a liberal woman based in Dubai, who even as she sends her daughter to an international school chose to bring her to Mumbai to be circumcised.

When contacted by Outlook, Quresh Ragib, who handles public relations at the high priest's office, flatly refused to discuss Tasleem's petition. "I am not interested in discussing this non-issue. The real reason behind this petition is propaganda. They are just using you like tissue paper," he said.

But even as some within the community may find the ritual abhorrent, they continue to perpetuate khatna because it guarantees support from the Bohra clergy and members. As one Bohra father put it to Outlook, many parents who choose not to circumcise their girls fear being excommunicated from a community that is closely knit under the influence of its clergy, which supports the practice but doesn't enforce it directly. Not following traditions, like female circumcision, can also preclude important milestones in the life of a Bohra girl, like misaaq (initiation ceremony into adulthood) and exclusion even after death by not being allowed burial at a communal graveyard. "Who wants to take up a fight with the community?" he asks. "We just lie each time somebody asks us if we have got our two daughters circumcised."

There seems to be no religious sanction for khatna. “It has nothing to do with Islam,” says Asghar Ali Engineer, “as the Quran doesn’t mention it. There may be some controversy about its mention in the Hadith but the fact is that it is an attempt to suppress sexuality so that women do not go astray.” One invalidated theory supports the idea that the Bohras, who are essentially a trading community and would travel often on long voyages, adopted this practice to prevent their women from having extra-marital affairs in their absence. Another prominent Bohra Muslim and a noted social activist, J.S. Bandukwala, tells *Outlook* that the practice stopped in his family with his mother. “The family felt it was not needed at all. It’s not mentioned in the Quran and even leads to unhealthy consequences.”

Indeed, more than just an abuse of women’s rights, khatna can also cause medical complications if executed in unhygienic conditions or by an untrained pair of hands wielding the blade. Bano, who is researching abuse of women in south Rajasthan for a project sanctioned by the University Grants Commission, is documenting actual instances where female circumcision did go horribly wrong. This includes a case where a Bohra girl had to be hospitalised in Udaipur a few years back because she had bled excessively after suffering a cut deeper than what was intended. It reminded Bano of the time her childhood friend went through the same trauma.

Because it still tends to get done secretly, even Bano has little idea if conditions have improved at all. “One does not really know if the dais use the same kind of razor blade as in my time, if the blade is new or is it sterilised,” she says. In a paper titled ‘*All for Izzat*’ that she wrote in 1991, Rehana Ghadially, a retired professor from IIT-Bombay and who suffered the indignity herself, profiled a 75-year-old woman who used a “rusted barber’s razor duly blessed by the clergy” and a small stone to sharpen her razor. But even if it is medically supervised and hygienic these days, it doesn’t make the rationale for female circumcision any more acceptable.

The practice finds mention in a 2009 cable on the Bohra community from the US consulate in Mumbai. Detailing an interaction between six Bohra women and consulate representatives, the women reportedly “affirmed that female circumcision was practised in their community, ordained and supported by the Syedna’s decrees”. Terming the practice “medieval”, the cable (among those made public by Wikileaks) adds that they “acknowledged that for

males, the circumcision is for health reasons and that for women the procedure is to curb sexual desire and prevent wives from straying from their husbands". Neelam Gorhe, a women's rights advocate and member of the Maharashtra legislative council, is cited in the cable as someone who has come across such cases.

When contacted, Gorhe, also a gynaecologist, did affirm she knew women from "certain western states and a certain section of the society whose clitorises – and not just their tips – had been completely removed." According to her, the first step in trying to deal with this practice is to acknowledge that it actually happens. "Rather than ban this with force, this has to go along with social transformation and be carried out in a manner that's participatory and democratic," she says. Tasleem's petition, whether successful or not at this stage, may just provide the chance to begin a conversation on the subject.



The award winners at the National LMA, 2011-12.

Boys Don't Cry

September 16, 2012

Even as awareness about child sex abuse grows, male child abuse is still seen as non-existent. It defies the patriarchal logic of Indian society.

An 18-year-old boy, having been a victim of repeated abuse since childhood by his own mother, stands at the crossroads of life. Aman is unable to articulate his sexuality or his sexual feelings. His mother is the only family he has had during most of his growing years, having lost his father and brother when young. A mother who bathed him, and some more, for as long as he can remember. Today, Aman is sexually drawn to his mother.*

Aman's case may be unconventional and exceptional, given that reported cases of women as abusers is a minority, and mothers even lesser, but the abuse he has undergone isn't new. In the patriarchal setup we live in, male child sex abuse remains hidden and disbelieved. The reality is stark.

An extensive research survey spanning 13 states in India by The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Prayas and UNICEF, reported that of the 12,447 children who were part of the study, 53% reported sexual abuse – 52% boys and 47% girls. Dr. Shekhar Sheshadri, renowned child psychologist at NIMHANS, Bangalore, established the high incidence of male child sex abuse over a decade ago in a first of its kind CSA study. He says that the situation hasn't changed much today.

The Need to be a Man at All Times

Given how prevalent male child sex abuse is, one wonders why it's hushed up. "The short and long term effects on both boys and girls is equally harmful, but gender bias and patriarchal nature of social structures gives huge importance to female CSA while ignoring male CSA," offers Dr. Shaibya Saldanha, sex educator, who started Enfold Proactive Health Trust to work on CSA, HIV and other related issues.



Deepa Ranganathan, www.thealternative.in

Deepa Ranganathan writes for www.thealternative.in. She won the award for the Best Feature (Web) at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Southern Region.

A male victim of child sex abuse is burdened, not only by the abuse and everything that it brings, but also by being a 'victim' – a position traditionally reserved for women. Anuja Gupta, founder and executive director of the RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest) Foundation, New Delhi, explains it further. "Traditionally, in a society like ours, men are not supposed to be victims; men are supposed to be aggressors. When men are victimized, they get confused about their masculinity and that causes a lot of problems when they grow as adults in terms of self esteem and self-confidence."

RAHI Foundation has been working with adult survivors of child sex abuse for the past fifteen years. Gupta explains that adult male survivors begin questioning both their masculinity and sexual orientation.

While abusers mostly turn out to be family or friends, the other misconception is that the abusers are always male.

Harish Iyer, a gay rights activist and survivor of CSA himself, points out that there have also been cases involving female abusers. "Forget about discriminating against boys when it comes to such offenses, there is also denial of the fact that even a woman could abuse a child. Aman* is a case in point. But you'll never hear such stories," he says.

Vidya, programme co-ordinator at Equations, a research organization in Bangalore that has done extensive study on CSA and child pornography, says that gathering data for such studies is not easy, especially when it involves male children. "The child does not know whom to tell or not because society will never believe him. He undergoes the same trauma and emotion that a girl child undergoes," she says. Sometimes, a male victim is threatened into silence by the abuser. "If it's a male victim, the abuser might threaten to abuse the sister(s) too. There is additional pressure of protecting the rest of the family. So the child never comes out to talk about what he went through," she explains.

The Power to Take Advantage

An abuser may commit CSA for various reasons. However, these causes, as commonly understood and perceived, are also burdened with assumptions. One of them is sexual experimentation, commonly seen as one of the causes, but has nothing to do with sexual abuse. Abuse, by its very definition, is non-consensual.

Iyer says sexual frustration could also be a possible cause. “It’s not about the sex; it’s more about power. They know they can disempower and exploit another being.”

Sometimes, abusers are victims themselves. “Most child abusers have suffered deep emotional neglect and trauma in their childhood, usually by abusive adult caretakers. They are very often heterosexual married men with children of their own,” says Dr. Saldanha.

Another possibility is that abusers could prefer male children over female as the former do not get pregnant in the process. “There have been cases of foreign tourists wanting to have sex with boys only because of that one reason”, says Vidya, quoting from research studies conducted by Equations.

A System Ill-Equipped to Help Survivors

India does not have a single comprehensive law that addresses CSA at present. B. T. Venkatesh, a Bangalore based child rights lawyer and advocate dismisses the current provisions for CSA redressal under the IPC as archaic. “The penal law that we have goes back to 1860. We adopted all the colonial laws post-independence, except a few, and the status continues to remain the same even today,” he says.

And then again, the affected person might not even want to take the legal route. Gupta notes, “More often than not, the abusers are people the victim has known, loved, or related to. In such a case, survivors of sexual abuse may not necessarily want legal action against them.”

Dr. Saldanha believes that India lacks adequate trained personnel to deal with a sensitive issue like CSA. “Not just counselors, there is a general lack of child protection services too. Most teachers, administrators, doctors and paramedical staff are completely at sea when it comes to prevention of abuse and rehabilitation of children who have suffered sexual abuse,” she says.

RAHI has consulted on the new comprehensive bill dealing with CSA which has been tabled at the Rajya Sabha. “The fact that work is happening in drafting a new law across the country is welcome. Sooner or later, we hope there is a law on CSA. The process has begun and it’s quite hopeful,” Gupta says.

Iyer believes that a new law on CSA which speaks more descriptively about male child sex abuse and sexuality education is the need of the hour. “As a

matter of fact, there is no said age you can assign to sex education. Right from the time when the child starts pointing at his/her private parts, instead of calling them fictitious or funny names, one ought to call a penis a penis and a vagina a vagina. That's where sex education starts," he says firmly.

Both teachers and parents are equally responsible and competent enough to teach the child, says Gupta, emphasizing that they have to work together.

Iyer sums it up accurately with, "Sexuality education has to start; law restructuring has to begin; victim's documentation has to be improved. All of this has to happen together. There is no structured process. There has to be a rounded approach and what is required is action."

** Some names have been changed to protect identities.*



Performance at the Eastern Region event, 2011-12 in Kolkata.

Walking the Line

May 8, 2011

They are women at a disadvantage, abandoned and abused, often used as pawns by racketeers. This is a report on the thriving sex trade near the Indo-Bangladesh border.

“WAMINA Bibi is from Sirajganj in Bangladesh. Manasi Mistry is from Katwa in West Bengal’s Burdwan district. Both, however, share a common destiny. They are engaged in sex work to sustain themselves and their children. Amina works in the Kalabagan red light area near Dhulian town in Murshidabad district, where extensive erosion by the Padma river has displaced thousands of people. Manasi works on the highway near Farakka, not far away from the barrage of the same name on National Highway 34.

Amina and Manasi have something else in common, though they don’t know each other. For want of a better term, it could be called the “border” connection.

Amina says, “I got involved in smuggling rice across the border when my husband abandoned me with two children. I was constantly harassed by border security forces on both sides; especially by those in the Border Security Force who man the outposts of the fence. I also ran into debt and did not have money to bribe and so had to give in to them.” In the local parlance, this is regarded as “payment” for a favour extended when money runs short and survival becomes a focal point for women like Amina.

One day Amina decided to come over to Dhulian along with another woman by paying Rs. 3,000 to a “lineman” who smuggles in persons illegally to India. Subsequently, she ended up in Kalabagan. Of her two children, a 28-year-old son is still in Bangladesh but her 13-year-old daughter is in a shelter home in Berhampore, district headquarters of Murshidabad.



Ranjita Biswas, The Statesman

Ranjita Biswas was earlier with The Statesman, Kolkata. Now she is Editor with Trans World Features, the only syndicated feature service in eastern India. She won the award for the Best News Feature at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Eastern Region.

The 42-year-old Manasi was abandoned by her husband, too, and at first worked in a major red light “para” at Kalna in Burdwan district. “But when we get older, getting customers is difficult as young girls turn up every day. So we have to move to the highway,” she says.

One can see ramshackle sheds lining the highway at the Farakka stopover which the “maliks” rent out to the women and also take a cut on their earnings. Manasi’s clients are mostly people from the “camp” – those keeping vigil on the border, truck drivers, etc. She does not work during the day, though many do – namely the “flying” Female Sex Workers who commute from nearby areas and return home. She confides that she now earns Rs. 8,000-10,000 a month. She wants to send her daughters, 12 and eight years old respectively, to a hostel if her “babu” agrees. Like many of the FSWs, she a “babu” – a live-in partner who is regarded as a proxy husband in the red light areas of West Bengal.

Manasi’s “babu” is 26-year-old Samsul Sheikh from Bangladesh. Without batting an eyelid, he says, “I used to be a cattle smuggler from the age of 21, taking herds of cows to Dhaka, and used to make Rs. 1,000-5,000 per cow. We had contact with people on both sides. I was robbed and also was not given the money I was supposed to get. I left the job two years ago.” He does not “do” anything now and lives off Manasi’s earning and “looks after the house”. He claims to love her daughters. Though a Bangladesh citizen, he boasts, “Soon I’ll get my voter ID card, I know the right people. I’ve lived here for many years, after all.”

According to Bela, a madam, who has six to seven girls under her working at Kalabagan, of around 300 FSWs in the area, eight to nine are from Bangladesh, all having illegally entered the country. The Indo-Bangladeshi border fence, which was initiated by the Indian government in 1986 to curb smuggling and illegal migration through the porous border, does not seem to be foolproof enough even today though most of West Bengal’s border stretch of 2,216 km. has been fenced. Many areas fall under waterways, making it more difficult to fence it off. The matter gets more complicated as the border demarcation, and fencing, has been such that some Indian farmers have land beyond the fence, practically making it an Indian enclave within Bangladesh, and vice-versa.

Human trafficking, particularly of young girls and women for prostitution, with promises of a “better life” across the border is a well-documented fact. Organisations like Delhi Childline or Mumbai’s Justice and Care, a human rights support agency that helps rescue victims of trafficking from brothels, report that many of the girls are from Bangladesh who enter India through the border with the help of a network of contact persons and procurers.

A recent research on cross border issues by ethnographer Swagato Sarkar for Sanjog, an NGO primarily focusing on issues of violence against children, and which also collaborates with NGOs in the border areas, found that “smuggling and sex are intertwined” in the border area. Many of the trafficked girls are underage, below 18 years.

According to the Suprava Panchashila Mahila Uddyog Samity, a Berhampore NGO that works for child rights and also runs programmes to combat trafficking and sexual exploitation, there are 1,438 FSWs in the border area in Murshidabad, but only per registration with them. It says there might be many more.

**Some names have been changed to protect identities.*

Manufactured Shame

July 28, 2012, Issue 30 Volume 9

The telecast of a young girl's molestation in the heart of Guwahati by a local news channel has jolted the nation's consciousness. People all over the country were shocked because the girl was sexually assaulted in public by a mob of 30 men while bystanders watched. Also shocking was the filming and telecast of this act.

What was initially touted by a news channel as an exposé on the depravity and moral turpitude in society is now emerging as an event which was manipulated by the channel to “create” news. On 9 July, the whole country was outraged by a video clip aired by News Live, a leading news channel of Assam, which showed a young girl being groped, clawed, beaten and molested in full public glare outside a pub on the busy G. S. Road of Guwahati, the Northeast's biggest city.

People were shocked, the people of Assam more than anybody else. Public morality had hit an all-time low. How could this happen on a busy street of a state capital? How could bystanders watch as a mob of not less than 30 men humiliated a young girl? Where was the police in all this? There was a storm of outrage as social media sites went into overdrive. Questions were raised and debated, calling for a strong protest against this heinous act.

Amidst all this clamour, another question gnawing at the sides was the role played by the news channel, News Live, which filmed the whole episode. RTI activist and leader of the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) Akhil Gogoi claimed to have laid his hands on video clippings that demonstrated that the News Live reporter who filmed the whole incident had instigated the mob. TEHELKA has reviewed these clips and the truth is horrifying.

Akhil alleged that Gaurav Jyoti Neog, the News Live reporter who had called in his camera unit to film the incident, had orchestrated the molestation to



Ratnadip Choudhury, Tehelka

Ratnadip Choudhury is a Principal Correspondent with Tehelka. He was awarded for Best Investigative Feature – Magazine at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Eastern Region.

“manufacture” a “sensational news piece” to boost the channel’s TRP. “News Live is promoted by Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma, his wife Riniki Bhuyan Sharma is its chief managing director (CMD),” says Akhil. “The channel has been involved in false and fabricated news from the start, but this one has been the most unethical. News Live reporter Gaurav Jyoti Neog has instigated the molestation and I have video footage to prove that.” The raw footage has since been handed over to state DGP Jayanto Narayan Choudhury. Sources say that in its preliminary report to the Union home ministry, the police has hinted at the reporter’s involvement in instigating the molesters. Gaurav has been working for News Live since 2009.

Interestingly, the News Live office is located at Christian Basti, not far from Club Mint Bar where the incident occurred. The channel has admitted that Akhil got the footage from somebody in their office. TEHELKA has found that there were people in the office who were against this kind of unethical journalism, and these were the people who handed over the footage to Akhil to blow the lid off the whole episode. The channel’s Managing Editor Syed Zarir Hussain has admitted that it was a News Live reporter who shot all the raw footage. There are two shots of footages. One shot by an open camera used by channels to cover news, and the other footage, which actually indicts the news reporter was shot by the reporter himself on his own mobile camera. The digital camera visuals were shot by News Live reporter Dibya



Public outcry Youngsters protesting the horrific molestation that shook up the city
Photo: Ujjal Deb

Bordoloi and his cameraperson Jugal, reporter Gaurav Jyoti Neog shot the other clips with his cell phone.

In a reconstruction of the hitherto unaired footage, we have tried to recount what happened outside the Club Mint Bar on the evening of July 9.

According to News Live, reporter Gaurav Jyoti Neog was on his way home from work when he heard the ruckus outside Club Mint (the bar is about 200 metres from the channel's office) and started shooting with his cell phone. Sensing something sensational afoot, he asked his office for a camera unit to be sent to the spot. Though the channel claims that Gaurav had asked the news desk to inform the police, nothing in the raw footage or otherwise that establishes this claim. The Assam Police has maintained that they received no calls from News Live or any other media organisation informing them about the molestation. The first calls it got, the police claims, came from Club Mint and later from the Hotel Gateway Grandeur, situated close to the pub.

The footage starts at the point after two girls have been thrown out of the pub following a scuffle over a lost ATM card as the victim recalls later. The girls are waiting on the road for an autorickshaw, when ambient noises are heard in the background. The conversation is not very clear. Later, one can see that a group of boys, who were standing outside the bar at a wine shop, had been recording the girls' movements with their cell phones and had passed some comment. One girl in a white T-shirt and a pair of shorts slaps one of the boys. The footage then shows the girl engaged in a physical struggle with the boys. The other – the victim – is wearing a black top and shorts. A male voice is heard: "Send a camera immediately near the income tax office." Akhil claims this is the voice of the News Live reporter Gaurav, a fact admitted by the channel, which has aired the same visual with the same voice claiming it to be Gaurav's.

'Please come quickly, she has been caught...(to the mob) the camera is here. Hold her. Hold her,' the voice in the footage is heard saying

Further, the raw footage shows the other girl being chased by a group of boys. Someone shouts: "Catch her, make her naked, make her naked, catch her." This voice is strikingly similar to the voice the channel admits belongs to Gaurav. (The authenticity could only be proved by a forensic examination, but ex facie it does appear to be Gaurav's). This can be deduced from the circumstances around the clippings. In a situation where there is a lot of

noise in the background, it is likely that the most audible voice will be of the person holding the phone. Also, most of the people voice matches the earlier male voice that News Live had itself identified as belonging to Gaurav.

What follows there after are horrific scenes of the girl being pulled from all sides, thrashed and fondled. Someone pulls her top to expose her bra, another man gropes her private parts when she is pinned down. She cries and shouts for help, and tries her best to free herself. A voice is heard saying: “Make her naked, let people see her... she is a prostitute and she dares to do this.” The molestation gets even more violent, more brutal. The frame, albeit shaky, is clear enough to see the girl struggling all the while screaming “help, help!” This blood-curdling scene plays out again and again. Bystanders can be seen watching, some from a distance, some to get a ringside view. No one comes forward to help the traumatised girl.

As the recording continues, the same male voice is heard again, this time distinctly: “Please come quickly, she has been caught...(to the mob) the camera is here, hold her, hold her.” Circumstances suggest that this could again be Gaurav’s voice, because he has called his colleague at the News Live office, Dibya Bordoloi to come to the spot with a camera team.

Night duty reporter Dibya Bordoloi arrives with the cameraperson. The camera rolls, this time with the lights on. The face of the main accused Amarjyoti Kalita becomes distinct here. Kalita in a red T-shirt and a cap, takes charge of what has by now become a circus. The footage shows how the girl



Hunter-to-hunted: Rup Kanta Kalita (27), Deba Das (22), Nabajyoti Barua (22), Jitu Moni Deka (30) and Dipak Deb (50), five of the alleged accused being produced before the CJM Court on July 17.

breaks away twice from the molesters, only to be brought back each time. Pulled by her hair, her jacket ripped apart, her undergarments visible, the mob was enacting a “live act” in its most horrific form. Amarjyoti was pulling the girl by her undergarments, another assaulter was pulling her by her hair. This part of the raw footage caught on News Live cameras holds the key for the police investigation. This is the part that Akhil has not released to the media and News Live has not aired.

Many questions arise out of this. Did any of the molesters personally know the reporter? Police sources confirmed that almost all the molesters whose faces have been identified did not have prior criminal records. A well-placed source in the Assam Police has confirmed that Gaurav knew prime accused Amarjyoti pretty well; a few others in the mob knew each other since they worked in the same area. So the question automatically veers towards the intent of “manufacturing” news. Or does it go deeper than that? Only a forensic test of the raw footage will throw up conclusive answers. Managing Editor Hussain defends his reporter. “It is because News Live had aired the visuals that the molesters are behind bars,” he says. “If we had given the footage to the cops directly, it would have been put in cold storage as has happened frequently in the past.”

Even after Mukul Kalita and some other people restore order and call the cops, Amarjyoti Kalita is still seen trying to grab the girl from behind

In the open camera footage, the perpetrators were clearly enjoying being filmed. Some were even smiling at the camera. Gaurav is also seen wearing a black T-shirt and a pair of jeans. “Initially, Gaurav tried to protest, but things went out of control so our reporters kept rolling,” defends Hussain. TEHELKA found no video frames or audio streams in the raw footage, to remotely suggest that Gaurav tried to dissuade the mob at any time. Though the footage does show that, the other reporter Dibya shouts at the molesters and even tries to rescue the girl. Despite numerous attempts to contact Gaurav, the reporter was not available for any comment.

The footage then shows the girl running towards traffic on the busy G. S. Road asking car drivers for help. The mob follows her shouting that she is a prostitute. Incredibly, this seems reason enough for people not to intervene in what they could have seen as an act of moral policing. A man on a motorcycle tries to stop the crowd, but in vain. It is only when vernacular

daily *Ajir Axom*'s senior journalist Mukul Kalita, who happened to be passing by, interferes, that some other people also come to the rescue of the girl. Dibya also tries to bring some order. No such effort is made by Gaurav.

After some order has been restored, Gaurav is heard shouting at Dibya for not carrying the channel mic ID (channel logo attached to the mike) and snatches the gun mic before asking the victim: "Please tell me what happened." What the girl says is perhaps the most telling statement in the footage. "I was returning home after attending a birthday party, you have done it... you people have done it," she says. This is a shocking revelation. Akhil claims that the victim was talking about Gaurav and the molesters. News Live claims nothing is conclusive; traumatised as she was, the girl might have meant all the people or some people around her, or may be venting at the constant rolling of the camera.

TEHELKA has in its possession a copy of the victim's statement at the Chief Judicial Magistrate's court. Written in Assamese, one section of the statement reads thus: "...they started to tear off my clothes; a media team was shooting the scene instead of helping me. The mob tore my clothes and started groping my private parts. I somehow saved my face from being exposed by the camera. I was shellshocked. A gentleman saved me, the police arrived and dropped me home."

The footage reveals people led by Mukul Kalita trying to convince cops to reach the spot fast and also trying to ensure the girl's safety. Even then, Amarjyoti Kalita is seen smiling and grabbing the victim from behind.

Above the din, Dibya is heard telling Gaurav: "This girl's career, future is ruined." After a brief pause, a voice, probably Gaurav's, is heard: "Ruined meaning?" Leaning towards Gaurav, Dibya's face is visible for a second. "I have done all this!" someone says. Though TEHELKA cannot independently verify this, a comparison with other audio streams in the clip gives the impression that the voice making this boast belongs to Gaurav. The footage ends with the girl being taken away by the police. The molestation even then and the mob groped the girl even while she was seated in the police van.

The cops have already taken voice samples of Gaurav and confiscated the News Live camera, tapes and computers where the video footage was processed. The memory card of the cell phones that he was using has also been sent for forensic tests. After Akhil handed over the raw footage to the

cops, Gaurav resigned from News Live. In his defence he said he had quit to ensure “a free and fair investigation”. On July 18, he applied for an anticipatory bail at the Gauhati High Court, though he still has not been named an accused or detained by the police.

Launched in January 2008, News Live gained reputation for its smart presentation, vast coverage and a knack for breaking news before anyone else. The past few months had seen the channel dedicating huge chunks of airtime to what many describe as “on-air moral policing”. From stories of young girls getting drunk and unruly scenes inside bars and on the streets to hosting regular panel discussions on what women should wear, the channel was almost on a moral crusade.

In 2011, News Live Editor-in-chief Atanu Bhuyan made it to the headlines of national dailies after he made unsavoury comments about Aahom girls from upper Assam. The Tai-Aahom Students’ Union had even locked down News Live bureau offices in upper Assam towns.

Interestingly, Akhil’s claims of “manufactured” news got approval from an unexpected quarter. In a press conference, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi came down heavily on the news channel. “I cannot approve the fact that the TV crew went on rolling their tapes for almost 45 minutes without making efforts to save the girl,” said a stern-looking Gogoi. The chief minister has asked the



Angry wave: Social activist Akhil Gogoi leading a demonstration in front of the News Live office on July 15.
Photo: Ujjal Deb

CID to investigate the role of the channel in the molestation. A team of police officers led by DGP Choudhury has been entrusted with the task of nabbing the culprits. The chief minister has said that a crackdown will happen without infringing on the freedom of the press.

Of the 14 molesters who have been identified, the cops have already arrested 12. At the time of going to press, two, including prime accused Amarjyoti Kalita – a casual employee of the state government’s information technology agency AMTRON – were still absconding.

Editor Atanu Bhuyan quit his office, not owning moral responsibility, but citing apprehensions that the chief minister would “pressurise” the management to sack him. For his part, the CM got the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW) Mamta Sharma to visit Guwahati and meet the victim, after an earlier NCW fact-finding team led by Alka Lamba left Guwahati without meeting him. Lamba was later removed for naming the victim during a press conference. Shockingly, even the CM’S office repeated the same callousness. After Tarun Gogoi had met the victim, the CM’s office released pictures of the girl with Gogoi. Not only this, they even revealed her identity. Though Gogoi later apologised for the slip-up, asking the media not to publish the pictures, he continued naming her.

The brutality was not confined to the street. NCW member Alka Lamba, and even the CM’s office, named the victim without a care for her reputation

The incident has scarred Assam. The state that prides itself on its treatment of women has now been reduced to a group of bystanders. “The rest of the country protested violently, people started calling Guwahati a city of bystanders,” says Guwahati-based author Ayushman Dutta. “People watched with voyeuristic pleasure the horrific scenes of a girl being ravaged on the streets. Some even took photos and made the odd MMS, but no one stopped their car to help her, they did not even bother to lower their car windows.” The incident has also sparked a debate on the mad race of news channels for TRPs.

Interestingly, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), both of which have never missed a chance to issue diktats on New Year’s or Valentine’s Day, have maintained a stony silence on this.

But, it is with the police that the buck finally stops. The government has put the wheels in motion. The SSP, Guwahati city, Apurba Jibon Baruah has been transferred. “We are looking at all aspects of the evidence. If the reporter and the channel are found guilty, we will act,” says DGP Choudhury.

Tarun Gogoi has declared that he will create the position of a City Police Commissioner. But many of the recommendations of the expert committee constituted after the 2008 serial blasts in Guwahati has been kept in cold storage. “Almost all our recommendations have not been implemented,” says H. K. Deka, former DGP and member of the expert committee on police reforms. “With the city moving fast to becoming a metro, police modernisation is a must, transferring the SSP is not a solution.” In size and population, Guwahati is similar to Bhubaneswar. However, where the Odisha capital has 3,500 dedicated police personnel, the Guwahati City Police has 210 sub-inspectors and 1,300 constables manning the streets. Nowhere is this void felt more than in the pubs and clubs of the city.

But for all this, if it turns out that the media has behaved in a callous manner, its very relevance will be questioned. If proven true, this would perhaps be the first incident in which a media house has had a frighteningly complicit role in a despicable crime against a woman. While it is almost sure that this is our *News Of The World* moment, media houses, especially electronic media, need to rethink their priorities: higher TRPs or news ethic. Until that happens, the spectacle will continue.

Lost World

May 17, 2012

The feature provides a closer look at the lives of survivors of acid attacks. It details their lives post such attacks, their mental and psychological trauma, the stigma that they face, the financial burden owing to high hospitalization bills and their struggle to get justice. In most cases of acid attacks the perpetrators get away scot free and justice is never delivered at all. The feature calls for more stringent laws to deal with acid attacks and a more humane approach and support for survivors of the attacks.

An acid attack ends the life of a victim as she knew it, and starts a road littered with heartbreaks

“It took him one minute to destroy my life.”

– Zakia, an acid attack victim, in *Saving Face*, an award-winning documentary by Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy

Sixty seconds are easy to be dismissed as inconsequential in the procession of minutes and hours. Sometimes, however, in 60 seconds, everything changes. A few seconds are all it takes to splash acid on someone. And acid takes five to 30 seconds to etch its ruin on the person. That is what happened to Haseena Hussain, a computer operator, in 1999. She quit her job when the attention of her boss, Joseph Rodrigues, became too ardent. A spurned Rodrigues poured two litres of sulphuric acid over her. “My face became a lump of flesh,” she would later recount. Her lips, nose and ears merged into one mass and had to be re-grafted. There is a permanent hole in her skull, one side of her neck is welded to her shoulders and she became completely blind. Haseena was only 19 years old then.

Acid attacks have their root in hatred. While there are many villains in such incidents, from spurned suitors and angry mistresses to estranged partners and irate moneylenders, the victim is almost always a woman.



Nikita Doval, The Week

Nikita Doval was a Special Correspondent with the Week when this was written. She won the award for the Best Feature – Magazine at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Northern Region.

The name of Aarti Thakur of Goregaon, Mumbai, was added to this long list on February 1. Pintu, her former landlord whom she spurned, hired people to splash acid on her. Today, she lies in the National Burns Hospital in Airoli, Navi Mumbai, waiting for her scars to first emerge and then heal, before the long and painful spells of surgeries. “The acid has burnt the skin around her eyelids, and one eye cannot close,” says cosmetic surgeon Sunil Keswani. “As soon as she stabilises, we will have to operate on her, as the cornea might dry up, causing blindness.”

For a survivor, an acid attack starts a life littered with obstacles, heartbreaks and isolation. So tough is it that many choose to shut out a world which they once dreamt of conquering. But there are also those who choose to rise like the phoenix, though never whole again, determined to be seen and heard. “I would wear a veil before stepping out of the house. Children taunted me, neighbours shunned me. I could not share my pain even with my parents,” says Jayalakshmi, whose husband attacked her with acid in 2003. She would have continued hiding in her village in Karnataka’s Tumkur district, had not been for a school teacher and a doctor. “They told me that my face might be burnt but my strength was still intact. My husband took away my right to lead a normal life but not my freedom or my abilities,” she says. Today, she is an active member of the state Women’s Commission’s rural programmes. Even if these women try and rebuild their lives, society and the legal system ensure that nothing comes easy. Shirin Juwaley, who was attacked in 1998 by her husband after she asked for a divorce, went on to do her MSc. in development and human rights. She runs an NGO, Palash, that deals with rehabilitation of people with disfigurement, and is widely regarded as a motivational speaker. Last year, however, a Mumbai college principal refused to let her address students, saying that she would dissuade them from marriage.

“Society’s refusal to engage with victims scars them further,” says clinical psychologist Dr. Rajat Mitra, director, Swanchetan Society for Mental Health. Speculation about the victim’s morals and harassment is par for the course. “I have abuses hurled at me when I walk down the road. There are days when it seems the whole world is intent on intimidating me,” says Syeda Rahath Unnisa, an acid attack victim from Bangalore. Rahath, who runs a boutique, shakes with anger every time she describes the harassment at the hands of the local jamaat. “But I will fight till the end. No one can take away

my right to live with dignity," she says. She opens the store in spite of repeated threats and intimidation by her husband, who threw acid on her and is now out on bail.

Legal apathy is the most disheartening factor in these women's struggle. Currently, there is no section in the Indian Penal Code that deals specifically with acid attacks in spite of its rampancy. Acid attack cases are dealt with by sections 320, 322, 325 and 326 of the IPC. Of these only section 326 addresses the issue of being attacked by a corrosive object but categorises it as 'grievous hurt'. Though this section allows punishment up to life imprisonment, most convicts get only a jail term of three to four years. Compensation, if ordered, is often paltry.

Dr. Mahalakshmi had a flourishing practice in Mysore when she was attacked by her landlord in 2001 after she turned down his sexual advances. The accused, Chikkabasallaiah, was sentenced to three years in jail and ordered to pay her 120,000 as compensation. Today, she works in a government hospital, seeking to rebuild her life and striving for some semblance of normalcy. In Haseena's case, Rodrigues continued intimidating her throughout the trial and even threatened to douse her younger sister with acid. Her family, however, was undeterred, and fought the case. He was sentenced to five years in jail.

According to a Thomson Reuters Foundation survey last year, India was ranked fourth among the most dangerous countries in the world for women. However, even by our abysmal standards of women safety and gender equality, acid attacks remain a woefully under-investigated crime. In fact, there are no nationwide statistics available on the crime. According to a 2011 study by the Avon Global Centre for Women and Justice at Cornell Law School, New York, 153 cases of acid attacks were reported in India from January 2002 to October 2010 in different newspapers. "It is quite possible that attacks in rural areas go unreported," says activist Sushma Varma of Campaign & Struggle Against Acid Attack on Women. The organisation, which is perhaps the only one of its kind in the country, also relies on media reports to find victims in Karnataka.

Acid burns are far more severe than those induced by fire. Usually, victims are attacked with concentrated sulphuric acid, nitric acid or hydrochloric acid. All of them are easily available over the counter. This correspondent

bought two litres of concentrated acid for 150 from a hardware store with no questions being asked in spite of the repeated emphasis on 'acid which will burn'.

Perpetrators aim at the face, neck and chest. The intention is not to kill but to maim for life. "The attack is as much on your femininity and identity as a woman as it is on the individual," says Dr. Mitra, who has interviewed several offenders. "The message is, if I cannot have you, no one else can."

Abhinav, who attacked his classmate Arti Srivastava ten years ago in Kanpur, reportedly said more than once after the attack that he wanted to ruin her face so that she would finally agree to marry him. "The rage these men feel towards women is pathological," says Dr. Mitra. "They describe them in abusive, derogatory terms. The offenders also tend to see themselves as victims who have been harmed by the women. There is rarely any remorse expressed."

For the victims, the process of recovery is arduous, both physically and mentally. Dr. Mitra says it is advisable for victims not to see their reflection for some time, as the experience can be shattering. "Most victims who have been disfigured report out-of-body experiences. They are completely disassociated from their body," he says. Depression, fear, victimisation and insomnia are just some of the other troubles that come calling.

"We need a specific act to deal with acid attacks," says Supreme Court lawyer Aparna Bhat, who is pursuing a public interest litigation since 2006. "We are also asking for a ban or regulation on the sale of acid and a rehabilitation process to be put in place." Bhat is counsel for Lakshmi, an acid attack victim in Delhi.

Based on Bhat's PIL, the Supreme Court, in 2009, sought a response from state governments on banning the over-the-counter sale of acids. The governments have also been directed to look at the rehabilitation and a compensation scheme for the victims. Also, a committee constituted under the home secretary has recommended insertion of sections 326 A and 326 B, hurt by acid attack, in the draft Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2011.

The Law Commission of India and the National Commission of Women have also submitted reports asking for a specific section to deal with acid attacks. Both the reports recommend life sentence for the attacker and monetary compensation for the victim.

“The whole system is bad,” says Rahath. Does that dishearten her? “Never,” she says with a flash of fire in her eyes. “This is not a battle I chose to fight, but if you have thrust it on me, then I will emerge victorious.”

Acid Over the Counter

On a busy Saturday afternoon, THE WEEK’s Chief Photographer Sanjay Ahlawat approaches a hardware store in Delhi’s Paharganj area. “I want to buy acid,” he says to the proprietor. An attendant brings a plastic bottle containing a copper-coloured liquid.

“Is this strong?” Sanjay asks. The attendant nods. “This is what is used for cleaning,” he says. Sanjay insists that he wants something “much stronger”. The proprietor looks up and asks why. Stubborn stains, says Sanjay.

Satisfied by the perfunctory explanation, the proprietor says stronger acid is available but one has to be very careful. “It will burn you,” he says. “Are you sure you want it?”

Sanjay nods, and the attendant brings out a beer bottle containing a thick greenish liquid. The bottle is sealed with a plastic cap. Sanjay’s attempts to open it are met with a stern reprimand. “Open it only where you intend to use it. And if there is any left, just pour it down the drain,” says the proprietor. Sanjay wants to know if this can burn a person. “Oh yes,” he says, before asking for Rs. 50. “It will eat your skin away.”

Lame Laws

Acid attacks are punishable under sections 320 (causing emasculation and disfigurement), 322 and 325 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt) and 326 (causing grievous hurt by dangerous weapons or means) of the Indian Penal Code. However, none of these has been effective in dealing with acid attacks. Most perpetrators get away lightly as the case registered is for causing grievous hurt.

In 2006, lawyer Aparna Bhat filed a PIL in the Supreme Court requesting that section 326 A be introduced to deal specifically with acid attacks. She also sought a ban on the over-the-counter sale of acid. A decision on Bhat’s PIL is still pending.

The Law Commission of India and the National Commission for Women have also asked for a specific section to deal with acid attacks. Both recommended compensation for victims.

A committee constituted under the home secretary has recommended insertion of sections 326 A and 326 B, hurt by acid attack, in the draft Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2011.

In 2009, the Supreme Court sought a response from state governments on banning the sale of acid. It also asked for a rehabilitation and compensation scheme for victims. In 2007, Karnataka had announced a compensation scheme after the Bangalore-based NGO Campaign and Struggle Against Acid Attacks on Women filed a PIL. According to the scheme, victims of acid attacks will be paid between Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 2 lakh for advanced treatment. Employment, too, was promised. "However, most promises are yet to see the light of day," says Sushma of the NGO.

In 2012, Delhi announced a package of Rs. 3 lakh for victims whose faces were disfigured and Rs. 50,000 for others.

Syeda Rahath Unnisa, 34

'I will never give in'.

Attacked by her husband of 13 years, in Bangalore, in June 2011

The morning of June 17, 2011 dawned with a lot of promise for Syeda Rahath Unnisa. Her divorce from her estranged husband had come through, her boutique was doing roaring business and she had just applied for a new passport. But Abdul Wakil, the divorced husband, had other plans. He showed up at her doorstep, offering to take their two daughters, Sophiya and Sumaiya, to school. "I protested, but he insisted. En route, he stopped at a bakery and got them goodies, the first time ever," says Rahath. After dropping the girls, Abdul came back, this time to carry out his threat of the past six years – throw acid on Rahath. "He caught hold of me by the neck. I was wearing a loose cotton nightshirt and he poured it down my torso," the soft-spoken woman recounts.

She is standing behind the counter of Sophiya's Boutique, her pride and joy, which, till the attack took place, was flourishing. "I would get orders worth Rs. 10,000 every day. Now business is sporadic," says Rahath. A thick mass of hair is gathered at Rahath's nape. "It used to touch my knees," she confides. In fact, it was the curtain of thick hair that saved her face from being burnt, though there is a dark patch on her right cheek left by the fumes of the acid. Her brother, a doctor, cut off her burnt hair in the ICU.

Rahath remembers running to the bathroom scared that Abdul would come after her again, determined to maim her face this time. “I called my brother after barricading myself only to find that Abdul had already dialled his number to say ‘I am coming for you now’.” She kept pouring water on herself till her family arrived.

All of Rahath’s right shoulder, starting from her collar bone is burnt. “It is till here,” she says, pointing to her navel and her legs. “The only silver lining is that my face remained unscarred.” She has already undergone skin grafting and the doctor is extremely pleased with the results, she says. “I was asked to wear tight clothes, preferably jeans and a shirt, so that the skin got stretched.” Little did Rahath know that this small gesture would make life even more difficult for her. The local jamat leaders, she says, used this as a starting point for harassing her. “I was asked to wear a burkha, never mind that their daughters wear the same kind of clothes,” he says. And the intimidation and harassment have not stopped. Abuses are hurled at her as she walks down the road, and then there are the propositions and threats.

The spectre of Abdul also looms large. Within a month of being arrested, he was out on bail. “He is politically connected and every time I open the boutique, a few goons show up. They threaten to throw acid again.” Abdul is keen on a compromise and wants Rahath to withdraw the case and



Syeda Rahath Unnisa, an acid attack victim, with her daughters Sophiya and Sumaiya at her boutique in Bangalore.

reconsider the divorce. “I will never give in. I want justice, an eye for an eye,” she says with vehemence, even as her eyes well up. “I want to blast out at all those who were instrumental in giving him bail. Is a woman’s life worth nothing in this country? He threw acid on me and today he roams the streets free.” The next date of the hearing is still some months away.

Abdul and Rahath had a love marriage, but it turned sour soon after the birth of their first daughter. “He wanted a son. Then the dowry demands started. Once I brought home Rs. 50,000 and another time, I sold my jewellery to satisfy his demands. But it never stopped there,” she says.

Rahath had been an architecture student when she got married, but gave it up. She found herself turning to designing as a means of being independent. “I love designing,” she says, showing pictures of her creations on her mobile phone. There is a gown which she proudly says is similar to what Katrina Kaif wore for an appearance and a flower girl dress that she made for a wedding in the UK. Her daughters are her models, posing excitedly in their mother’s creations.

Rahath has already spent Rs. 9 lakh on her treatment and is financially wiped out. She acknowledges the support of her sisters and brother and admits that she would have been completely at sea without them. “Acid victims have been promised compensation by the government, but nothing has come through till now. I have made innumerable trips to the women’s commission and government offices. Each rickshaw ride costs me a few hundred rupees, money I can ill afford.”

But no matter how tough the day, Rahath always finds the strength to smile. “My daughters keep me going. My younger one tells me ‘Mama, tension dene ka, lene ka nahin’,” she laughs.

The older one, Sophiya, she admits, has matured much before her years. “Sometimes she says let us kill ourselves, we will be free from all of this then,” says Rahath. “But I am a fighter. My daughter will be one, too.”

Pranitha T., 24

A New Life

Attacked by the spurned lover of a friend in December 2008

By Lalita Iyer

On the evening of December 10, 2008, Pranitha T., a final-year engineering student at Kakatiya Institute of Technology and Sciences in Warangal, was returning home from class on her Scooty with friend Swapnika. Three men on a motorbike overtook them and one of them, Sreenivas Rao, called out Swapnika's name. When Swapnika turned around, he threw acid on her face and fled. Rao was Swapnika's neighbour. As she had spurned his advances, Rao wanted revenge.

Swapnika took the brunt of the attack, while Pranitha, who was wearing a helmet, took a hit on the right side of her face, neck and back. "As soon as I realised that something had been thrown at us, my first reaction was that the men had sprayed water. But with the burning sensation, I realised that it was more serious," recalls Pranitha.

Both of them fell from the vehicle and a crowd gathered. By the time they reached a nearby hospital in an autorickshaw, Swapnika had been blinded and was in unbearable pain. Pranitha called her mother and Swapnika's parents and told them what had happened.

Swapnika was shifted to Yashoda Hospital in Hyderabad, which had better facilities. But, on December 31, days after Rao and his associates were killed in an alleged encounter with the police, she succumbed to the injuries.

Pranitha had suffered 60 per cent burns and spent more than three months at Axion Hospital in Hyderabad. She tries not to think of the incident, which has left scars on her neck and the right side of her face. "Why should I blame fate? I am happy and doing well in my life," says Pranitha, who is a software developer with Infosys now. "I am alive and going around doing things other people of my age do."

Jayalakshmi, 39

Erasing the Scars

Attacked by her husband of 18 years in June 2003

Jayalakshmi, a women's rights activist, has devoted her life to the empowerment of rural women in Karnataka. But, ten years ago, if anyone had told her about her future, she would have laughed, before bursting into tears.

On June 25, 2003, Jayalakshmi, then 31, was at home watching television when her husband of 18 years attacked her with acid. The scars on her neck, arms and the lower half of her face reflect his brutality and the acid's corrosiveness.

"I was a simple housewife with ordinary concerns. The biggest of them was my husband's drinking problem. One day, I put my foot down and refused to let him enter the house," she says. Her husband, a weaver, spent 10 days outside home and reportedly told villagers that he would throw acid on her to "teach her a lesson". He was convinced she had thrown him out because she was having an affair.

Ironically, when Jayalakshmi was attacked, she was watching Chandrika, a television show in which the protagonist was an acid attack victim. "I was waiting to see how Chandrika was going to react to her being disfigured when my life turned upside down," she says.

On being attacked, she almost fainted but still managed to push her husband out of the house and lock the door. "My clothes were sticking to my body," she says. "I watched my skin erupting and the pain was unbearable."

Jayalakshmi describes the days that followed – her trip to the hospital, the refusal of the staff to treat her, her father insisting that they try and save her, or consider mercy killing. "I was lucky that a doctor in the local hospital asked a specialist to come down and look at me. Dr. Suresh, the surgeon who treated me, always had a kind word for me," she says.

She had several surgeries ("Five or six, I forget," she says) before she decided not to go ahead with more. "My father had taken a loan," she says. "Even though the surgeries were being done free of cost, the medication was bleeding them dry."

When talking about her recovery, her eyes well up. "I don't want to talk about those days," she says. "Do I have to?" Jayalakshmi says she would sleep on plantain leaves on the floor as the wounds hurt. In her parents' village, she wore a veil every time she stepped out. "The children would crack cruel jokes, the adults would shun me. I never considered myself beautiful but I just did not know how to live with this face," she says. She feared her parents would believe her husband's imaginings of an extramarital affair if she discussed her troubles. It was the local school teacher who gave Jayalakshmi the strength to move on. "He told me that my body may have been disfigured but my mind is still my own," she says.

She started counselling other women and got involved in activism. "Women in rural areas have no voice," she says. "I try to give them one." Today, she is her district's representative in the State Women's Commission's rural programme. The media has lauded her and college girls tell her she is an inspiration, but Jayalakshmi still feels defined by her scars. "If I see children coming towards me on the street, I cross over. I don't want to scare them," she says.

Jayalakshmi's husband was sentenced to 10 years in jail and was released three months ago. She has not met him, even though he indicated that he wanted to get back with her. "Does he think I can forgive and forget?" she asks. Her daughter does not talk to him but her son is in touch. "He tells me, 'What has happened has happened. Forget it'," she says. "He is a married man himself. I wonder how can he even say that."

Even as she stops to ponder over her own statement, her phone starts ringing. She wipes her tears, answers with a smile and is off, like a flash, trying to make the world a better place for women.

Crime and Punishment

Pakistan, after the Oscar success of the film *Saving Face*, is seriously considering legislation against acid attacks. According to some estimates, nearly 150 women are attacked every year. In 2002, Bangladesh passed the Acid Crime Prevention Act 2002 and the Acid Control Act 2002. These acts strengthened the criminal procedures for acid violence cases with a capital punishment provision. They provide for setting up of a rehabilitation centre for the victims and making legal and medical aid available to them.

Most importantly, these acts forbid the sale of acid over the counter, making it a licensed trade. Though the attacks continue, the frequency has come down since the enactment of these laws.

Like Cattle, from Kabul

February 9, 2013

This is the story of how Afghanistan has become a source, transit point and destination for sex trafficking. Through interviews with trafficked women both in Delhi and Kabul as well as with social workers, human rights experts and other officials/agencies, the story presents a holistic picture of trafficking from the reasons for trafficking to the various methods through which it is carried out to the various agencies and their work to combat this.

She calls herself Diljan. But, that is not her real name; pimps and customers call her so. "I serve the rich and the executive class," said the round-faced blonde with green eyes. "If the guys have money, they can have me for a night." Depending on the nature of the service, her rates range from Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 90,000 for a night. Though women of other nationalities, including Russians and Ukrainians, still dominate the flourishing sex trade in India, Diljan said Afghans like her had pushed many of them out of business.

Back home, she was a simple and devout girl, who wore the hijab and rose early each day to say the dawn prayers before helping her mother in kitchen. Then came the war in 2001. She and her family fled from Kandahar to Kabul, where they stayed in a rented house. Her nightmare began when a man raped her, she said, while returning home from the market. He threatened to kill her if she told anyone about it. She would be raped again that month by another man, who made the same threat. In 2011, a woman approached her with a waitress's job in a posh Delhi hotel. She jumped at the chance. The woman got her a passport and visa and put her on a plane. In Delhi, she was told that the job had fallen through.

She ended up being an escort. "There were six other Afghan women already at work," recalled Diljan. THE WEEK's cross-border investigation and interviews with dozens of victims reveal a disturbing story of how



Syed Nazakat, Kabul & New Delhi, The Week

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Afghanistan has become a source, transit point and destination for victims of sex-trafficking. Nobody knows exactly how many Afghan women have been sold into sexual slavery. Like the drug trade, trafficking takes place in a shadowy world. Some girls like Diljan are cheated by pimps and sold to traffickers. Others are abducted, raped and psychologically pummelled into submission. The rampant trafficking has put Afghanistan on the US's "Tier 2 watch list" of countries which are failing to fight human trafficking.

Human trafficking in Afghanistan grew as the many decades of war caused displacement of millions. Chronic poverty and growing crime increased the vulnerability of women. Geography is another crucial factor; Afghanistan has six direct neighbours including Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan. Many of these borders are nearly impossible to guard, thanks to inaccessible terrain and tribal fiefdoms. Palwasha Saboori, director, Afghan Women Training and Development Organisation, said hundreds of women are trafficked every year. Still, it remains a hidden crime, one that the government is not combating, said Saboori. In the last two years alone, her organisation has rescued 319 women and girls. "Almost all of them were sexually abused," said Saboori.

At present, 727 victims of rape and trafficking are being rehabilitated at eight shelters run by the Afghan government. These shelters, first established in 2007, are temporary homes providing protection, accommodation, training and health care to the victims. Many such shelters are managed by local and international NGOs. Victims who cannot find a place in the shelters often end up in prison. "We have an army of victims in Afghanistan. But we do not have enough shelters to rehabilitate them," said Zakia Baryalti, director, ministry of women's affairs. At a shelter in Kabul, I met Marzah, a young girl from Logar province, who, after months of therapy, was able to speak about her ordeal. She said she was raped when she was nine, and was then sold into sexual slavery. All she wants now is a life in oblivion. "I do not want to return to my village. My family will kill me. I have brought such shame to them," said Marzah.

In another Kabul shelter, Perveen Jan told me the story of how she had survived bombs, only to be trapped in a brothel. The US bombing of 2001 had destroyed countless villages like hers. Amidst the raging war she fled to the nearest town, Jalalabad, where the situation was a little better. Then, her

mother called her and told her about a prospective groom. She thought the marriage was fixed, only to realise a few weeks later that she was sold to him for 20,000 Afghani. She would be traded to ten men over the next three years. In 2011, a pimp drove her across the Turkhan border checkpoint into Pakistan. Here, she had to dance semi-naked, entertain rich men, and have sex with customers who paid her owner a few thousand Pakistani rupees. Last year, when her Pakistani owner was away, she escaped and fled to Jalalabad. Now, she is traumatised and unable to speak.

"She has been destroyed," said Zaibesh, 21, her friend at the shelter and a victim herself. "When I met her and heard her story, I forgot all my pain and misery." Zaibesh's parents were killed by her brother-in-law for trying to protect her from sexual abuse. The killer has threatened to kill her too for running away. As she spoke about how she was repeatedly raped and abused, she suddenly paused and cried out loud, "People have done such bad things to me. I just hate myself for what I have gone through." In her brimming green eyes you can read the tragedy of a land drained by war.

The Afghan constitution, written after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, enshrines equal rights for men and women. And, the new landmark law, passed in 2009, has for the first time criminalised forced marriages. Yet, women remain at the receiving end. Like the overwhelming presence of foreign troops on Afghanistan's streets, there is also the overwhelming absence of women in public.

Every day, from different parts of the country, complaints pour in to the office of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. "Trafficking of women is going largely unreported due to tribal and societal acceptance of the practice," said Dr Sima Samar, chairperson, AIHRC. As a young girl, Sima lived through the civil war between Mujahideen groups, which ravaged Kabul before the Taliban conquest in 1996.

She witnessed unimaginable cruelty and many deaths. "Much of the brutality you see these days," she said, "is because people have become insane from all these wars." Last year, an AIHRC survey on trafficking confirmed that majority of trafficked women had lost their parents in the war and had no family support and protection. Others were caught in the vicious cycle because of extreme poverty and early, forced marriages. "Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. There are hardly any jobs for the young.

Then there is a growing uncertainty about the future," said Sima. "All these conditions make Afghanistan ideal for human trafficking."

The trafficking network has both local and international routes. The routes, most often, connect to Gulf countries (mostly, the UAE), Pakistan and Iran; India is a relatively new destination. Traffickers exploit vulnerabilities and lack of opportunities. They make promises of marriage, employment, education, or a better life.

Once a girl lands in New Delhi, the agents use surrogate advertisements, promising 'massage' and 'escort services', to attract clients. Some Indian newspapers are riddled with scores of such ads promising full body massage. They offer 24-hour service, at home and in hotels. Online advertisements boast of "hot Afghani girls" who are "always ready to do anything with you for your betterment and satisfaction."

Delhi Police Deputy Commissioner (crime) S. B. S. Tyagi said that there was a huge influx of foreign sex workers to India. "We have arrested many such girls," he said. He confirmed that Afghan girls were new entrants. He said, "We enforce anti-prostitution laws by checking classified advertisements and the internet for those soliciting sex, but it is difficult to clamp down on high-class prostitutes and clients whose liaisons are usually arranged in private."

The Kabul Police's chief of criminal investigation, General Mohammad Zahir, told THE WEEK that his department was aware of Afghan girls working as call girls in India. "They may have been cheated and exploited," he said. "We do not have details of how these women were trafficked to India, but we are raising the issue with our counterparts in India. On the face value, this seems to be a part of well-organised criminal gang."

The introduction of a direct flight between Kandahar and Delhi and an increase in the number of Kabul-Delhi flights has in part facilitated the trafficking. In a bid to strengthen its ties with Afghanistan, India has also been generous with visas; in 2012, the Indian embassy in Kabul issued around 58,000 visas. Though the majority of them were for patients, a good number were also for young Afghans in search of a better life and future.

Zakia said Indian movies and TV serials were very popular in Afghanistan. "When Afghan girls watch these movies, they dream of a world where

women are free," said Zakia. "They run away and become very vulnerable." She said that the decades of war made the youth ignorant of the outside world. At the ministry, when Zakia was talking to me, Khatija, an old woman from the Taliban-dominated Maidan Wardak province, came to check about Zia Gul, a missing girl from her neighbourhood. Zakia's staff made a series of calls to the shelters in Kabul, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif, to trace Zia. Unfortunately, there was no news. Khatija was told that Zia might have escaped to Iran, Pakistan, or, perhaps, India.

"She was a free spirit," said Khatija, showing me the picture of a tall, beautiful blonde. Two days before she went missing, Zia had visited Khatija's home to show off a new dress. Now Zia's family is accusing Khatija of selling her to traffickers. "Her brothers have threatened to kill me, if I do not bring her back," Khatija said, almost talking to herself. "Where can I find her?" In Kabul, authorities never believed that sex trade was flourishing, until 2005, when General Ali Shah Paktiwal, who was chief of criminal investigations, got a tip-off that the scores of Chinese restaurants in the city were actually fronts for brothels.

The subsequent police raids uncovered how the years of war and influx of foreigners had created a burgeoning demand for sex trade. "What surprised me was that all those brothels were being run in the heart of city," recalled Paktiwal. "The brothels were largely serving foreign security contractors, NGOs and spies."

Paktiwal said that around 96 Chinese women were arrested and deported. A high-profile case alleged that American security company RA International was running a popular brothel called Light House. At the time of the raid, RA International was providing security to the US embassy in Kabul and was a sub-contractor of ArmorGroup North America, Inc. The brothel was raided after James Gordon, then RA International director of operations, turned whistleblower. The case became so sensational that details about the investigation were never made public.

In Afghanistan, far more controversial is the issue of local sex workers, who stay underground in a society that pretends that they do not exist. Prostitution is so taboo here that the car industry went into a tizzy in 2011 when a pimp bought a flashy car with the number 39. Overnight, nobody wanted cars with plates numbered 39. The number had become a synonym for pimps! People even avoided mobile phones with the dreaded digits.

Here, all extra-marital sex is defined as adultery and is prohibited both by customary and statutory laws, with harsh punishments for prostitutes and their customers, which include not just prison but even being sentenced to be stoned to death.

Farzana Wahidy, an award-winning Afghan photographer, was the first to film the secret trade (see box). In 2008, while following a story on Afghan women, she came to know about a brothel in Kabul. It looked like a normal house from the outside. "Inside, I noticed that there were only women," she said. "They were working as sex workers. Instead of going out, they were using cell phones to contact their customers."

In the brothel, the oldest girl was a 15-year-old orphan who had lost her parents in a rocket attack on Kabul. Another girl, an 11-year-old, became sex worker after she was repeatedly molested by a man who had lost a leg in a landmine explosion.

The most touching story was of a young girl in Herat who set herself afire to evade pimps. "She was in such pain. Her body had almost burnt completely," recalled Farzana. Later, when Farzana saw her old pictures, she could not control her tears. "She was so beautiful," said Farzana. The terrifying fact is that the Herat girl is not the only woman in Afghanistan to take such drastic action. Every year, hundreds of desperate Afghan women commit suicide by self-immolation to escape abusive marriages, abusive in-laws, poverty and forced prostitution.

"This is not merely a women's issue," said Shukria Barakzai, MP and leading Afghan politician. "It is an economic problem, a societal problem, a migration problem and most of all a question of the future of this country." Her concern over women's declining status has deepened as the Hamid Karzai government seeks reconciliation with the Taliban. "The Taliban is not the solution to anything," she said. "The government has to protect and respect the honour of every citizen of this country. Unfortunately, it has failed to do that."

As music blared from the loudspeakers in the dimly-lit cafe in South Delhi, Diljan's cell phone rang. Her response was brief – "Yes, yes, I'm coming." She hurriedly finished her cigarette and got up. She had a customer to attend to, and a car was waiting downstairs. I followed her outside, and before she left, one last question – did she want to leave her profession? The answer came, wrapped in loud laughter: "It is my business. It was the will of God."

Names of victims have been changed to protect their identities.

Bravely Fought the Teen

February 17, 2011

This is about Sunita Murmu, a young woman from the tribal community who lodged a complaint against the powerful criminal elements in her community for sexually harassing, torturing and ostracizing her. She followed up her complaint bravely and ensured that the leaders concerned were arrested.

Young Sunita lodged a complaint against the powerful criminal elements in her tribal community and ensured that they were arrested for sexually harassing, torturing and ostracising her.

Sixteen-year-old Sunita Murmu is quite the celeb in her locality these days. This teenager had the courage to approach the remote Mohammadbazar police station in Birbhum, one of West Bengal's most backward districts, and lodge a complaint against the powerful criminal elements in her community. Of course, she did not stop there. Young Sunita also ensured that the men were arrested for sexually harassing, torturing and ostracising her.

Not so long ago, Sunita was just another tribal girl, with little education, living quietly in a male-dominated society. She had no idea of her rights and spent her days working as a daily wage labourer to support her parents. And like most girls her age, she too fell in love. Her life, however, turned into a nightmare the day her involvement with a non-tribal boy from the nearby village was discovered by the local tribal *panchayat* in June last year.

The self-proclaimed *panchayat* met and decided on the punishment for her romantic attachment: She was stripped publicly and made to walk around the village, even while being jeered at and sexually harassed by random villagers. Those who were party to this heinous crime went a step further; they took photos and videos of her in that situation, and turned them into multimedia messages (MMS) that were forwarded to everyone in the village as a warning to other girls not to repeat Sunita's crime.



Saadia Azim, Business Line

Sadia Azim is with The Business Line, Kolkata. She won the award for the Best Human Interest Story at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Eastern Region.

Not one person came to the rescue of the traumatised young girl, including the police at the nearby Mohammad bazaar station. Her shocked parents, too, could be of little assistance. For about two hours, Sunita was forced to walk nearly 8 kms. after which she was literally dumped. Plucking up whatever courage she had left, Sunita made her way back home only to be taunted by neighbours and others. No case was registered against her attackers and no one dared defy the tribal *panchayat's* diktat, even though the area has an elected *panchayat*.

As the community leaders were party to the crime, all evidence was tampered with. For two months, Sunita remained isolated in a corner of her hut. It was during these dark days that she resolved to raise her voice for justice. Her parents tried hard to dissuade her and divert her attention.

Meanwhile, the MMS continued on their rounds. Those close to her family advised her to forget the incident and move ahead. Looking back, Sunita says, I wondered how people thought I could forget what happened to me. I am living with that pain, which will remain for all time. But I shall now fight against all crimes against women in the name of traditional values.

When the police knocked on her door during an inquiry two months later, her family dissuaded her from speaking up. But Sunita decided to go ahead and fight on her own. She told the police everything that happened and lodged a formal complaint. But there was no evidence except for the MMS doing the rounds. None was willing to testify, either out of fear or in solidarity with the perpetrators who were viewed as safeguarding tribal values.

But there was no stopping Sunita. As Bidhan Ray, the Sub-Divisional officer (SDO) of Rampurhat investigating the case, recalls, it was amazing to see a victim so confident. We thought she may be in depression and would not cooperate. Also, in such cases the chances of victims turning hostile are very high. But Sunita could identify the criminals since they were from her locality and she knew them well. Her confidence won everyone's support.

Just two days after the complaint was filed, the six main accused were arrested. Barely out of their teens, the accused had allegedly incited the crowd and later forced everyone to keep quiet.

Fearing a backlash from the community, Sunita was sent to a government welfare home 'Pushparag' in Rampurhat. She remains there even today,

trying to pick up the pieces of her life. She has learnt weaving and embroidery, and the district administration has opened a savings account for her.

It was a proud moment for Sunita when the district administration decided to propose her name for the National Bravery awards. It is an unusual case because, despite being a victim, Sunita fought for herself. We decided to propose her name as she has not just taken on criminals but also stood up against organised crime, regressive and outdated values, and self-proclaimed, unauthorised *panchayat*-like bodies, says Saumitra Mohan, the district magistrate of Birbhum.

Sunita was among the 26 children who were honoured by President Pratibha Patil with the National Bravery Award last month. Sunita has been able to regain control of her life. She is a fast learner and mixes well with other teenagers. Yet, she continues to lead a life of seclusion and ostracism, admits Satyabrata Banerjee, the superintendent of her welfare home.

Many of Sunita's family members refuse to talk to her. The accused are out on bail and the locals fear her life may be in danger at her Santhal village of



The Hindu: Sunita Murmu of West Bengal receiving a memento from President Pratibha Patil when the National Bravery Award winners of 2010 called on her at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.
Photo: V. Sudershan

Burtola, where the majority are daily wagers or dependent on government schemes for their livelihood. But Sunita remains unfazed, I have not gone back but it does not mean I have done anything wrong. I want to finish my studies and fight for the rights of others who have been abandoned like me.

Her courage has proved inspiring for many other girls in the region. Kuntalshree Bhattacharya, the headmistress of a local girls' school, says, I keep telling my girls that enduring crime is equal to being a party to it. Learn from Sunita, who could win accolades for defying the wrong in society.

Sunita's friend at her village, who wishes to remain unnamed out of fear, says, "We are proud of her. But what is alarming is that the culprits are roaming free while the one who fought for what is right is living away from home."

But things are slowly changing, with voices now raised in her support. Women's organisations are demanding that Sunita should be rehabilitated within the community. Says District Magistrate Mohan, "We are trying our best, but for now she has to concentrate on her studies and the skills she is learning at the welfare home. It is a three-year course and Sunita is enjoying interacting with her new friends. Meanwhile, her accomplishments are being recognised even within her community. Our assessment is that her medal, the cash prize and the national recognition will gradually change public opinion in her village."



Sunita Murmu with the Welfare Home Superintendent. At the Home, Sunita has been able to take back control of her life as she is learning new skills like weaving and embroidery.

Section 376, The Week

The Week started the campaign Section 376 in January 2013, a few weeks after the Nirbhaya incident of December 2012, as a sustained year long regular feature on sexual violence that women face at home and outside. Written by staff correspondents of the magazine, this series addresses a wide range of issues relating to rape with the intention of making readers, police and governments better understand and prevent crimes against women. Besides dealing with the trauma of rape victims, the series examines unprofessional, unscientific and inhuman methods of evidence collected by investigators and doctors as well as apathy shown to victims at police stations. It also explores the insecure lives of girls in slums and what the girl child goes through when the rapist is a guardian or a person known to her. While discussing the everyday hazards faced by girls and women, it also informs readers about precautions that they can take against sexual predators. Reproduced are two articles from the series.

Rise Against Rape

In India, a woman is raped every 22 minutes. In 2011, Delhi saw 572 rape cases. Madhya Pradesh topped the list with 3,406 cases. These figures could be an understatement, as many rapes are not reported, for reasons ranging from the police refusing to register a complaint, to powerful men intimidating victims and shame on the victim's part.

On December 17, the day a paramedical student was gang-raped in Delhi, a 13-year-old tribal girl was raped by two men at Khadra village in Madhya Pradesh. Going by the statistics, at least a hundred women were raped on the same day. The rapes, however, went unnoticed; there was no public outrage against them, like what we saw at India Gate.

Every rape is brutal. Every rape is violent. Each one is horrifying. On the face of it, the only difference between the cases in Delhi and in Madhya Pradesh is in the degree of brutality. Yet, our responses to them have been starkly

SECTION 376

The Week carried a year-long campaign to raise awareness about the various issues related to the heinous crime of rape entitled "Section 376". The Week was awarded for the Best Campaign at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Southern Region.



different. True, the little girl in Madhya Pradesh went back to her job as a daily-wage labourer while the 23-year-old Delhi student is fighting for her life. But the inhumanity of the act of rape itself, not to mention the violation of the body and the mind, is no different for the two girls. Or for that matter, any woman, man, child or transsexual.

Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code defines rape and lays down punishment for the crime. Enacted by the British in 1870, the law is woefully inadequate. The Supreme Court, in *Sakshi v. the Union of India*, recognised its failings and suggested that the legislature amend it.

We decided to call THE WEEK's campaign against sexual assault on women by this name: Section 376. We hope this campaign is at once a reminder, an appeal and a resolve to fight crimes against women. At a point when emotions are running high and votaries of retributive justice seem to be winning hands down, we hope that this column makes each of us introspect.

This column will speak of stories of violated lives as well as societal attitudes that, though not directly a cause for rape, feed a mindset that perpetuates this most terrible violation. The first story, by Deepak Tiwari, is that of the tribal girl who was raped at Khadra in the heart of India. Sakhi (name changed) dropped out of school when her father died of malaria a few years ago. The daughter of a landless Kol tribal and the fifth of seven children, she lives in a mud house in a hamlet called Khadra, a few kilometres from Karondi, which is geographically the central point of the country.

Like most tribal girls in the village, Sakhi works as a daily-wage labourer. She is considered 'half labour' by her employer, as she is a minor. During the harvest season though, she is treated as an 'adult' and entitled to full wages. She goes to work with her mother, and they ensure each other's safety. They were working in the fields on December 17 when the mother received a message that a distant relative was coming to their house to finalise the marriage of her eldest son, Marra. At three in the afternoon, the mother asked Sakhi to go home; the house had to be white-washed to receive the guests.

Sakhi was walking home when two young men of her village, Shankar Bedia and Barati Kol, abducted her on their motorcycle to a secluded place. "They tied my hands and left me in a well till late evening," she said later. "In the night, they took me to the field of Shankar Bedia and kept me in the farm hut." She was repeatedly raped for the next 48 hours. It was on the evening of the second day that Shankar's uncle, Soni Bedia, found the girl and released her.

Sakhi told her mother and her elder sister's husband, who lives close by, about the incident. Mustering great courage, the three reported the matter to the police. In rural India, no complainant can register an FIR without spending hours at the police station. Sakhi was no exception. After hours at the police station, she was sent for a medical examination and a case was registered under sections 341, 342 and 363 (abduction and confinement), 366 (compelling for intercourse) and 376 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code.

Even a week later, fear is writ large on Sakhi's face. She has lost all confidence. Along with her mother, she is back labouring in the fields. The neighbours hang around her house, guiding a regular stream of visiting police and administrative officials, who are busy making a case for mandatory compensation given to rape victims belonging to the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. Said Sakhi's mother: "Nothing has changed for us. Our life is as usual. For poor people like us, the priorities are different. I am concerned about tomorrow's meal. Nothing else."

Though they are poor, the family is not covered by 'below poverty line' benefits. They are so scared of the police that four years ago, when Sakhi's nephew, a toddler, went missing, the family did not even go to the police station.

There are no anti-rape protests in Khadra. Shankar and Barati have been arrested and sent to jail. Sakhi's family is reluctant to speak about the case. But for some whispers at the tea-stall in the village, life here has moved on.

Armed with an App

THE WEEK campaign: Applications that can help you in times of distress should be part of every woman's phone.

If the city cannot protect its women, it's time women found their own tools and techniques to tackle harassment and safety threats of any kind. For the tech-savvy woman, a number of applications have been launched to provide that sense of security in times of emergency, says Senior Correspondent Sharmista Chaudhury.

Situation 1: It's late and you are on your way from work. You get down at the bus stop and walk towards home through that familiar narrow dark alley. You hear footsteps behind and catch the sight of a shadow. You walk as fast as your legs can carry you. In a few minutes, you feel another shadow has joined the first.

Situation 2: You are waiting by the sidewalk to let a procession pass by. You can't move an inch in that tightly-packed crowd and suddenly you feel a hand touching you.

Whether you are alone or in a crowd, the question is always the same: what will you do? While in a crowd you may try to fight back or cry out loud, but will those around you help? What if you had a device that could scream when you are in trouble, or alert people within a 3 km. radius, or inform your loved ones in case of an emergency?



With applications permeating almost every aspect of urban life, it was only a matter of time before they provided a solution for women's safety, too. Says Annie Mathew, director, alliances and business development, BlackBerry India: "Women must have every tool at their disposal to tackle harassment and safety threats of any kind. Mobile applications are a critical part of this new age armoury. In the light of recent events that have highlighted the need for enhanced safety for women, apps like the Panic Alarm Button are particularly popular and have seen many downloads by women looking to ensure their own safety."

By the time schoolteacher Siddhi Mehta, 23, heads out to work, the city is just waking up. The early morning train travel did not worry her much till she heard that a 58-year-old woman was gang-raped near the Santacruz railway station in Mumbai. Reports suggest that the woman was groped at the station as she got off the train and then dragged to a bus stop near the station where she was forced to drink alcohol and then raped. "That incident scared me," says Mehta, who travels to that station every morning. "Even if you have a pepper spray, you might not be able to use it at the time. However, you always have your phone in your hand." She has installed an application, Bachao, on her phone that sends text messages to five people on her contact list at the touch of a button.

After news of the Delhi gang-rape shook the nation, app developer Kamlesh Yadav decided to address the problem. He came up with Awaaz. "The idea was to create a system for women's safety, so anyone within a 3km radius would be alerted," he says.

The latest and probably the most publicised application is VithU, an initiative by Channel V, which stemmed from its crime-based television show, Gumrah. The app, which has had four lakh downloads, sends alerts every two minutes to designated contacts if you press the power button twice. App developer Erick Rustomjee from Bombay Works says it is only a matter of time before more nuanced applications hit the market. "I think right now the technology is in its infancy; this is just the beginning," he says. "As soon as the platform goes forward, we will see more features and functionality."

Trupti Deshmukh, 30, a photographer who works for a social media marketing company, travels on work quite often. For her, these apps have become a means to pacify the family. "After the photojournalist's rape

in Mumbai, my family insisted that I keep such a safety app to alert them," she says.

While many women have embraced the technology, there are those who think that an application is merely an appendage to tackling the real issue. Even if it does have an impact, it will not have a broad base, says technology writer Jubin Meha. "I feel they do not work," he says. "These applications are preventive, but we also need apps that spread awareness or tackle the root problem."

Incidentally, there is some amount of work being done in this sphere, too. An online initiative, Harassmap-Mumbai launched by Akshara, aims at encouraging women to report any form of sexual harassment on a web site. Actor Rahul Bose, who has worked closely with the initiative, says, "In the US, with a population of 313 million people, 84,000 cases of rapes were reported last year. While in India, with a population of 1.2 billion, only 24,900 cases were reported. This shows that many cases are not being reported. This map will give a true picture of how Mumbai treats its women." The idea is to map the trends perceived on the site and then work with the police to make these areas safer.

APPS YOU CAN USE

Sentinel: Sends smses and emails to emergency contacts

Nirbhaya: Sends alerts during emergency situations; you can also send messages by shaking the phone.

Scream Alarm: The app literally screams

Panic Alarm Button with Flashlight and GPS on BlackBerry 10: Press the red panic button and the phone will send a message with a link to Google Maps with your GPS- or GSM-based coordinates.

VithU: Press the power button twice to send out messages to listed contacts, who will also receive updates on your location.

Even Men are Vulnerable

December 11, 2013

A part of a four-part series, this story is about the controversial issue of making Section 375 of the IPC more gender neutral. It talks about the fact that men too can be sexually assaulted. Such cases are rarely reported or acknowledged, but are traumatic for the survivor. Often they are not believed and there is no law to protect them resulting in few cases being reported. The story is based on the experience of a 24-year-old man who was assaulted.

For those who think only women can be raped, this is going to be a shocker. While Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code is definitely made to address sexual violence against women, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, doesn't seem to be as gender neutral as a law is supposed to be.

The rape of a 24-year-old boy by nine men, that took place about a year ago in the slums of Kurla, was never reported by the victim to the police as he knew that his complaint would not be taken seriously. He knew nobody would believe that a man can be raped.

The incident left the youth scarred physically and mentally. The ADC got to know about the case through an NGO in the city. Details about the NGO and the victim have been kept confidential on request. The ADC spoke to the victim's friends about the incident as the victim was apparently not in the state of mind to talk about it.

“Abhi thoda thoda woh bhoola hai uske baare main. Par hume pata hai kya hua. Aur hum sach hi batayenge”, said a close friend of the victim. (He has slightly gotten over it. But we know what has happened and we will only tell the truth.)

“This happened six months ago. He was at a bus stop in Kurla waiting for a bus to get back home when a boy came to him and lured him into going with him. Usne meethi meethi baatein karke use phasa liya aur apne saath le gaya.



Shwetha Kannan, Afternoon Despatch and Courier

Shwetha Kannan works with Afternoon Courier and Despatch. She won the award for the Best Feature at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2013-14, Western Region.

(He sweet-talked our friend into accompanying him.) He took him to a nearby slum and there my friend noticed nine people waiting. Before my friend could react, all the nine men caught him and forced themselves on him. Uske saath zor zabardasti ki aur bahut amaanviya tareeke se uska rape kiya.” (They raped him in a very inhuman manner.)

The boy was subjected to rape for an hour and a half and was then left at the spot by his assaulters.

“He somehow managed to reach home. It was a Saturday. On Monday when he met us, he was a changed man. From being talkative and chirpy he had become silent. We noticed that he was unable to concentrate on his work and that he used to cry silently when he was alone. And it was only later that we got to know about what had happened.”

The victim had to be counselled for a week and was administered Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) as precautionary measure against contracting the HIV virus.

“It was only after his HIV tests came negative that he started feeling better. He is okay now,” said a friend.

Can Men be Raped?

“Yes,” says eminent psychiatrist Dr. Harish Shetty. “Cases of men being sexually assaulted are not uncommon. And when there is one victim and many assaulters then, yes, rape is possible. Men are often raped by men when in a drunken state at parties. Such cases do happen but go unnoticed because they are never reported.”

Dr. Shetty said, “Such cases aren’t reported because of shame and guilt, because men feel that nobody will believe them, because the law is weak, because nobody wants to come out of the shell and talk about the incident and finally, because of the fear of being labelled ‘gay’.”

According to Dr. Shetty, the way to handle such cases is to have gender inclusive and gender sensitive laws and more open dialogues about rape, irrespective of the gender of the victim.

“The concept of men being raped needs to be legitimised now,” said Dr. Shetty.

Bindumadhav Khire, a gay activist and president of Samapathik Trust, Pune, said, “If one goes by the definition of rape given in Indian law, then men cannot be raped because, according to the law, it is only for women by men. Forcible peno-vaginal penetration, use of fingers or objects, oral or anal sex does amount to rape now-a-days, but it is only for women. When any of this happens to men, it is considered to be unnatural sex. I am of the opinion that the definition of rape needs to be revised and that anti-rape laws should be more gender inclusive.”



Singer Usha Uthup being felicitated by Dolly Thakore at the National LMA, 2011-12 in Mumbai.

भारतीय समाज में बढ़ता यौन उत्पीड़न

In this editorial in Hindi, the author enumerates the reasons for the increase in violence against women. He brings out the fact that while there has been a lot of social and economic.

अभी हाल ही में सामूहिक बलात्कार की दिल दहलाने वाली घटना दिल्ली में हुई उसने सारे देश को उद्वेलित कर दिया। इस बात का महत्व नहीं कि पीड़िता का नाम क्या था, उसकी जाति और शहर क्या है? महत्व इसका है कि यह सब आए दिन हो रहा है। हमारा समाज इसे रोकने में असमर्थ है। आज से 25-30 साल पहले सामूहिक बलात्कार जैसी घटनाएं शायद ही सुनने में आती थीं।

तो फिर इस अंतराल में ऐसा क्या हो गया कि राक्षसी भावनाओं का उदय हो गया। पिछली एक चौथाई शताब्दी में जो परिवर्तन आए उससे दौलत बढ़ी है, औसत आयु बढ़ी है, शिक्षा और चिकित्सा की सुविधाएं मुहैया हुई हैं, और इन सब के साथ ही बढ़ी है हमारे कुछ नौजवानों में हिंसा और उदंडता। अभिभावक सोचते हैं उनका बच्चा विद्यालय जाएगा तो शिक्षित और सभ्य बन जाएगा, लेकिन हमेशा ऐसा होता नहीं। हमारे विद्यालयों और विश्वविद्यालयों में कुछ छात्र राजनीति की ट्रेनिंग लेने जाते हैं और ऐसे नौजवान वे सभी हथकंडे सीखते हैं जो आज के राजनीतिक जगत में प्रचलित हैं। छेड़छाड़ और यौन उत्पीड़न का सिलसिला भी वहीं से शुरू होता है। सबसे अधिक यौन उत्पीड़न सहन करती हैं वे महिलाएं जो घर से निकल कर समाज में कुछ करना चाहती हैं। अनाचार करने वाले होते हैं ऐसे लोग जो सम्पन्न घरों से आते हैं, और जिनके माता-पिता अपने बेटे के



Shiv Balak Misra

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अपराधों को जानते हुए भी पूरी ताकत लगाकर छोड़ा लेते हैं। हमारी पुलिस चाहे सम्पन्न परिवारों के दबाव में या फिर यौन उत्पीड़न को गंभीर अपराध न मानते हुए अदालतों में गुनहगारों को सज़ा नहीं दिला पाती। कभी कभार स्वयं पुलिस पर ही यौन उत्पीड़न के आरोप लगते रहते हैं।

समाज के कुछ लोगों का सोचना है कि गैंगरेप जैसे अपराधियों को फांसी पर लटका देना चाहिए, कुछ का मानना है ऐसे लोगों को नपुंसक बनाकर छोड़ देना चाहिए। यह सच है कि दस-बीस लोगों को फांसी पर लटकाने से कुछ डर तो पैदा होगा, लेकिन अपराध रुक जाएंगे, कहना कठिन है। विभिन्न देशों की अपनी व्यवस्थाएं और सोच हैं। इस्लामिक देशों में सख्त से सख्त कानून प्रचलित हैं। इसके विपरीत इन देशों में जघन्य अपराधी को अगर सुधरने का मौका दिया भी जाता है तो उसे बेनकाब किया जाता है। हमारे समाज में दोषियों की पहचान तक कभी कभार ही सामने आती है, जिनमें सम्पन्न लोगों की बहुतायत रहती है। चिंता का विषय है कि जिन परिवारों में दौलत है, वर्चस्व है और समाज को सुधारने का दायित्व है, वे ही अपने बच्चों पर इतना भी ध्यान नहीं दे पाते कि उनकी संगत किनके साथ है, वे पढ़ते या देखते क्या हैं? ऐसे परिवारों बच्चे बुरी संगत में पड़कर अपराधी बन सकते हैं। दोष नौजवानों का काम परन्तु अभिभावकों का अधिक है। परिणाम यह है कि भारत के शहरी युवाओं में गाँवों की अपेक्षा राक्षसी प्रवृत्तियां बहुत तेजी से बढ़ रहीं हैं।

पुलिस को अपराधियों की पूरी जानकारी आवश्यक रहती होगी। उसी आधार पर अपराधी पकड़े जाते हैं, पुलिस की गिरसत में आने के बाद भी आखिर क्या कारण है कि दोषियों को सजा नहीं मिल पाती। क्या पुलिस पूरी जानकारी अदालतों में पेश करने में असमर्थ होती है या हमारे कानून ही लचर हैं। अपराधियों को साधारण सजा भी कुछ ही मामलों में मिल पाती है, फांसी आदि की बात कौन कहे।

यौन उत्पीड़न के खिलाफ राष्ट्रीय चेतना पहल कभी इतने व्यापक आन्दोलन में नहीं बदली। अब लागों ने समझ लिया है कि राक्षस आदतें तेजी से तब बढ़ती हैं जब अपराधियों के लिए अपराध करके बच निकलना सरल होता है। अमेरिका जैसे देशों में जहां परमिसिव सोसायटी है अर्थात लड़के, लड़कियों के मिलने-जुलने की आजादी है, वहां भी यौन उत्पीड़न करने वालों के रजिस्टर बने हैं, आप उनमें नाम, पता आदि इंटरनेट पर देख सकते हैं। परन्तु हमारी व्यवस्था में समाज ने रक्षात्मक रुख अपनाते हुए महिलाओं को पर्दे में डाल दिया और घर से निकलना बन्द कर दिया अथवा बाल विवाह कर दिया। इससे काम नहीं चलेगा। राक्षसी मानसिकता के विकास के कई स्तर हैं, और उसके उन्मूलन के लिए बच्चों के अभिभावक, विद्यालयों के प्रशासक, देश के राजनेता, फिल्म निर्माताओं और पुलिस को अपनी-अपनी जिम्मेदारी निभानी होगी। अदालतें तभी अपना काम कर पाएंगी और अपराधियों पर अंकुश लग सकेगा।



Journalist Shiv Balak Mishra receiving the Award from Singer Sunita Rao at the National LMA, 2012-13.

‘गर्भलिंगनिवड’ हा शब्दप्रयोग रुजवूया !

September 14, 2012

This article in Marathi touches on how the movement against ‘pre-birth sex selection’ should not affect a woman’s lawful right to abortion and why the words ‘female foeticide’ should be replaced by ‘pre-birth sex selection’ as the usage of the former hampers a woman’s right to terminate her pregnancy, etc. The author has analysed this issue from a right’s perspective.

दर जनगणनेत ० ते ६ वयोगटातील मुलींची संख्या कमी होत होत ती २०११ मध्ये दर हजार मुलगांमागे ९१४ एवढी खाली आली आहे. जुनी बुरसटलेली पितृसत्ताक विचारसरणी आणि आधुनिक तंत्रज्ञानाचा गैरवापर यातून ही गंभीर सामाजिक स्वास्थ्याची समस्या तयार झाली आहे. कमी होणाऱ्या मुलींच्या प्रमाणाकडे लक्ष वेधण्यासाठी ‘स्त्रीभ्रूणहत्या’ हा चुकीचा शब्द सर्रास वापरला जातो. तो अयोग्य का आहे ते प्रथम पाहूया.

‘स्त्रीभ्रूणहत्या’ हा शब्द स्त्री, भ्रूण आणि हत्या या तीन शब्दांच्या जोडणीतून तयार झाला आहे. त्यातील ‘हत्या’ हा उपशब्द गंभीर सामाजिक प्रश्नाला सनसनाटी बनवितो. हत्येला कोणी तरी जबाबदार असतो/ असते. या ‘हत्येला’ कोण जबाबदार, याचे उत्तर ‘अशाप्रकरणातील डॉक्टर्स, कुटुंबीय आणि स्त्री’ असे असले तरी यामध्ये प्राधान्याने स्त्री जबाबदार आहे असे सूचित केले जाते. प्रत्यक्षात गर्भलिंगनिवडीसाठी गर्भार स्त्रीवर नाना प्रकारे दबाव आणले जातात. काही वेळा स्त्रीदेखील गर्भलिंगनिवडीसाठी कसलाही कौटुंबिक दबाव नसताना तयार होते. अशा स्त्रियांनी समानतेच्या मूल्यांच्या ऐवजी पुरुषप्रधान मूल्ये स्वीकारलेली असतात. बहुतेक वेळी स्त्री पुरुषप्रधानतेची बळी असते.



Aruna Burte, Divya Marathi

Aruna Burte is a feminist activist and has been consistently writing on gender issues. She was awarded for Consistent Engagement with Gender Issues at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Western Region.

आरोग्यसेवेच्या व्यवस्थेत ती डॉक्टरांच्या तुलनेत सर्वात खालच्या पायरीवर असते. तरीही तिलाच गर्भलिंगनिवडीसाठी जबाबदार धरून गंभीर गुंतागुंतीच्या प्रश्नाला सोपे उत्तर देण्याची वृत्ती वाढीस लागते.

‘स्त्रीभ्रूणहत्या’ या जोडशब्दाच्या वापरामुळे विचार चुकीच्या मार्गाने भरकटतात. उदाहरणार्थ, गर्भलिंगनिवडीच्या प्रकरणाला मनुष्य वधाचे फौजदारी कलम ३०२ लावावे, असे जाहीर विधान अधिकारपदावरील व्यक्ती करतात. ‘हत्या’ रोखण्यासाठी प्रत्येक गर्भपाताची नोंदणी व्हावी आणि अर्भकाचे फोटो काढून ठेवावेत; गर्भपाताच्या कायद्यात बदल करावेत; सायलेंट ऑबझरवर बसवावेत यासारखे इतर उपाय सुचविले जातात. गर्भपाताचा अधिकार अधिक मर्यादित करावा- म्हणजे २० आठवड्यांच्या ऐवजी १० आठवड्यांच्या आतील गर्भपात वैध करावा, असे आरोग्यमंत्री म्हणतात! सुरक्षित गर्भपात सेवा हा स्त्रीच्या प्रजनन हक्कापैकी एक महत्वाचा हक्क आहे. १९७१ च्या वैद्यकीय गर्भपात कायद्याने तो मिळाला आहे. ‘स्त्रीभ्रूणहत्या’ या शब्द वापरामुळे गर्भपात विरोधी वातावरण तयार होते. त्यामुळे विशिष्ट अटीखाली स्त्रीला असलेल्या गर्भपाताच्या अधिकारावर गदा येते आणि छुपेपणाने गर्भपात होण्याला प्रोत्साहन मिळते. परिणामी धोकादायक गर्भपातापासून होण्याचा त्रासात आणि मरणात असंख्य स्त्रिया ढकलल्या जातात.

मुली नाहीशा होत आहेत, कारण त्या आज नकोश्या आहेत. त्यामागे सामाजिक, सांस्कृतिक, आर्थिक आणि राजकीय कारणे आहेत. स्त्रियांवरील अत्याचारांमागे असते स्त्री-पुरुषांच्या मनांतील पिढ्यानापिढ्या वाहत आलेली पुरुषसत्ताकता. जमीनजुमला घर आणि संपत्ती सर्वसाधारणपणे पुरुषाच्या नावाने असते. लग्नानंतर स्त्री पतीचे नाव/आडनाव लावते. लग्नात मुलगी कन्यादान करून “दिली” जाते. श्रमविभागणी लिंगाधारित असते. ही पितृसत्तेची महत्वाची लक्षणे. पितृसत्तेचे हे आधार जाणीवपूर्वक नष्ट केले तरच समन्यायी व्यवस्था निर्माण करता येईल. ‘स्त्रीभ्रूणहत्या’ या शब्दातून पितृसत्ताकतेच्या या

वास्तवापासून दुसरीकडे लक्ष वळते. या उलट, गर्भलिंगनिवड हा शब्द पुरुषप्रधानतेकडे सरळ बोट दाखवितो.

या संदर्भात पीसीपीएनडीटी म्हणजेच '२००३ चा गर्भलिंगनिवड प्रतिबंध' कायदा काय सांगतो तेही पाहू:

- गर्भधारणेपूर्वी गर्भलिंग निवड करणे म्हणजेच तो मुलीचा का मुलाचा ते ठरवणे,
 - पोटातल्या गर्भाचे लिंग तपासणे,
 - गर्भाचे लिंग काय आहे ते सांगणे
- हा गुन्हा आहे.

'गर्भलिंगनिदान' व नंतर 'स्त्रीलिंगी गर्भपात' आणि गर्भधारणेपूर्वी गर्भलिंगनिवड या गोष्टी फक्त डॉक्टर करू शकतात. यातील गर्भधारणेपूर्वी गर्भलिंगनिवड सध्या अती श्रीमंतांनाच परवडू शकते. नजीकच्या काळात ती सेवा स्वस्त होऊ शकेल आणि सामान्यांनाही परवडू शकेल! सेवा कोणतीही असली तरी ती पुरविण्यासाठी डॉक्टरांनी नकार दिला तर आधुनिक तंत्रज्ञानाचा गैरवापर थांबवणे सहज शक्य आहे. पण ही गोष्ट शासकीय आणि राजकीय इच्छाशक्ती नसल्याने होत नाही. जी प्रकरणे उघडकीस आली आहेत, त्यावर विनाविलंब कारवाई होणे आवश्यक आहे. यासाठी शासनाबरोबर इंडियन मेडीकल कौन्सिलनेही पुढाकार घ्यायला पाहिजे. तरच वेगाने ढासळणारी खाजगी वैद्यकीय सेवेची व्यावसायिक नीतीमत्ता थोपविता येईल. कायदेशीर कारवाई हा ताबडतोबीचा उपाय आहे.

तसेच प्रजनन संदर्भातील आरोग्य सेवा स्त्रियांना नाकारल्या जाणार नाहीत, याकडे ताबडतोबीने पुरेसे लक्ष द्यायला हवे. २००३ च्या कायद्याखाली अल्ट्रासोनोग्राफी मशीन वापरण्यावर काही नियम बंधनकारक केले आहेत. जसे, माशिनची नोंदणी करणे आणि तपासणीचे रेकॉर्ड ठेवणे इत्यादी. ही बंधने टाळण्यासाठी खाजगीत कांही डॉक्टर्स सोनोग्राफी आणि गर्भपाताची सेवा देण्यापासून दूर राहण्याचा निर्णय घेऊत, अशी दमदाटी करतात. भारतात ८० टक्के वैद्यकीय सेवा खाजगी आणि फक्त २० टक्के सरकारी क्षेत्रात आहे.

खाजगी क्षेत्रावर कोणतेच नियंत्रण नाही. त्यामुळे सामान्य स्त्रिया आरोग्याच्या असंख्य प्रश्नावर उपकारक सोनोग्राफीच्या सेवेपासून वंचित राहतील. असे झाले

जातपंचायतीच्या विरोधातही पुकारले बंड

March 18, 2013

This feature in Marathi by Jahnvi Sarate which appeared in the Maharashtra Times is on how the Jat Panchayat was opposing a girl's education after marriage and how the girl was even ready to divorce her husband in order to pursue her education. Her consistent writing had its impact with the Jat Panchayat actually withdrawing their opposition and accepting the girl's right to education.

जातीसाठी माती खावी, असे आजही म्हटले जाते; पण ती जातच एखाद्याच्या मुळावर उठली तर त्याने पाहायचे तरी कुणाकडे? त्यातही एखादी मुलगी शिक्षण घेते आहे म्हणून तिला आणि तिच्या कुटुंबालाच बहिष्कृत केले, तर अशा कुटुंबाने जायचे कोणाकडे? या परिस्थितीतही कोल्हापूर जिल्ह्यातील इचलकरंजीतील गोसावी समाजातील एका तरुणीने जातीविरूद्ध बंड पुकारले आणि उच्च शिक्षण घेण्यासाठी जातपंचायतीच्या विरोधात जाऊन तिने नवऱ्यालाही सोडचिठ्ठी दिली. जातपंचायतीने ठोठावलेला लाख रुपयांचा दंडही तिच्या कुटुंबीयाने भरला आणि व्यवस्थेविरूद्ध ठामपणे उभे राहिले.

अर्चना गोसावी (नाव बदलले आहे) ही गोसावी समाजातील तरुणी. या समाजात आजही बालविवाहाची प्रथा पाळली जाते. अर्चनाचे लग्न वयाच्या सातव्या वर्षी जयसिंगपूरच्या मुलाशी ठरले. मात्र, लग्न अर्चनाच्या विसाव्या वर्षी, काही महिन्यांपूर्वी झाले. त्यावेळी ती 'बीएचएमएस' च्या दुसऱ्या वर्षात होती. पुढे शिकायला संधी मिळाली, तरच लग्नाला तयार असल्याचे तिने सांगितले होते. तिची ही अट मान्य करण्यात आली होती. तथापि, लग्नानंतर तिच्या सासरच्या



Jahnvi Sarate, Maharashtra Times

Jahnvi Sarate writes for the Maharashtra Times, Kolhapur. She won the award for Best News Feature at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Western Region.

मंडळींकडून जाच सुरू झाला. तिला शिक्षण घेता येणार नाही, असेही सुनावण्यात आले. मात्र, अर्चना निर्णयावर ठाम राहिली.

ती माहेरी आली आणि पुन्हा कॉलेजला जाऊ लागली. दुसऱ्या बाजूला सासरच्या मंडळींनी तिच्याविरोधात जातपंचायतीकडे तक्रार केली. त्यानंतर पंचायतीचा निवाडा झाला तोही अर्चनाला हादरवून टाकणाराच होता. 'आमच्या जातीतील मुलींना शिकायला बंदी आहे. तुला शिकायचे असेल, तर काडीमोड दे आणि एक लाख रुपयांचा दंडही भर. तो न भरल्यास तुझ्या आईचे मुंडन करून तिची समाजात धिंड काढली जाईल, असा इशारा तिला देण्यात आला,' अशी माहिती अर्चनाचे नातेवाईक आणि शिक्षक असलेले अशोक जाधव यांनी 'मटा' शी बोलताना दिली.

दंड भरेपर्यंत तिच्या कुटुंबीयाला बहिष्कृत करण्यात आले. या परिस्थितीत अर्चनाचे कुटुंबीय तिच्या पाठीशी राहिले. भंगार व्यवसाय करणारे वडील आणि तिच्या आजोबांनी काही भार उचलत हा लाखाचा दंड भरला आणि अर्चनाची या बंधनातून मुक्तता केली.

'लग्न केले तरीही शिक्षण सुरू ठेवायचे होते. मात्र, जातपंचायतीने आडकाठी घातल्याने अखेर दंड भरून सोडचिठ्ठी देत शिक्षणाचा मार्ग मोकळा केला.'

- अर्चना गोसावी

आखिर तुम दिनभर करती क्या हो ?

October 19, 2011

The article raises the issue of how work done by women, whether at home or outside, is rarely acknowledged and often belittled. The double burden which working women face is also mentioned. The author has written this in a lighter vein keeping the urban and rural difference in perspective.

सुबह चार बजे का अलार्म लगा दिया है.. छः बजे शानू की कोचिंग का स्पेशल सेशन है... उठकर उसका नाश्ता, टिफिन तैयार करने और उसे उठाकर भेजते-भेजते पाँच-सवा पाँच तो बज ही जाएँगे.. उसके बाद सबका चाय-नाश्ता, 'इनका' टिफिन, दोपहर का खाना, कपड़े और हाँ.. आज मसाले भी खरीद कर लाना है और बिजली का बिल भी भरना है..। ये तो सुबह के गए शाम को ही 'थके-माँदे' लौटेंगे.. खैर.. चलो! आज दिनभर का काम तो खत्म हुआ। रात का खाना, उसके बाद जूठे बर्तन और बाकी सारा पसारा समेटा.. शानू और 'इनके' लिए बादाम गला दूँ.. आखिर इतनी मेहनत करते हैं.. अरे गेट पर ताला भी लगाना है..। पता नहीं क्यों सुबह से पीठ में थोड़ा दर्द है.. भागदौड़ में ध्यान ही नहीं रहा..। देखती हूँ अगर 'ये' जाग रहे होंगे तो थोड़ा आइन्मेंट लगाने को कहूँगी.. "सुनो.. थोड़ा सा मलहम लगा दोगे पीठ पर.. बहुत दर्द कर रही है.."(पता नहीं स्वर दयनीय और कातर क्यों हो जाता है, ऐसा कहते हुए).. "हद है यार.. एक तो ऑफिस में मगज पचा कर आओ फिर रास्ते का ट्रैफिक और अब तुम सिर पर खड़ी हो। यहाँ तो दिनभर बदन दर्द करता रहता है, हम ध्यान ही नहीं देते.. थक जाते हैं यार.. तुम्हारा क्या है, दिनभर घर में ही रहती हो, आराम भी कर सकती हो.. वैसे और काम ही क्या होता है दिनभर?"



Swati Sharma Shaiwal

Swati Sharma Shaiwal has been writing on gender issues consistently. This article appeared in Naidunia Media Ltd., Madhya Pradesh. She won the award for the Best Feature at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Northern Region.

आज रात को हो सकेगा तो जल्दी सो जाऊँगी..कल ऑफिस में प्रेजेन्टेशन है। शुक्र है कि मेरे काम और लगन की कद्र है वरना कहाँ किसी कम उम्र व्यक्ति को इस प्रेजेन्टेशन के लिए चुना जाता है। मीटिंग रूम से निकलते ही कहा था शुक्ला जी ने- “भई औरते हैं..इनकी ‘स्पेशल स्किल्स’ (और हाथों से मेकअप करने का सा इशारा करते हुए) के सामने अपने टैलेंट की कद्र ही कहाँ होगी...।” खैर... मुझे इस तरह के कमेंट्स से फर्क नहीं पड़ता..। चलो अच्छा हुआ ये भी घर पर हैं- “सुनो.. क्या आज तुम्हारे हाथ की चाय पीने को मिलेगी...? और हाँ, आज खाना भी कहीं से पैक करवा कर ले आओ ना ! ऑफिस में कल एक इम्पोर्टेंट प्रेजेन्टेशन है और उसकी जिम्मेदारी मुझे सौंपी गई है” (कहते-कहते ही आँखों में चमक सी आ गई..और ‘रिमार्क’ की दृष्टि से ‘इनकी’ तरफ देखा) “टू हेल्थि योर प्रेजेन्टेशन यार...वैसे भी तुम्हारी प्रेजेन्टेशन में होगा क्या? सौंप दिया होगा कोई ‘कॉपी-पेस्ट’ टाईप का ‘सॉफ्ट’ काम। मुझे तो कल वर्मा से भी निपटना है..साला, बॉस को इंप्रेस करने के लिए हर तरह का मक्खन मार रहा है..। तुम अपने लिए कर लो बाहर से कुछ ऑर्डर..और हाँ, मेरे लिए तो दाल-चावल, सब्जी-रोटी ही बनाना...ऑफिस में ‘आऊटसाइड फूड’ वैसे ही बहुत हो जाता है। वैसे भी... दिनभर ऑफिस में बैठकर ‘गॉसिप’ ही तो करती हो तुम लोग और करती क्या हो!”

सोलह नंबर वाली बाई के यहाँ आज ‘पाल्टी’ थी..। सुबह से बर्तन और झाड़ू-पोछे के अलावा सब्जी सुधारने के साथ रसोई के भी काम पकड़ा दिए..बीच में तीन बार बाजार भी भगाया। पन चलो.. आज खाने को बहुत सारी चीजें मिली हैं। सुबे से भूख लगी थी..अब घर जाके आराम से सबके साथ बैठ के खाऊँगी। अरे..वाह..चीनू के पप्पा भी आ गए। “अच्छा हुआ जो तुम ‘टैम’ पे आ गए। आज सोलह नंबर वाली बाई के यहाँ से बहुत कुछ मिला है..चीनू तू भी आ.. आ जा.. सर्मिला बेटा..। जोर की भूख लगी है.. सुबे से कुछ नी खाया। हाथ-पैर भी दरद कर रए हैं।” “आ हा.. आई बड़ी महारानी। बोल तो ऐसे रई है जैसे पहाड़ तोड़ के आई है। यहाँ तो सुबे से शाम तक मजूरी का काम करो। ऊपर से सिरफ

एक टैम का खाना पका के पकड़ा देती है। और तू बंगले में मस्त ठंडी हवा में बैठ के 'चार बर्तन' माँज के थक जाती है... और करती क्या है दिनभर? चल खीसा ढीला कर कलाली जाने का टैम हो गया। अपनी जिंदगी में तो वोई 'दवा' लिखी है, पीके सारे दरद दूर करने की कोशिश करेंगे..तेरी तरह रोना थोड़े ही ना रो सकते हैं।”

आज फिर घर में पार्टी है। ये 'बड़े' लोगों के चोंचले पालते हुए कई बार मन कड़वा सा हो गया है। उसपर दिनभर कभी फलाँ को इंप्रेस करने के लिए डिनर है तो कभी नया खरीदा गया बेशकीमती कालीन दिखाने के लिए ही 'हाई टी' रख ली जाती है। कहने को नौकर-चाकर हैं लेकिन उनको भी देखना तो पड़ता है। फिर इतना बड़ा घर.. हर कमरे की सजावट और मेंटेनेंस... पूरा दिन भी कम पड़ता है...। “कितनी बार कहा है यार.. ये सिल्वर कलर के 'वास' में ऑरेंज फूल मत सजाया करो..। तुम माली के साथ थोड़ा समय नहीं दे सकतीं क्या? पता नहीं क्या प्रॉब्लम है। इतने सारे नौकर और इतनी सारी सुविधाएँ.. सब दे रखा है फिर भी पता नहीं दिनभर क्या करती रहती हो?”

कचरावेचक नव्हे.. स्वच्छता व्यवस्थापक!

August 18, 2011

The story in Marathi talks about the plight of women waste-pickers in Mumbai; their working condition and health problems. Waste-picking is a caste and gender-based activity of the urban poor. These women work in unhygienic conditions and are socially marginalized. Their role in keeping the city clean is often overlooked by the people. Their efforts at getting together to form a group through NGOs working in some suburbs in Mumbai has been taken note of by the Government and efforts are being made to improve their lot.

भाज्यांचे देठ, उरलंसुरलं अन्न आणि केसांची गुंतवळ इतक्यापुरतं कच-याचं स्वरूप आता मर्यादित राहिलेलं नाही. काळाबरोबर या कच-याचं स्वरूपही बदलत गेलं आहे. बाजारातून विकत आणलेली वस्तू त्याच्या चकचकीत वेष्टनातून काढून ते वेष्टन आपल्या दृष्टीनं निरुपयोगी असल्यानं ते आपण अगदी सहज कच-यात फेकून देतो. कचरा गोळा करणाऱ्या महिला अशी वेष्टनं गोळा करतात. दारोदारी फिरून गोळा केलेल्या वेष्टनांवर रिसायकिलग करण्याच्या प्रक्रियेत पाठवण्यासाठी या महिला अत्यंत महत्त्वाची भूमिका बजावत असतात. उन्हातान्हात पावसापाण्यात भटकून कचरा वेचणा-या कष्टकरी महिलांमुळे मुंबईसारख्या महानगरांमधील कचराव्यवस्थापन सुलभ झालं आहे. पण त्यांच्या या कामाची दखल मात्र कोणत्याच पातळीवर घेतली जात नाही.

पायात तुटक्या चपला, घाणीमुळं काळंकुट्टे झालेलं अंग, पाठीवर पोतंभर ओझं, कचराकुंडीतील वस्तू शोधण्यासाठी हातात असणारी काठी अशा अवतारातल्या कागद, काच व पत्र्यासाठी दिवसभर वणवण करणाऱ्या बाया सगळीकडं दिसत



Amita Bade, Prahaar

Amita Bade has been writing a regular column "Mahila" for many years now. She writes about the diverse aspects of the lives of women and the problems faced by them. She works with Prahaar. She won the award for the Best Column at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Western Region.

असतात. त्यांच्याकडं नाक मुरडून पाहातच पुढं जाण्याची प्रवृत्ती दिसते. लोकांनी फेकून दिलेला कचरा गोळा करून त्यावर उदरनिर्वाह करणा-या या महिलांची सतत अवहेलना होत असते.

आपण सारेजण जेव्हा साखरझोपेत असतो तेव्हा या कष्टकरी महिलांचा दिवस सुरू होतो. कचरा गोळा करणा-या महानगरपालिकेच्या गाड्या यायच्या आधी कचराकुंडीतला कचरा गोळा करण्यासाठी त्या बाहेर पडतात. आपापल्या विभागातील कचराकुंड्या शोधून त्यातला आवश्यक तो कचरा त्या गोळा करतात. कचरा गोळा करून झाल्यावर मग त्यातला ओला आणि सुका असं कच-याचं त्या वर्गीकरण करतात. त्यानंतर मग खाद्यपदार्थांची वेष्टण, बाटल्या, प्लास्टिक अशा प्रकारचा कचरा पुनर्निर्मितीच्या प्रक्रियेसाठी पाठवतात. हे काम करत असताना त्यांना अनेक अडचणींना सामोरं जावं लागत असतं, पण हेच उपजीविकेचं साधन असल्यानं येईल त्या परिस्थितीशी दोन हात करत स्वतःचं अस्तित्व टिकवण्याची त्यांची धडपड सुरू असते.

कच-याचं ओला आणि सुका असं वर्गीकरण, पुनर्निर्मिती करता येण्याजोग्या कच-याची विक्री यावर अवलंबून असणारे सुमारे १५ लाख कष्टकरी देशात आहेत. फक्त मुंबई आणि नवी मुंबईतील कचरावेचक महिलांची संख्या लाखाच्या घरात आहे. या महिला सतत कचरा आणि घाणीमध्ये काम करत असल्याने त्यांचे आरोग्यविषयक प्रश्नही गंभीर आहेत. त्वचारोग, क्षय, कर्करोग यांसारख्या आजाराना त्यांना सामोरं जावं लागत असल्याचं त्यांच्या आरोग्य तपासण्यांमधून आढळून आलं आहे. सातत्यानं वाकून करावं लागणारं काम आणि रोज २०-२५ किलो कचरा पाठीवर वाहून न्यावा लागत असल्यानं पाठ, कंबरेचे विकार तर त्यांची अखंड सोबत करत असतात. त्यांची ही जगण्याची धडपड पाहून या कचरावेचक महिलांना स्त्रीमुक्ती संघटनेनं मदतीचा हात देऊ केला आहे. नवी मुंबईत स्त्रीमुक्ती संघटनेच्या समन्वयक प्रा. वृषाली मगदूम आणि त्यांच्या सहका-यांनी कचरा वेचणा-या महिलांचं उत्तम संघटन केलं आहे. आजमितीला नव्या मुंबईत कचरा वेचणा-या ५०० महिला संघटित झाल्या असून, त्यांचे ४३ बचतगट कार्यरत आहेत.

कचरा गोळा करून पर्यावरण निरोगी ठेवण्याच्या या महिलांच्या कामाचं महत्त्व लक्षात घेऊन सिडकोनं त्यांच्या पनवेल, कळंबोली इथल्या वसाहतींमधला कचरा गोळा करण्याचं काम या महिलांना दिलं आहे. या ठिकाणी १३ कचरावेचक महिला कचरा गोळा करण्याबरोबरच ओल्या कच-याचं खत तयार करण्याचं कामही त्या करतात.

कचरावेचकांच्या समस्यांकडे सरकारनं लक्ष द्यावं यासाठी देशभरात अनेक संस्था कार्यरत आहेत. पुण्याच्या कागद-काच-पत्रा संघटनेनं सुरुवात केल्यानंतर गेल्या काही वर्षांत या कष्टक-यांची चळवळ देशभरात सुरू झाली. 'अलायन्स ऑफ इंडियन वेस्टपिकर्स' ही राष्ट्रीय पातळीवर काम करणारी संस्था स्थापन झाली असून, त्यांच्या अथक प्रयत्नांमुळे सुप्रीम कोर्टानं घनकचरा व्यवस्थापनविषयक तज्ज्ञ समिती स्थापना केली. इतकंच नाहीतर दुस-या राष्ट्रीय श्रम आयोगानंही या कष्टक-याची नोंद घेतली आहे.

मुंबई आणि नवी मुंबईतील हजारो कचरावेचक कष्टक-यांमुळे शहरी कचराव्यवस्थापनाला मोठाच हातभार लागला आहे. इथल्या प्रत्येक कचरावेचक आणि भंगारविक्रेत्याची शहरी स्थानिक स्वराज्य संस्थेनं नोंदणी करून त्यांना ओळखपत्र द्यावं अशी गेल्या अनेक वर्षांपासून मागणी करण्यात येत आहे. परंतु



Journalist Amita Bade receiving the Award from Chhavi Rajawat, Sarpanch of Soda village of Rajasthan.

तिचा अजूनही विचार झालेला नाही. सामाजिक संस्थांच्या माध्यमातून एकत्र येऊ पाहणा-या या महिलांना स्वतःचं जगणं थोडंतरी चांगलं घडवणं शक्य होत आहे, ही मात्र त्यातल्या त्यात सकारात्मक गोष्ट आहे.

संघटन, स्वावलंबन, प्रबोधन इत्यादी..

डॉपिंग ग्राउंडवर जाऊन एका महिलेपासून कचरावेचक महिलांच्या संघटनाला आम्ही सुरुवात केली. सुरुवातीला संघटनेच्या कार्यकर्त्या डॉपिंग ग्राउंडवर जायच्या, तेव्हा त्यांना सरकारी अधिकारी समजून कचरा वेचणा-या महिला पळून जायच्या. पण कार्यकर्त्यांनी हार न मानता पुनःपुन्हा जाऊन त्यांच्याशी संवाद साधला, त्यांचा विश्वास संपादन केला. संघटन, बचतगट, बँका वगैरे गोष्टी त्यांना समजावून सांगितल्या, त्यांच्या गळी उतरवल्या आणि बचतगटांची स्थापना केली. त्यांच्या आरोग्याची काळजी घेण्यासाठी एक मोबाइल क्लिनिक चालवलं जातं. या महिलांना आता बचतीचं महत्त्व पटल्यानं त्या सावकारी पाशातूनही मुक्त झाल्या आहेत. त्यांच्या वसाहतींमध्ये जाऊन आम्ही कुमारवयीन मुलींच्या बैठका घ्यायला सुरुवात केली. परंतु १३-१४ व्या वर्षीच लग्न होत असल्यामुळे अशा मुली मिळणं अवघड झालं. त्यामुळे आम्ही सुनांच्या बैठका सुरू केल्या. कुटुंबनियोजन, आरोग्य, शिक्षणासंदर्भात प्रबोधन केलं जातं.

प्रा. वृषाली मगदूम, समन्वयक, स्त्रीमुक्ती संघटना, नवी मुंबई विमल इंगळेचं नेतृत्व विमल इंगळे या सध्या कचरावेचक महिलांच्या फेडरेशनच्या अध्यक्षा आहेत. नव-याचा त्रास असाह्य होऊन त्या मराठवाड्यातून इथं आल्या. कचरा गोळा करून उदरनिर्वाह करू लागल्या. वस्तीत भांडखोर म्हणून प्रसिद्ध असलेल्या विमलबाई यांचे नेतृत्वगुण स्त्रीमुक्ती संघटनेनं हेरले आणि त्यांच्या या गुणाला विधायक वळण देण्याचा प्रयत्न केला. कचरावेचक महिलांच्या फेडरेशनची स्थापना केल्यावर तिचं नेतृत्व त्यांच्यातूनच उभं राहिलं पाहिजे, या विचारातूनच विमल इंगळे यांना फेडरेशनचं अध्यक्ष करण्यात आलं. त्यांनी आपल्यावरील विश्वास सार्थ करून दाखवला. त्यांच्या नेतृत्वामुळं फेडरेशनची व्याप्ती वाढत चालली आहे. शिबिरं, सभा, मेळावे यामधून त्या आपल्या शैलीत खणखणीतपणे बोलत असतात.

સ્ત્રીહિંસા સામે જાગૃતિનો સમય આવી ગયો છે !

Kutch Mitra's campaign in Gujarati covers an array of different issues relating to women and gender like detailed information about the Domestic Violence Act and the recourse available under it and how to claim the same, the mindset of society which while on one hand wants to ape the western culture, on the other hand denies women freedom even to use mobiles or go out alone. The campaign calls for a change urging women to be economically, physically and mentally strong.

સંયુક્ત રાષ્ટ્રના આંકડા મુજબ ૨૦૧૦-૧૧માં ઘરેલુ હિંસાથી સ્ત્રી મૃત્યુનો આંક ૮૩૮૩ હતો જ્યારે એ જ વર્ષમાં આતંકવાદથી મૃત્યુનો આંક ૨૨૩૧ હતો. એ સૂચવે છે કે મહિલાઓ સામેના ગુના શાસન અને સમાજ માટે વધુ ચિંતાજનક છે

ભુજ, તા. ૩૧ : દિલ્હી ગંગરેપના સમગ્ર દેશમાં તીવ્ર પ્રત્યાઘાત પડ્યા છે. આ ઘટના પછી દેશમાં સ્ત્રીની સ્થિતિ અને તેની સલામતી સંદર્ભે વિચારવલોણ પણ થયું છે. સ્ત્રી સંબંધી કાયદાઓની પુનઃ સમીક્ષાની વાતે ઊઠી છે. સમાજનો સ્ત્રી પ્રત્યેનો અભિગમ બદલાય એ માટેય કશુંક નક્કર થવું જોઈએ એવીય હિમાયત થઈ. આ હિમાયતને સમર્થન આપવાનો આગામી ૧૪મી ફેબ્રુઆરીના સમગ્ર વિશ્વમાં એક સાથે પ્રયાસ થશે.

૧૪મી ફેબ્રુઆરી આમ તો સમગ્ર વિશ્વમાં પ્રેમના દિવસ તરીકે મનાવાય છે. પ્રેમના વિવિધ રૂપો પૈકીનું એક રૂપ સ્ત્રી-પુરુષ સંબંધોનું છે. આ સંબંધોમાં વિકૃતિ પ્રવેશે ત્યારે જ સ્ત્રી સલામતીના પ્રશ્નો ઊઠે છે. એટલે જ ૧૪મી ફેબ્રુઆરીના જ સમગ્ર વિશ્વના એક કરોડથી વધુ લોકો સ્ત્રીહિંસા સામે વિરોધ એક સાથે પ્રદર્શિત કરશે.

આ દુનિયાની સહુથી સારી એક બાબત એ છે કે તેમાં સતત પરિવર્તન આવતું રહે છે. હા, એ વાત અલગ છે કે તે બદલાવ હકારાત્મક અને નકારાત્મક બંને રીતનો છે. તેની અસર પણ



Kutch Mitra

Kutch Mitra won the award for the Best Campaign at the Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Western Region.

અલગ અલગ છે. આ બદલાવ જોવા માટે સંવેદનશીલતા જરૂરી છે. જેમ કે મહિલાઓની જિંદગીની વાત કરીએ તો અત્યારે એ બદલાવ જરૂર આવ્યો છે, બહેનો સ્વતંત્ર બની છે. પહેલાં નહોતી એવા ક્ષેત્રોમાં કામ કરતી થઈ છે, પણ આવા સારા પરિવર્તનની સાથે બહેનો સાથે થતી હિંસામાં વધારો થયો છે એ પણ એટલું જ સાચું છે.

છડેચોક છેડતી, બેફામ બળાત્કાર, ગંભીર ગુનાઓની વધતી જતી સંખ્યા... ક્યાં જઈને અટકશે આ બધું ? એવો સવાલ ઘણા લોકોને સતાવી રહ્યો છે. બીજો સવાલ વધુ અગત્યનો છે— શું દેશમાં કાયદો અને વ્યવસ્થા સાચવવાનું કોઈ તંત્ર છે કે નહીં ? છે તો કેમ નિક્કિય લાગે છે ? કેમ કે જો સક્રિય હોય તો ગુનાઓ વધતા અટકવા જોઈએ, પણ એવું થવાને બદલે ગુનાઓનું પ્રમાણ અને ગંભીરતા વધતા જ જાય છે. સંયુક્ત રાષ્ટ્રના એક અહેવાલના આંકડા આ બાબતને સમર્થન આપે છે. વર્ષ ૨૦૧૦-૧૧માં ઘરેલુ હિંસાથી થયેલી દુર્ઘટનાઓમાં મૃત્યુ પામનારાઓની સંખ્યા ૮૩૮૩, જ્યારે આ જ વર્ષમાં આતંકવાદી હુમલાઓમાં મૃત્યુ પામનારાઓની સંખ્યા ૨૨૩૧.

પણ ફરી એક હકારાત્મક બાબત એ છે કે હવે ઘણા સરકારી માળખા, કાયદાઓ, સંસ્થાઓ આ મુદ્દે નક્કર કામ કરતા થયા છે. એટલું જ નહીં, હવે તો બહેનોના પ્રશ્નો અને પરિસ્થિતિ માટે વ્યક્તિગત અવાજ ઉઠાવનારા લોકો પણ છે. એવી જ એક મહિલા છે ઈવ એન્સલર. છેલ્લા ૧૪ વર્ષથી મહિલા અત્યાચારના મુદ્દે લડત આપી રહેલાં ઈવે ૨૦૧૨ના વર્ષમાં જ ૧૪ ફેબ્રુઆરીએ જ સ્ત્રીહિંસા વિરોધની ઝુંબેશ શરૂ કરી હતી અને આખી દુનિયાને તેમાં જોડાવાની અપીલ કરી હતી. તે મુજબ જ ૨૦૧૩ની ૧૪મી ફેબ્રુઆરીએ આખી દુનિયાને હચમચાવી દેવાનું આયોજન છે. વી-૩ (વિકટરી, વેલેન્ટાઈન, વજાઈનનુ' ટૂંક સ્વરૂપ) ના આ દિવસે દુનિયાભરના એકસો કરોડ લોકો પોતાના કામની જગ્યાએ, ઘર, શાળા, કોલેજમાંથી બહાર નીકળી હિંસા સામે પોતાનો વિરોધ અનેક રીતે વ્યક્ત કરશે. આ એક વિશ્વવ્યાપી વિરોધ પ્રદર્શન અને હિંસા નાબૂદી માટેની માગણી હશે.

છતાં અમુક સવાલો તો હજુ પણ સળગે છે. કાયદો કેમ થોડો ઢીલો પડે છે ? નાગરિકો પણ ન્યાય માટે દેખાવો અને દબાણ કરે છે. છતાં ન્યાય માટેની લડત લાંબી કેમ ચાલે છે ? ભોગ

બનનાર વ્યક્તિને સહાનુભૂતિની સાથે બધા પ્રકારના સહયોગની જરૂર રહે છે. બીજું જે ઘટનાના પડઘા દેશસ્તરે પડે છે, તેમાં સહયોગ આપનારા લોકોની સંખ્યા વધુ હોય છે, પણ એવી જ ઘટના જ્યારે સ્થાનિકે અને ત્યારે સહાનુભૂતિ અને સહયોગનું પ્રમાણ ઘટતું હોય એમ લાગે છે. થોડો સમય બધું ચાલે પછી ધીમે ધીમે ઠંડું પડી જાય.

દિલ્હીના બળાત્કારની ઘટનામાં નાગરિકોએ પોતાનો વિરોધ સારી રીતે બતાવ્યો, પણ પછી શું ? દીકરીઓનું ભણતર બંધ કરાવી દેવું, નાની ઉંમરે તેના લગ્ન કરાવી દેવા, ઘરની બહાર ન નીકળવા દેવી ? આ દીકરીની સલામતીની સાચી રીત છે ખરી ? આટલું કર્યા પછી પણ મહિલાઓ સલામત છે ખરી ? અફસોસ સાથે જવાબ છે : ના. દીકરી, માતા, બહેન, નાની જેવા સંબંધોમાં પણ દરેક પ્રકારના શોષણથી માંડીને બળાત્કાર જેવી ઘટનાઓ બનતી જ રહે છે. સ્વજન જ દુર્જન બને છે.

તો પછી હવે શું ? હવે જરૂર છે સતત જાગૃતિની, સતત સભાનતાની, સતત સતર્કતાની. ઘરમાં તો મહિલા સભ્ય ઉપર કોઈ અત્યાચાર ના જ થાય. સાથે બીજી જગ્યાએ પણ જો આવું થતું હોય, તેને રોકવાની હિંમત બતાવવાનો સમય આવી ગયો છે. અત્યાચાર માટે કોઈ ધર્મ, જાતિ, વિસ્તાર, ઉંમર-કોઈ ભેદ નથી હોતો. હાથ કે પગ ભાંગવામાં આવે, બાળી નાખવામાં આવે, એસિડ પીવડાવવામાં આવે, તલવારથી ઘા કરવામાં આવે-આ બધાની પીડા જેટલી પુરુષને થાય એટલી જ મહિલાને પણ થાય. એટલે મહિલાઓ પર થતા અત્યાચાર રોકવા માટે સ્ત્રી હોવું જરૂરી નથી, એક સંવેદનશીલ માનવ થઈએ તો બસ છે.

કચ્છ મહિલા વિકાસ સંગઠન એટલે કે મહિલાઓની સાથે કામ કરતી એક સંસ્થા તરીકે અમે આવી ઘટનાઓ આજથી સામે મૂકતા રહીશું. જેમાં સત્યઘટનાઓ જ છે. ભોગ બનનારી વ્યક્તિનાં નામ બદલી તેમની પીડાનું સાચું બયાન રજૂ કરીશું. આવી વાત વાંચીને કદાચ કોઈ એક મહિલા ઉપર થતો અત્યાચાર અટકે, અત્યાચારમાં ઘાયલ કોઈ બહેનને દવાખાને પહોંચાડનારું મળી રહે, અત્યાચારનો ભોગ બનેલી મહિલાના પક્ષમાં કાયદાને સાચી સાક્ષી આપનારું કોઈ મળી રહે, તો પોતાની જિંદગીની અંગત પીડાને આપણી સામે મૂકનારી બહેનની હિંમતને સાચી સહાનુભૂતિ અને સહયોગ મળ્યા કહેવાશે. સમાજમાં જ્યારે સ્ત્રી પ્રત્યે સંવેદનશીલતા સર્જાશે ત્યારે જ આવા પ્રયાસો સાર્થકતામાં ફેરવાશે.

Electronic Media

Surrogate Maa

Neetu Rana's documentary in Hindi 'Surrogate Maa' analyses the pros and cons of surrogacy. Her interviews with women staying in the Surrogate House reveal the socio-economic compulsions behind women choosing to become surrogate mothers. She also brings out the mindset of people who want their own biological child and opt for surrogacy which makes the Surrogate House a place full of hope and life for both, the surrogate mother as well as the biological parents. She also exposes the flipside where surrogacy becomes a means for exploiting women who are forced to be surrogates at the cost of their health.



Neetu Rana, IBN 7, Delhi

Neetu Rana won the award for the Best Feature at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Northern Region.

Vidhi Vanchitalu

In Mehboonnagar district of Andhra Pradesh, the cruel and medieval practice of marrying girls from poor and backward communities to the village deity and then sexually abusing them still continues. These girls are called joginis and are treated as sex commodities by men. Their children often grow up as orphans. The efforts of NTV awakened the administration and efforts are now being made to stop this inhuman practice.



Swaroopa Potlapally, NTV

Swaroopa Potlapally works with NTV. She won the award for the Best News Feature (Telugu) at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Southern Region.

Ee Vedana Inkennallu

Indian tradition still considers widowhood a curse, an aberration, and a misfortune of gigantic proportions. Widows are considered an economic and social burden, and while some are relegated to a life of seclusion in their own homes, others are evicted by their family to prevent them from inheriting money or property. Widows don't have many social rights within the family. The programme in Telugu talked about putting a stop to the current practice of isolation and exploitation.



Padma Vangapally, 10TV

Padma Vangapally is the producer of Maanavi programme of 10 TV. She won the Best Documentary Award at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Southern Region.

Jautuka Na Jibana

Dowry as a social evil has been spreading especially among so called educated and enlightened people who instead of directly demanding dowry are resorting to new and novel methods of extracting gold, money, vehicle, etc. from the girl's family. As anchor of '*JAUTUKA NA JIBANA*', a programme in Oriya, Rakhi, by talking to a father who lost his daughter to this social evil as also getting experts to mediate, forcefully put forth the message that such commercialization of marriages can only lead to sorrow and disaster. She also highlighted the fact that while earlier in tribal society dowry was not in existence, now it has become rampant among tribals too.



Rakhi Ghosh, Naxatra News

Rakhi Ghosh handles two programmes independently for Naxatra News channel including Rahaa focusing on issues on women and children. She won the award for the Best Topical Programme Award at the Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Eastern Region.

Jeevo Manav Gaurav thi

These 89 episodes in Gujarati on contemporary social issues highlighted sexual harassment, domestic violence, dowry, rape, etc. Presented in face to face interaction of invited studio audience with specialists and activists, this programme generated awareness about redressal mechanism and legal options available to women.



Manisha Sharma, Doordarshan Gujarat

Manisha Sharma is a writer and reporter. She has made documentary films on various topics. She won the award for the Best Issue Based Programme at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Western Region.

Satakshi: Save the Girl Child

This was a 94.3 MY FM Initiative for the girl. A little girl was found crying in a dustbin and the FM team helped find her a home and mobilized sponsors for her education and medical aid. By presenting this story in a song based format the programme in Hindi managed to sensitise listeners towards the girl child.



94.3 MYFM, Rajasthan

94.3 MYFM won the Best Issue Based Radio Programme at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Western Region.

Analysing Policies and Programmes

There is no dearth of laws, policies and programmes in the country and most of these are meant to protect women from discrimination and violence as well as ensure that they are able to exercise their rights that are enshrined in the Constitution. Yet, at the level of implementation we find many lacunae. Lack of awareness among women about their rights, legal provisions and entitlements under various programmes, the patriarchal mindsets of the implementers who subvert the very purpose of the legal and other provisions to deny women their rights, and other cross cutting issues of class, caste etc. are responsible for the continuing violence and discrimination against women in spite of the existing laws and programmes. There are also contradictions and gaps in the laws which need to be debated and brought into the public domain.

Media can play a major role as a watch dog on effective implementation of laws, policies and programmes, provide in depth insight into issues in implementation and finally highlight the cases where they have been effectively implemented benefitting women as they are meant to.

While Satya Prakash brings to the women readers all their legal entitlements in an interesting fashion, Tejaswini Pagadala looks at the Child Marriage Act and the issues in its effective implementation. Vishnai Vittal on the other hand explores the class bias in development investments, with governments prioritizing cost intensive mega projects over inclusive development that gives equal importance to the survival issues of the poor and marginalized.

Kulsum Mustafa and Shirish Khare present two positive case studies and write about an innovative livelihood project i.e goat rearing and how the empowered women Panchayat members are being instrumental in transforming the villages in Bundelkhand district of Madhya Pradesh respectively.

Even when laws and regulations are in place it is often not easy to get justice. Vinay Deshpande narrates the struggle of a woman to get justice in a sexual harassment case while Saswathi Ghosh takes us through the Rana Plaza fire tragedy that exposed the exploitative working conditions of women garment workers and calls attention of the Government and Industry to revisit the sector and see where things are going wrong. Mahua Das's feature underlines the difficulties in rehabilitating the trafficked girls due to the social prejudices against them and the need to look at solutions that empower them.

Amarjit Gill and Prajakta Dhulap focus on efforts to stop Pre-birth Sex Selection in Bibipur Village of Haryana and in Maharashtra respectively. Ram Tarun and Kishtiah Nandagiri focus on the hurdles in accessing and reaching school services to children in remote rural areas while Shai Venkatramana compares two conflict ridden areas – Gadchiroli and Jammu & Kashmir to underscore the point that quality services could be provided even in conflict areas if we have a people centric approach to service delivery.

Print and Web Media

Getting Her Goat: Food and Finance Come on Four Legs

March 26, 2011

The article outlines how impoverished women can overcome poverty by rearing goats and in the process improve their own nutritional intake. This has been done with the assistance of Goat Trust whose chief focus is to promote goat-based livelihoods.

Her bright red woollen sweater, multi-coloured glass bead necklace and a pair of anklets lay in the corner of the thatch-roofed hut. There was a pall of gloom hanging heavy in the air. Seven-month-old Jhumri, around whom the entire family had rallied ever since she was born, was severely unwell - she had caught a severe cold and stomach infection. All the family members were frantic. Unfortunately, despite the tender care, Jhumri did not survive the infection.

Even today when Hakikun, 50, remembers the suffering her beloved goat went through, she has tears in her eyes. "She was the most loved of my five goats. She died because I did not have money for her treatment," she says, tears rolling down her wrinkled face.

One may wonder why Hakikun is so emotionally attached to her goats, but her love for these hardy animals is not surprising considering that they supplement her income. Not only do they help her make ends meet, they allow her to provide better for her children – Currently, only her youngest 11-year-old son lives with her, though she has married off two daughters and her two older sons have moved away from the village. Hailing from Madanapuri, a village located 50 kilometres from Rae Bareilly district in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, Hakikun works hard the whole day as a daily wage labourer only to earn a paltry sum. But her goats chip in – she can sell their milk and earn a few extra rupees. Over the years, Hakikun



Kulsum Mustafa, www.boloji.com

Kulsum Mustafa has over 30 years of experience in journalism and is the Secretary General of Media Nest, an organisation involved with media persons' welfare. She won the award for the Best Feature at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Northern Region.

has played mother to several kids and goats and that's why Jhumri's death is mourned like that of a precious family member. To Hakikun, Jhumri's loss is both an emotional and financial blow.

"Women in poor households in rural areas as well as some urban pockets of the state have been keeping goats as a supplementary livelihood source. However, goat rearing has never taken the form of an enterprise because aspects like marketing, veterinary services, feeds and breeding have never been looked into seriously," says Sanjeev Kumar, the founder secretary of Goat Trust.

Headquartered in UP's capital Lucknow, the Trust has a presence in five states, and their chief focus is in promoting goat-based livelihoods. "The Trust has been working towards organising this sector for over a decade now," informs Kumar, who has a degree in livestock product and management.

After working as a livestock researcher for several years, in 1998 Kumar decided to use his expertise to help women form Self Help Groups (SHGs) around dairy farming. That goats can provide food security, nutrition and employment, especially for women, was something he learned while working with rural women. "I have to thank Ram Dulari, an illiterate village woman from Rajasthan, for drawing my attention to the economic benefits of rearing goats instead of cows for dairy farming," says Kumar.



Over a decade ago, he had initiated a group loan for some poor women in Alwar district in Rajasthan to pursue dairy farming but the scheme unfortunately failed because there was a severe drought that year. Angry and fearful of how they would pay back the bank, Ram Dulari had lashed out at him, saying, "You have got us into this mess. You made us dream big – telling us that rearing cows would be beneficial. But our little goats are much better any day. They are easy to rear, eat so much less and still give two litres of milk every day."

This angry outburst remained with Kumar. He realised that the goat was the animal for the poor, especially for poor women. Which is why he decided to set up the Goat Trust, with the help of a few friends and an initial investment of just Rs. 5,000 (US\$ 1 = Rs. 45.1). The Trust was formally registered in Lucknow in 2008.

Today, it has partnered with 26 small non government organisations (NGOs) that work in UP, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Across the five states, they have partners in 145 villages, who have trained over 2,500 women as goat rearers and promoted 125 special goat nurses. Financial aid is provided with the assistance of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust.

While focusing on creating awareness about goat rearing, the Trust works towards engendering good breeds, marketing and research. Regular training workshops on goat specific livestock diseases are also organised, where women friendly techniques of training are employed. For instance, the colour coding of medicines – a mixture of allopathy and herbal medicines – helps in easy identification. Women trained as goat nurses are given a primary goat healthcare kit and the Trust regularly updates information on preventative health care and good practices. The women are also taught marketing techniques, which includes traditional selling methods so that they have the confidence to sell goats without waiting for a male member to be present.

Hakikun and others have benefited tremendously from this. Hakikun received three days goat management training and money through the revolving fund initiated by the partner NGO – Vishwas Sanstha. The revolving fund is provided through the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust to women who have been organised in Self Help Groups. Further, the Goat Trust has trained

a woman from her village as a goat nurse, who provides regular appropriate healthcare service for a nominal price.

Then there's Hayeda Begum from Khale Ka Purva hamlet in Rahi block of Rae Bareli, who in December 2010 was able to get a fair price for her male kid – her training allowed her to negotiate the price of Rs. 2,550. She says, "Live body weight pricing enabled me to assess the real price and negotiate well. Assessment of price had intrigued me for years, but it turned out to be quite simple and it helped me take a stand with the local traders."

Goat rearing may still not be a full-fledged livelihood option – it is mostly for supplementing family income – but goats have definitely ensured the food security of many impoverished households. They have escaped hunger and disease just because they have a goat to take care of their dietary needs. Goats have also proven to be a ready source of cash for buying ornaments or clothes or paying the school fees. And had it not been for goat milk, children in many villages that have benefitted from the Goat Trust's work, would never have known the taste of milk, since the big cooperative dairies buy up all the buffalo and cow milk available in these villages.

To women like Hakikun and Ram Dulari, these hardy creatures are indeed their reason for empowerment and well-being – they give them financial security, put food on their table and, yes, allow them to dream of a good life for their children.

Poor Sidelined in Mega-Project Frenzy

July 23, 2010

This web report is a detailed investigation of how Government Schemes bypass the disempowered.

They are the ones who go out in a majority on election day and vote. But very little has been done for Bengaluru's poor. This is the second in a series of two articles.

"I don't want my daughter to make the same mistakes I made", says 35-year-old Selvi P., a domestic worker who married at the early age of 19 to Pazhani, who then used to work at a petrol bunk. Against her family's wishes, Selvi married the man she was determined to spend the rest of her life with.

But her happiness was short-lived as her husband soon took to alcohol and beat her up regularly. Selvi even suffered fractures due to this domestic abuse. At one point in time, she was at the brink of ending her life by drowning herself in Ulsoor lake, after her husband poured a can of kerosene on her.

A few years ago, Pazhani, who used to work as a painter, suffered a stroke, thanks to his profuse drinking. His left hand was paralysed as a result, forcing him to quit working.

He briefly attended a rehabilitation programme and has since quit drinking. Selvi hopes that he will one day go back to work and bring home some money. Meanwhile she continues to work in a house in Ulsoor where she earns about Rs. 500 a month. Her weak bones, that have borne the brunt of her alcoholic husband, allow her to do very little work.

To the better-off, English-schooled citizens, this will seem like a classic story, heard time and again from their own domestic helps or their neighbours. But Selvi's story does not end.



Vaishnavi Vittal, bangalore.citizenmatters.in

Vaishnavi Vittal earlier used to write for Citizen Matters. Now she has switched from print journalism to broadcast journalism and is with NEWS X. She won the award for the Best Investigative Report at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Southern Region.

She doesn't want her daughter Savita P and sons, Pramod Kumar and Prathish Kumar, to suffer like her. "I never studied, at least my children should study and live a good life", she says, teary-eyed.

Luckily for Selvi, she has been able to educate her children with no worries, because of financial assistance from a local non-governmental organisation called Ashwini Charitable Trust (ACT), based in Ulsoor. ACT targets children in and around low-income neighbourhoods of Ulsoor, and supports them till they are gainfully employed.

About the plight of those like her who are stricken with poverty, Selvi says, "The government nods their head for everything but they do nothing for us"

Ask her why the government doesn't do anything for the poor in Bengaluru and she says, "Facilities are given to those who already have something. Those who don't have anything, continue to not have anything."

Selvi's not alone in feeling like this. For the lakhs in Bengaluru who are economically weak, the sentiments running are similar.

In Bangalore east's Byappanahalli, work is progressing at a fast-pace at the site of the metro rail station, scheduled to be finished by the year-end. A few hundred metres from here, on Old Byappanahalli Road, lives 25-year-old Kalaivani with her husband and four children.



On a recent trip to Mysore, Selvi saw the campus of IT major Infosys. Since then it is her dream that her daughter Savita works there. Photo: Vaishnavi Vittal

Every morning, just before dawn, Kalaivani goes out to the bushes nearby to attend nature's call. "One side is fear of snakes. The other side is fear of someone staring", she says. With no toilets/bathrooms in the settlement where she lives, the women folk are forced to leave their modesty behind and use the open to relieve themselves.

The men get into lots of fights, says her neighbour 28-year-old Annamalai, when they catch anyone staring at their women behind the bushes. He explains that the government cannot even build toilets for them because they live on land that belongs to the Railways.

The 'trum shed' (an informal name the neighbourhood has acquired) site where he, Kalaivani and 400 other families live, adjacent to the railway line, has seen no improvement ever since Annamalai can remember.

"Government Ignores us because We aren't Educated and Rich"

For the underprivileged in Bengaluru, the fight for survival is a daily affair. While you can easily get water at your doorstep, they still walk a mile for a pot of water. While you go to a private hospital for your check-up, they go to the dilapidated dispensary nearby. While you shop at the local supermarket for your groceries, they buy rice and wheat infested with worms. As cliché as all this may sound, it remains true today in a Bengaluru that has otherwise made its mark on the 'global map'.

Annamalai says the apathy of the state government and local city council is due to vote-bank politics. He points out that in the recent BBMP council elections, it was only the poor who went out and voted. "Why do rich people not go out and vote? Because they have everything. If I had everything, even I wouldn't have bothered to go out and vote", he expresses. The relative rise in voter turnout from the better-off citizens during the past two years in Bengaluru clearly has not impressed Annamalai.

So why do the city's elected representatives ignore the very people who have helped them come to power? Stark poverty in a remote part of the country may perhaps be easier for everyone to be blind to. But when it's glaring and right next door, how do local politicians and government officials get by? The poor themselves feel it is because they aren't *educated*.

Suresh A., who lives in Rajendranagar, a well-known low-income neighbourhood in the posh Koramangala locality of south Bengaluru, says,



Residents of trum shed on Old Byappanahalli enjoy direct to home satellite television. But basic amenities like toilets are still a far cry for them. **Photo:** Vaishnavi Vittal

"Education is the number one factor." Himself a high school dropout, 25-year-old Suresh says it is because the poor are uneducated that the government ignores them.

M. Manjula, who works as a domestic help in Ulsoor in central Bengaluru also feels the same way. "We are not educated. That's why the government doesn't do anything for us", she says. It is for this reason that she wants a good education for her children. "I want my son to work in a bank and my daughter to become a doctor."

These parents feel that their children will not have to live the life they have had to, if they get a decent education. "Children should study well and do well. They should not have to shed tears like us", says 30-year-old Parvati, a mother of two.

And it isn't just the adults who feel that it is the lack of education that is a cause for poverty. Speaking to students sponsored by ACT, strong remarks come out on why their mothers and fathers have lived under the shadow of poverty.

13-year-old Gayathri, a ninth standard student of Maharishi Agastya Vidyalaya (located in Ulsoor's S. C. Garden), is very plain in her mind why some women become domestic workers and others don't. People work as maids because they haven't studied, she says. "Education is needed."

On the other hand there are some amongst the poor who don't stop there. They feel that the government has ignored the poor because they are busy pleasing the rich. "Government supports only rich people because of money", says Shilpa P., 17, a 1st pre-university (PU) student. Her friend Manju M. also feels similarly saying, "Government is not doing anything for us because we don't have money."

Sangeetha R. says the government takes advantage of people being poor, and therefore does nothing for them. Swathi V. feels the government doesn't help the poor because they think the poor aren't vocal enough about their problems. "The government thinks we can't question them. If anyone questions them, they'll just pay them to keep quiet", says the 15-year-old student.

Talking to these youngsters, it's clear that their own realities are shaping their ideas about 'what government is' itself. Still, they think someone high up in politics will listen to them. "If I get a chance to speak to a 'big' person I'll ask them to look into our needs", says Swathi.

Poor Governance and Inequitable Use of Funds

So at a time when Bengaluru continues to grow at a fast pace and there is an increase in the influx of migrants, what do people in city politics and grassroots work feel are the reasons for basic amenities still not reaching the poor?

Earlier this year, low-income citizens of Mathikere were provided temporary housing under this flyover, as their houses were being demolished for road-widening.

N. P. Samy, President of the Karnataka Kolageri Nivasigala Samyukta Sanghatane (KKNSS), says education is the key. KKNSS is a state-level slum-dwellers federation, started by slum-dwellers, to fight for their rights and their place in society. "Without education, no society can go forward", stresses Samy, who also believes that the lack of committed bureaucrats and politicians results in no opportunities for those who need them the most.

BJP's Jayanagar constituency MLA B. N. Vijaykumar, who has been appreciated for his serious-minded local initiatives over the past two years, says the system isn't working because of "useless" government officials. "Everyone thinks politicians are above government officials. It's not the

reality. Take the case of a food inspector or a clerk, they'll do what they want. They are lazy, incompetent", he says, adding that they need to be motivated to work, which in itself a laborious task.

Former MLA and present corporator of Hanumanthnagar (Ward 155), K. Chandrashekar also blames it on the bureaucracy. "The bureaucracy is not introducing schemes in a proper manner. That's why it's not reaching the right places. Many people are not aware of the benefits", he opines.

But co-founder of Bangalore-based not-for-profit Janaagraha, Ramesh Ramanathan, feels that the problem is with the way government institutions are designed, where there's no single agency looking into the needs of the urban poor. In Bangalore, for example, you have the Karnataka Slum Clearance Board, BBMP, BWSSB, BDA and so on, most of them not working in coordination with one another, making the system more complex, says Ramanathan. (Janaagraha works with citizens and the government to improve urban governance).

"If there is a problem in a slum and you approach the local corporator, he can't do much. A corporator cannot control the slum board because it doesn't come under the corporation. He can probably use influence, that's all", says Ramanathan, explaining where the problem lies.

He also feels that prioritisation of funds is not equitable and transparent. "We see arbitrary decisions being made. So many crores are allocated for metro rail. In the process of prioritising, it is always the poor who are affected", he adds.

Bangalore-based filmmaker and political ecologist Pankaj Gupta also echoes this opinion. "Just look at the investments - at public expense - being made for connecting up Electronic city, the IT hub in Outer Ring Road, and the ITPL. Look at the investments being made to keep the airport well-connected", says Gupta.

Gupta's and Ramanathan's views are insights into a system lacking in a balance of priorities. It is noteworthy that teenagers Shilpa and Manju of Ulsoor already summed up the same sense in their own way earlier in this report: *the government has ignored the poor because they are busy pleasing the rich.*

Mega Projects Versus Pro-Poor Policy

So where should change in the city begin from, for real improvement to reach the poor?

Gupta feels that a good and responsible governance is what is required.

Ramanathan says it all needs to begin with collection of data from which the deficit can be measured. He explains that there is no accurate data on how many slums there are in Bangalore. "The slum board does have some data but it is not comprehensive. How difficult is it to have an accurate list?", he asks.

The collection of data should include information on the number of households, electricity connections, toilets, access to bus stops and so on. "We keep talking about parking for two-wheelers and four-wheelers. My wife (Swati Ramanathan who co-founded Janaagraha) wrote a report where she asks about parking for pushcarts and autos".

It is estimated that the population of the poor is more than 15 lakhs in this growing metropolis. While the city and state's decision-makers are hosting investor meets and having sleepovers at the Vidhana Soudha, very little is being done for the underprivileged.

So at one end of the spectrum lie mega projects like metro rail, road-widening, signal free corridors and so on. At the other end lie Selvi and her lot, who, in their large numbers are major contributors of low-priced labour to Bengaluru's economy. For now, in the midst of high-rise buildings, shopping malls and multi-national companies, the Selvis continue to struggle to make ends meet. Their hope: a better life for their children.

Battling Predators at Work

January 23, 2013

The Vishaka guidelines were meant to counter sexual harassment in the office but women employees who complain often end up fighting a lonely battle. The report deals with the case of a woman who was harassed at the workplace and refused to keep quiet about it. Lacunae in laws and implementation make it extremely difficult to seek justice in sexual harassment cases.

This is the story of a woman who allegedly suffered sexual harassment at her workplace, a multi-national company, but did not give up the fight even after the organisation suspended and later dismissed her.

Activists have lamented how women who choose to fight the demon of sexual harassment at the workplace are often targeted. In cases where they decide to struggle alone, they are shown the door. Lack of strong protective legislation worsens their plight.

To hear her tell it, the case of 32-year-old Rama Lobo (name changed to protect identity) was no different. She is now entangled in a maze of cases and counter-cases running in various courts, nearly a year-and-a-half after she was suspended from service. But this mother of two children has not given up. Nor has her family, which is backing her.

Rama Lobo joined Godrej Hicare Ltd. on December 1, 2005. The division merged with ISS Integrated Facility Private Limited, a Denmark-based MNC, in April 2009. She worked with ISS Hicare Private Limited, a Pest Management Service provider which is a part of ISS Group – one of the world's largest facility services providers with a presence in Europe, Asia, USA and Australia. The company is fighting the sexual harassment and unfair dismissal charges in court and has also filed a defamation case against her.



Vinaya Deshpande Pandit, The Hindu

Vinaya Deshpande is Principal Correspondent with The Hindu in Mumbai. She won the award for Best Investigative Crime Story at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Western Region.

Ms. Lobo worked in the HR (Human Resource) department and was a top performer with consistently good ratings, so much so that her organisation even funded her e-MBA programme by paying Rs. 3 lakhs. According to her, things changed when a new person joined the organisation in 2010 at a very senior position in the HR department. Ms. Lobo's boss, who used to report to him, resigned abruptly. And she then found herself shifted to various sections, kept without work for some time, and allegedly given hints about "performing as per expectations."

Every time she was put on a new task which she had not done earlier, she took it as a challenge and excelled at the job – something admitted to by her colleagues and bosses including senior HR personnel.

But the hints did not stop and one day, when she wanted to know why she wasn't being promoted despite good performance, she was allegedly told that mere performance was not sufficient, and that she needed to sit after office hours for getting promoted.

"On June 29, 2011, [My boss] told me, 'You don't understand how to get promotions, you are very hardworking and honest and your performance is excellent, but this is not enough, I told you before also, you have to use your body and your nose, mouth and tongue to get things done and to go up the ladder.' While talking about all this, he pressed his hand against my hand and gestured very seductively," Ms. Lobo told *The Hindu*.

Unable to bear it, she says she screamed at him and stormed out of his office to the nearest police station to register a complaint. Her office staff persuaded her not to file a police complaint, fearing the reputation of the company would be scarred. A senior management official assured her that her complaint would be heard by the internal committee for investigating sexual harassment.

But while hearing her case on June 30, the company allegedly flouted the Supreme Court's guidelines under the Vishaka judgment, as also its internal regulations under the firm's sexual harassment policy.

The confidentiality clause was breached even as the top management held a meeting with female staffers later and told them that Ms. Lobo had raised a sexual harassment complaint as she was unhappy at not being promoted, and that the accused person was not at fault. The internal committee, which

signed its report on July 5, concluded that Ms. Lobo's allegations were untrue.

When asked by *The Hindu* in a detailed email about the alleged flouting of norms and other pertinent queries, ISS Hicare responded, "We wish to state at the outset that the matter is *sub judice* and hence, we do not wish to give any comment at this juncture. The allegations are completely false and baseless. In fact the accused person [has] already filed a defamation suit against Ms. Lobo [name changed] and it is accepted by the court."

It is, ultimately, the case of a high performer turned into a "dull, lazy, adamant and non-cooperative" employee. She had also "brought disrepute" to the company by escalating the matter to the senior management of the parent company outside the country. The company, which, she claims, initially promised her an apology letter and a promotion later suspended her before sacking her unceremoniously, on August 13, 2012 after deciding her complaint was untrue.

"I was only talking about my dignity. I demanded a safe working environment. If I brought the injustice to the notice of my own seniors in the parent company, how did I bring disrepute to the company," she asked.

Women's rights activists have pointed out that the organisations generally view such cases from the perspective of the company's prestige and not as breach of an individual employee's right to dignity and safety, leading to skewed attitudes and hushing up of such cases.

It was the Bombay High Court which came to the rescue of Ms. Lobo.

On the basis of a writ petition filed by her, it directed the police to register a First Information Report in the case and directed the company to reformulate a committee as per the Vishaka guidelines to investigate charges of sexual harassment.

The company has filed counter-cases of defamation and extortion against her and her husband.

The accused has also filed a defamation case against her in a local court. The proceedings in all the cases continue.

Child Marriages: When Laws Betray Children...

November 12, 2012

This article explains how despite the presence of laws our country is unable to solve the riddle of child marriages and age of consent, which has left even the courts confused.

You wouldn't know she's a widow until you spend over an hour talking to her about her family. In the midst of this, Asma suddenly begins gasping for breath as she cries copiously. Her smudged kajal defines the stream in which her tears flow down her rosy cheeks. Her puffed up eyes reflect the tiredness on her face. As if she has cried the night before I met her. Recollecting her husband's death, the 40-year-old woman says bluntly "he died of cardiac arrest."

Splashing water on her face, in a morbid tone, she says: "I'm not crying because he died. I'm upset because he hasn't written the property on my name." She continues "How should I take care of all the children? I do not work. So, where will I get the money from?" The irksome expression was an indication of a harrowing life she underwent after her wedding.

"Why should I cry for him?" she asks, adding that she was robbed of childhood because she was married off at the age of 13 to Sajid, a man 23 years older than her. Gradually unravelling her wedding diaries, Asma says "This man had come to Hyderabad from Oman. He stayed at a motel which was a stone's throw away from my house in Old City."

Being a "richie rich", he managed to win over my parents by offering monetary help during difficult times, she reveals. In return, he wanted me, she says. "My marriage was a transaction and I was the commodity," Asma reveals. A victim of domestic violence, Asma was taken to Oman after her wedding with Sajid.



Tejaswini Pagadala, www.countercurrents.org

Tejaswini Pagadala is with Deccan Chronicle and her passion lie in covering and reporting on human rights. She has written on child sex abuse, sex education, human trafficking, Dalit rights and deprivation and child marriage. She won the award for the Best Feature at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Southern Region.

“He had three wives and 16 children. The old man wanted me only for sex,” she laments, adding that she has three kids with him.

Six months after her wedding, Asma told her husband that she wanted to go back to Hyderabad. “He said yes to that. I was happy I wouldn’t be in chains anymore.” He used to visit us one or twice a year, she reveals.

Taking a deep breath, she says “Hum logon mein ye sab chalte rehta! Bahut Shadiyaan hote yahan tho, (It is a common practice among us, Muslims. Child marriages are rampant in Old City),” in the native Hyderabad Hindi language.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) of 2006 states that a “child” or minor under this law is defined as someone below 18 years of age, in the case of girls and 21 years, in the case of boys.

Under the Act, a male adult above 18 years of age, who marries a child, shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment extending to two years or with a fine of up to Rs.1 lakh or both.

“Whoever performs, conducts, directs or abets a child marriage, including parents or an organisation will also face similar punishment,” it says.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as a person below 18 years and identifies the rights of children. A woman’s right to free and informed choice in the matter of a marital relationship is a fundamental human right which is secured by the provisions of a number of international human rights instruments, says Article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

These international organisations enumerate various human rights standards for the protection of children, choice of relationship and the age at marriage, and inform the laws on child marriage in India.

Arab Nationals

But, Asma’s example reflects the prevalence of child marriages among Hyderabad’s minority community. Reasons for this can be attributed to the heavy influx of people from Saudi Arabia, Oman and other Gulf countries into Old City.

According to activists, the “fixed-term matrimony” practice began in the 1970s after the Gulf countries banned their citizens from bringing home minor foreign brides.

Hyderabad has been a hunting ground for Gulf Arabs seeking young, virgin brides. This racket came to light in the early 1990s when an alert air hostess rescued a weeping pre-teen, Ameena, from her 60-year-old Arab husband, on a flight out of Hyderabad.

M. A. Shakeel of Human Rights Law Network says the incidence of child marriages is high in Old City of Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. “These foreign nationals come on a conditionality stating they are distant relatives of a person living in Old City or that they are physically disabled,” Shakeel adds.

Temporary marriage contracts called *Mutah* happen in Old city. Generally, aged and wealthy Arab nationals visit India, especially Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, to prey on teenage girls by paying fat cash as dowry to their parents. They marry a minor, stay in Hyderabad for a brief period and fly back home. “This has been an age-old practice,” Shakeel explains.

In a shocking incident in January 2007, a 60-year-old Arab was on a wedding vacation to Hyderabad. He had married three girls, Sahana, Fatima and Asfiya, at a single sitting. All, within 10 minutes.

Similarly in May 2004, one Muhammad Zafer Yaqub Hassan al-Jorani hailing from Sharjah came to Hyderabad on the pretext of a cataract operation. Jorani was living with his two wives and 11 children in his Sharjah residence. On May 7, he had married Sabah, a 19-year-old girl, in Hyderabad. Two days later, he divorced her. On May 24, he had married another 16-year-old girl Ruksaar. Following this, Sabah braved to approach the police and got Jorani arrested. Police later learnt that Jorani was living with his two wives and 11 kids at his Sharjah residence.

A person who has been a witness of several such marriages and did not want to be named says, “I have seen such marriages. I even tried to alert the police. In turn, I was threatened.”

Reflecting the same opinion, Mr. Shakeel says, the Human Rights Law Network had faced several such threats in their attempts to thwart child marriages. “In one case, we were informed about a child marriage. When we

were on our way, we had received threatening calls from local politicians. It was difficult to intervene,” he says, adding that the child marriage was finally stopped with the help of the Mandal Revenue Officer and the RDO.

Contradictory Laws Perpetrate Child Marriages

The Qazi Act of 1880 gives a free will for Qazis to perform weddings as the Act doesn't specify any age limit for marriage. According to S. Umaphathi inspector general, CID, Urdughar, there is a need to amend the Qazi Act. He adds that a clause specifying the minimum marriageable age of girls as 18 years also has to be brought into the Act.

Even the Sharia Law perpetrates child marriages as it says that a girl after attaining puberty is ready for marriage, without specifying the age limit again.

However, Farida Hussain, president of All India Women's conference, explains in a report that the Qazi Act amendment would not solve the problem. “The problem is prevalent among minor girls of other communities too,” she says.

Irrespective of the communities in which child marriages are prevalent, child rights' laws in India are very contradictory. “They somehow rationalise child marriages. Different laws like the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006, the Juvenile Justice Act, the proposed Protection of Child Against Sexual Offences Bill contradict and clash. There is no clarity,” rues Mamatha Raghuvver of Tharuni.

An example of this can be the Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences Bill (awaiting to become an Act). How? It has said that a minor (boy) below 18 may undergo criminal procedures if anybody complains that he has had sex with his wife, amounting to rape. “It is mandatory for everyone to report any under-18 sex, including the doctor the wife consults if she is pregnant,” the Bill says.

But, under the Indian Penal Code, sex with a woman under 16, and under 15 if she's the man's wife, constitutes statutory rape and can attract a jail term of a few years or life imprisonment. So, if a girl named A is 14 years old at the time of her marriage, her husband has to wait for four years to have sex with her according to the former law, while the IPC says he'll have to wait for two years.

The Marriage Registration Dilemma

The provision included in the Hindu Marriage Act (includes Jains and Buddhists), Muslim Marriage Act, Christian Marriage Act, Parsee Marriage and the Divorce Act says that no marriage involving minors will be null and void unless one of the spouses seeks annulment.

Ms. Raghuveer says many advocates are misusing the above clause in Marriage Registration Act and the PCMA to get divorce faster for their clients. "In most cases, the husband coaxes the girl into seeking a divorce when he actually wants it," she opines, adding that a person can get divorce quickly under the PCMA Act.

On the other hand, Mr. Shakeel adds a different angle to this. "Firstly, if the man has married a minor, he would be questioned. He can be booked under a criminal case for it," he says.

The practice of manipulation of birth and marriage certificates is also part of child marriages. "Most of girls don't have age proof or birth certificates," says Venkat Reddy, National Convener of MVF.

"Even if they show an age proof, it is likely to be manipulated. Same goes with a Marriage registration certificate," reveals Subhash Chandra, a district official of child welfare committee.

Low Conviction Rates

The lack of establishing evidence also leads to low conviction rates in child marriage cases. According to Mr. Umaphathi, "People do not report these cases. Moreover, if a case goes to a court, the evidence is diluted."

Because it takes years for a child marriage case to reach the courts, most of them (involved) are acquitted. "Girls do not take a strong stand. They succumb to family pressure and withdraw the case," Mr. Umaphathi explains.

Of the total 1659 child marriage cases taken up in courts in 2011, only 76 people were convicted across India under the PCMA act, with a pendency rate of trials at over 88 per cent. The statistics show that every one in four persons is acquitted.

An amusing trend evident in such cases is the out-of-court settlement. "This is convenient as they don't have to spend so much time and money," says Achyuta Rao, president, A. P. Balala Hakkula Sangham, adding that even at that stage parents want the couple to re-unite.

Policy Intervention in Andhra Pradesh

Five years after the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act has been passed, the AP government has taken steps to curb child marriages.

Following the state's directions, Sunita Laxma Reddy, Women and Child welfare development minister, said: "Many parents we counselled feigned ignorance of the law. After propagation of the rules, we will act strongly."

The six-tier system of Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs) has been set up from the district down to the village level to effect implementation of the Act.

However, the dismal numbers point at the lack of data recording and vigilance in villages despite high incidence of child marriages in certain districts. The CMPOs, who are vested with powers of a police officer and can thwart a wedding and book cases as well as village child marriage prohibition and monitoring committees and the gram panchayats, opine that child marriages have ended.

What Can be Done?

According to Mamidi S. Chandra, director, Carped and member of ICPU, there should be a comprehensive, inter-related law regarding age of consent and marriage across religions.

Expressing discontent over confusing laws for children, Ms. Raghuvver says, "All these laws only add to our woes. They don't address the child marriage problem."

Interestingly, Mr. Shakeel says that the PCMA alone is enough to penalise people involved in marrying off a minor. "It should only be implemented effectively," he says.

One should see it as a demand and supply chain, says Mr. Reddy, continuing, "because there is demand for girls (from the boys' side), there is supply. So, this should stop."

While those are some suggestions to stop forced child marriages, we have another set of astounding advices from Haryana's Khap Panchayat to its former chief minister urging to bring down the age of consent from 18 to 16 for girls. That said, all marriages below 18 years should be automatically made void.

A recent United Nation's report on child marriages states that the number of child marriages has been declining in India. Unfortunately, the dropping numbers only point to the contradicting laws that result in dismal reporting of such cases.

In fact, the riddle of the age of consent and child marriages has left even the highest institution in our country, the Judiciary, confused. So, where else do we go?

(This article has been written as part of the Asmita Media Fellowship 2012-13)



Dolly Thakore with special guests Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana Azmi, Javed Akhtar and Dr. A. L. Sharada (Director, Population First).

Empowered & Independent

July 4, 2013

The article below focuses on the rehabilitation of trafficked girls. It is pointed out that most of the time the girls rescued were not rehabilitated properly. Unable to go back to normal life without a source of income, they can hope to be mainstreamed only if society treats them sensitively.

Love, marriage and security are distant dreams for trafficked women or those forced into prostitution. Metro shares the stories of women who made a journey from despair to hope and a life worth living, with help from knights, not perhaps in shining armour, but with the courage to overcome stigma

She ran away from an oppressive family, only to be sold off to a brothel in Mumbai. Nusrat, now Srishti, was lucky to be rescued from there and taught herself to be self-sufficient. Wife, mother and project co-ordinator with a rehabilitation centre, Nusrat's is a tale of inspiration...

Nusrat was nine when she ran away from home and a conservative Muslim joint family in Howrah where girls weren't allowed to read and write or step out of their home.

"I'd see my cousin brothers go to school but whenever I told my mother I wanted to study, she would hush me up. I wasn't allowed to mix with Hindus and had to bathe five times if I did. I would always feel upset so one night I fled home and went to Howrah station," recalls Nusrat, now 23.

The sleepy nine-year-old dozed off on a platform bench and woke up to find herself on a moving train. "A woman was sitting beside me and told me 'don't worry, I will take you to a place where you'll be safe and also earn money'. So I went along with her." Nusrat was brave enough to land up in Mumbai with a stranger but not old enough to realise that she had been sold to a red-light area in Chor Bazaar.



Mohua Das, The Telegraph

Mohua Das has been a special writer of The Telegraph, Kolkata since 2006 and has steered 'The Telegraph Metro Safe City and Unsafe City', the newspaper's editorial driven initiatives against sexual harassment in the city. She won the award for the Best New Feature Series at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Eastern Region.

“I remember seeing a lot of women in pretty clothes standing along the stretch. I was taken into a house and kept inside a room hidden within walls where I found many little girls like me. We’d be given good food to eat, made to watch films and sometimes a doctor would come and check us,” says Nusrat. Although comfortable, she found it disturbing to watch the movies and being overfed. “Now I realise that those were blue films that we were made to watch and stuffed with food to make us fleshy.”

Nusrat had luck on her side when Mumbai’s police conducted a sudden raid on the traffickers’ den and rescued the girls. Nusrat returned to Calcutta and was put in the Liluah Home. “But my parents rejected me... they felt that for a girl once sold into a red-light area, there was no returning home,” says Nusrat. “I came of age by 13 and realised what it meant to be on your own.”

She moved from one shelter home to another and gradually worked towards empowering herself with education and dance.

“I wanted to do something that would be useful for me and for girls like me. So I became part of a rehabilitation centre and trained myself so that I could train others,” says Nusrat who also went in for a new name to go with her new identity when she turned 18. “Since my family had shunned me as a child, I did not want to keep my family name. I went to the Alipore court and got my name legally changed to Srishti.”

Like any other teenager, she fell in love with a boy who worked at a fast food shop next to her hostel. “I would visit his shop and we got talking, then one day he proposed to me,” said Srishti, a senior trainer and project co-ordinator with a rehabilitation centre.

Although honest about her background, Srishti didn’t want to emphasise her past for fear of another rejection. “I was afraid, so I lied to him about my name and my parents but he laughed and told me one day that he had found out everything about me and was ready to accept me for what I am.”

After two years of dating and setting up their own fast food eatery, they signed the marriage papers in 2009. “He did not hide anything from his parents either. Although hesitant at first, they finally approved.”

Srishti, who has a one-year-old son, says, “I’m very happy today and lucky because I’ve seen many survivors like me who don’t find a boy ready to marry them or a family that accepts them. The few that do are often subjected to taunts and torment. I hope that more girls find understanding men like my husband, who are willing to give innocent girls a fresh lease of life.”

Enough is Enough

July 22, 2012

There are several laws to protect women at all stages of their lives. But as facts show, they continue to suffer at the hands of society and the system. The article below gives us the types of violence faced by women, the laws that exist and the status.

Woman who is protected in her adolescence by the father, in her youth by her husband, and in her old-age by her son, deserves no freedom at any time". (Manusmriti 9:3) Thousands of years after the Manusmriti prescribed a very restrictive code of conduct for women, Indian society is refusing to look beyond it. Every time one thinks that the condition of women has improved, there is a Guwahati or a Bhagpat – a minor girl is molested and stripped by a mob in public or a khap panchayat issues a fatwa that women can't use cell phones and dare not go out without covering their faces. One is forced to rethink.

Even worse are the statements of those who are mandated by the law to protect the rights of women. National Commission for Women chairperson Mamta Sharma's statement after the Guwahati incident that 'Women should be careful in dressing themselves' is highly insensitive and outrageous, to say the least. It also exposes the limitations of the system that always appoints people with political backgrounds to such posts, perhaps fearing an independent person might embarrass the political establishment.

When the Indian constitution came into force on January 26, 1950, we opted for universal adult franchise at a time when women did not have voting rights in many of the western countries, including Switzerland. Today, we have a woman president, a woman speaker, a woman chairperson of the ruling coalition and several successful women in various fields. Notwithstanding these achievements, 65 years after independence, the condition of women in



Satya Prakash, Hindustan Times

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general is deteriorating. What is also disturbing is the fact that they are unsafe even in the so-called educated urban set-up.

A woman is harassed and discriminated against throughout her life (see lifestages).

Obviously, the Manusmriti's advice isn't working. According to a study by the South India Cell for Human Rights Education and Monitoring, a woman is molested every 26 minutes. One woman is raped every 34 minutes. Nearly five lakh girls are killed every year even before birth.

One-fourth of the 15 million girls born every year don't get to celebrate their 15th birthday. Around 1,000 honour killings (mostly girls) take place every year. According to "UN Human Development Report 2011", India ranks a low 134 among 187 countries in terms of the human development index (HDI), thanks to the gender inequality practised in the country.

Fifteen years after the Supreme Court laid down guidelines to deal with sexual harassment at the workplace, India is still struggling to have a proper law to deal with the issue. It's taken 12 years for the government to consider the Law Commission's 172nd Report on Review of Rape Laws and propose changes in the Indian Penal Code. God knows how much more time it will take to translate

the Bill approved by the Cabinet on July 19 into a proper law. Enough is enough. The time for talk is over. Here's how things stack up – and the reasons why action needs to be taken. As of yesterday.

How safe are women in India:

Life cycle of an Indian woman: exploited, subjugated and shortchanged from birth to death

BIRTH (0-4 YEARS)

Foeticide

Overview: A joint study carried out by researchers in India and Canada projects that half a million unborn girls may be aborted in India every year. According to the 2011 Census, the country has an average sex ratio of 940 females to 1000 males. Kerala has the highest sex ratio at 1084 while Haryana has the lowest at 877. The union territory of Daman and Diu has a sex ratio of 618. Things don't look set to get better. According to the GOI's Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, there will be 931 females per 1000 males in 2016 and 930 by 2021.

The idea that the sex ratio is more skewed among the uneducated or rural population isn't entirely true. In 1901, it stood at 979. More than a century later in 2011, it has fallen to 947. In urban areas, it was 910 in 1901; it stood at 926 in 2011.

Law: A number of laws have been passed to curb female foeticide and improve the gender balance in 1982. The spotlights first focused on clinics offering sex determination tests. The Central Act PreNatal Diagnostic Techniques Act (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) was passed in 1994.

Status: Though it's estimated by the UN that 50 million girls are missing in India due to foeticide, a few hundred cases are registered under the PNDT act. Convictions are even fewer with not more than a hundred in 18 years of the law's existence. But perhaps things are set to change. Last week, the Jind Maha Khap, a gathering of more than 300 khap panchayats, denounced female foeticide.

Infanticide

Overview: In the case of infanticides, things are trickier as these cases are often reported as still-births or not reported at all.

Law: Culprits can be tried under the Indian Penal Code.

Status: Though there are enough provisions to try culprits under murder charges, female infanticide goes largely unnoticed.

Nutrition

Overview: Girls are more likely to be malnourished than boys in India

Law: Provisions of domestic abuse can be used if girl child is being discriminated against in terms of food distribution due to her gender.

Implementation: Since it is hard to identify such cases, the laws are never implemented.

Status: The malnutrition level in male children is 45.6 % and 48.9% in girl children.

CHILDHOOD (5-12 YEARS)

Education

Overview: There is a 20-40% shortfall of attendance for girls in Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and

Orissa. The shortfall is 5-10 % in Assam, Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu.

Law: The Right to Education Act provides for universal education for children in the age group of six to 14.

Implementation: The male female sex ratio for school attendance shows the difference is lower in the six-10 years age group. The drop out rate is higher for girls in the 10+ stage.

Status: The gender bias against the girl child continues to manifest itself with families not sending their girls to school.

Child Marriage

Overview: For every woman aged below 18 getting married in urban areas, three are doing the same in rural areas. J & K has seen the largest dip in underaged brides at 83%. Kerala is the only state that has seen a 50% increase in girls getting married by age 18.

Law: In 2006 the Government of India replaced the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 with the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. Now child marriage is punishable with rigorous imprisonment. A non-bailable offence, those performing child marriages, male adults above 18 years marrying a child and the persons responsible for the child could be severely punished.

Implementation: Despite the Delhi High Court declaring child marriage a violation of human rights, the practice is still rampant.

Status: The incidence of early marriages remains high in Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chattisgarh with Jharkhand topping the chart at 71%.

Girl Child Labour

Overview: The NSSO survey 2009-10 puts the number of working children at 49.84 lakh. 19.25 were female. However UNICEF data of 2004-05 had put the number of working children at a much higher figure of 60 million.

Law: The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986 prohibits the employment of children below 14 years in 70 hazardous occupations. Domestic work and hotel work is on the list of banned occupations. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) of Children Act of 2000 made it a crime, punishable with a prison term for anyone to procure or employ a child in bondage.

Implementation: Despite the list of hazardous occupations, the practice of employing child labour continues.

Status: Minor girls from rural and tribal areas who work as domestic help are often kept in inhuman conditions and deprived of basic amenities.

Child Trafficking

Overview: There are two million child commercial sex workers between five and 15 years of age. They form 40% of the total population of commercial sex workers in India. Five lakh children are forced into this trade every year.

Law: Section Five of the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act or PITA of 1986 states that procuring or inducing a child into prostitution will be met with a minimum seven-year prison sentence which can be extended to a life term. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, intends to help the large number of children in need of care and protection but many fall victim to abuse at state home too.

Status: Minors continue to be forced into begging, prostitution, pornography, the organ trade and sex tourism.

ADOLESCENCE (13-18 YEARS)

Sexual Violence

Overview: One out of two children in schools have faced sexual abuse according to 'Study on Child abuse India 2007' conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. About 63% of girls in Delhi have experienced sexual abuse at the hands of a family member. Nearly 33% of the women said the perpetrator had been the father, grandfather or a male friend of the family (Sakshi, 1997).

Law: The Parliament has passed the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Bill, 2011 during the last Budget session.

Implementation: To protect children below 18 from sexual abuse, the Parliament has set up special courts for speedy trial of cases against them and provided stringent punishment extending up to life term for offenders.

Women in Media

Overview: The number of cases under the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986 has been increasing over the years – from 190 in 1998 to nearly 900 in 2010. As per the National Crime Records Bureau,

there was a nearly 200% increase in reported cases between 1999 and 2000. Andhra Pradesh with 753 cases in 2010 has accounted for the highest in the country.

Law: Indecent Representation of Women (prohibition) Act, 1986 (IRWPA) deals with the prohibition of advertisements and selling of publications that indecently represent women. The Information Technology Act, 2000: Section 67 of the IT Act is a legislative measure against pornography, while the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 prohibits the transmission of advertisements which are not in conformity with the Advertisement Code.

Implementation: In May 2012, the government said it is considering including visual media and computer (including the internet) within the scope of the IRWPA.

Sanitation

Overview: According to a 2010 survey by A. C. Nielson, nearly 90% women in India use ashes, newspapers, dried leaves, even husk sand during their periods due to unaffordability of sanitary napkins. Menstrual hygiene is lowest in eastern India with 83% women saying their families can't afford SNs. Due to inadequate protection during menstruation, adolescent girls miss five days of school every month, 23% drop out of school after they start menstruating and over 70% of the women have some kind of reproductive tract infection in their lifetime, increasing the risk of contracting associated cancers.

Law: There is no uniform legislation on the subject and different states have municipal byelaws.

Status: In June 2010, the Union Health Ministry announced Rs. 150 crore scheme to provide sanitary napkins to adolescent girls in rural areas for Re. 1 per pack. However, this 'plan' is yet to kick off.

YOUTH (18-40 YEARS)

Honour Killing

Overview: It is estimated that 1,000 honour killings take place per year across India, against the global figure of about 5,000 across the world. (India figures according to 2010 independent study by lawyers Anil Malhotra and Ranjit Malhotra of Malhotra & Malhotra Associates, Chandigarh. (Global figures according to UNHRC, 2010.)

Law: There is no separate law to deal with honour killings. IPC 302, the law dealing with murders is used to prosecute the accused in such cases.

Implementation: Supreme Court lawyer Aishwarya Bhati says that as society changes, the law changes to adapt to it. She cites the formulation of 304B of the IPC to deal with dowry deaths in 1986 after dowry deaths had become an overwhelming menace. Bhati adds, “Just as special circumstances of dowry deaths were recognised and laws formulated to deal with such crimes, it may be time to formulate laws to deal with honour killings, where the onus of disproving the allegation would be on the defendant as opposed to being on the prosecution.” If a law formulated around circumstances – for example, unnatural death under suspicious circumstances occurring close to marriage, after a history of threats, and caste-based animosity – could be established for honour killings, convictions would become easier.

Status: In the absence of a specific law, the khap panchayats are having a field day as even the general Indian Penal Code provisions relating to unlawful assembly and murder are not being implemented by law-enforcement agencies.

DOWRY

Overview: Although legislations against the dowry system are in place – the first one becoming law in 1961 and another stringent one against dowry deaths formulated in 1986 – the practice continues largely because Indian society internalizes a patriarchal culture, which is also becoming increasingly consumerist.

Law: In 1986, after pressure from activists, the Indian Penal Code was amended to include section 304 B, specifically against murder following harassment for dowry.

Implementation: Various crime-against-women cells have been formed around the country by various states, which deal with, among other things, dowry harassment complaints. However, awareness of the existence of these cells is still very low among women.

Status: According to the National Crime Records Bureau’s figures, 8,618 dowry deaths were reported in 2011, a rise of 91% since 2006. The 2011 figure translates into 23.61 cases of dowry deaths in the country every day. A charge-sheeting rate of 92% and a conviction rate of 35.8% were reported for 2011. In the same year, 6,619 cases of dowry harassment were reported.

Domestic Abuse

Overview: Despite the legislation, instances of domestic violence are rampant. According to a report by UN Women, around 35% Indian women suffer physical violence at the hands of their partners while nearly 40% men and women think that it is sometimes or always 'justifiable' for a man to beat his wife. There is no law dealing with marital rape.

Law: The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 came into force on October 26, 2006. It means to protect the wife or female live-in partner from domestic violence.

Implementation: Little has been done to address domestic violence. Public intervention would be helpful and NGOs have initiated campaigns like "Ghanti Bajao" ("ring the bell").

Status: According to National Crime Records Bureau's 2011 figures, 99,135 cases of domestic abuse were reported – a rise of 57% over 2006. For 2011, the NCRB reports a chargesheeting rate of 94.4% but a dismal 20.2% conviction rate.

MIDDLE AGE (40-60 YEARS)

Sexual Harassment at Work

Overview: According to an all-India study by NGO Sakshi, 80% women confirmed that sexual harassment existed in their workplace. The Supreme Court defines sexual harassment as any unwelcome gesture, behaviour, words or advances that are sexual in nature.

Law: India still awaits a law dealing with this problem. In the absence of one the Supreme Court has said the Vishakh and others vs State of Rajasthan (1997) is to be used as a set of guidelines.

Implementation: Dr. Medha Kotwal Lele, coordinator of Aalochana, filed a petition with the Supreme Court which said that neither the Centre nor the states had implemented the Vishaka Guidelines. A case that has been cited in this regard is that of Baroda's MS University where a research scholar was repeatedly abused by her supervisor and on complaining, none of the Supreme Court's guidelines were followed, specifically that of involving an NGO familiar with sexual harassment cases.

Status: The Ministry of Women and Child Development has prepared a draft entitled 'The Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Bill, 2007' to provide for the prevention and redressal of sexual harassment of women at the workplace. However, this is still at the Bill stage.

Divorce

Overview: Indian divorce laws are skewed against women because most of them do not enjoy high economic status. Even in the case of claiming maintenance, men can feign loss of wealth. Tracing property in India is tough and women seldom have the means to do so. Men often buy property in the name of their relatives and plead poverty in divorce courts.

Law: As per Hindu Marriage Act, both women and men can file for divorce and have equal rights. But in terms of maintenance and custody battle over children, women tend to be at a disadvantage because of their low economic status. The triple-talaq way of terminating Muslim marriages does not give Muslim women any say in the matter. A marriage can be dissolved even without the consent of the wife.

Status: According to an upcoming study on The Economic Rights & Entitlements of Separated and Divorced Women in India, more than 80% of the more than 400 separated or divorced women surveyed blame 'cruelty or domestic violence in their marital homes', for their split.

Political Empowerment

Overview: The crucial stage of empowerment in a democracy is involvement in law-making and the political process. Despite being close to half the population, women are under-represented in the political process, at the central level as well as in the legislative assemblies. Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 and National Policy for Old Persons 1999, Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 (section 125 for maintenance).

Status: In India, the representation of women in Parliament is 11%, which is lower than sub-Saharan Africa. In 2000, the number of women in the Lok Sabha was 49, which progressed to 60 in 2012. From 9% in 2000, representation now stands at 11%. This is below the average of 18% in South Asia.

Law: The Women's Reservation Bill, ensuring 33% reservation to women in Parliament and state legislative bodies, was passed in the Rajya Sabha in March, 2010. It is pending in Lok Sabha. It seeks to reserve 181 of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha and 1,370 of 4,109 seats in the 28 State Assemblies.

Implementation: Following a constitutional amendment in 1993, 33% of seats are reserved for women in Panchayati Raj institutions. Reservation in Panchayat institutions has been implemented effectively in most states.

OLD AGE (60 YEARS +)

Widowhood

Overview: Women in their old age become subject to more subjugation as they are discriminated against for a share in property by inheritance or otherwise. Widows, who are left with no socio-economic standing of their own after their husband's death, are abandoned by their families in the religious town of Vrindavan. A Supreme Court-appointed panel has highlighted their pathetic condition.

Law: The Hindu Succession Act of 2005 granted women co-equal inheritance rights to ancestral and jointly owned property. In 2011, the section of the law which denied rights of a widow to inherit her husband's property upon remarriage was repealed. The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 allowed Hindu women to remarry after death of their spouse.

Implementation: Enforcement of this law is weak. Many women are still denied inheritance.

Status: India's elderly population has already crossed 100 million during 2011. As per the 2011 census, for elderly at (60+) population sex ratio is in favour of elderly women by 1022:1000. There are 40 million widows in India, almost 10% of the female population.

Old Age Homes

Overview: Old age homes in India are a myth. We have only about 2000 old age homes operational across India with only 50 old age homes for women.

Law: Maintenance and Welfare of parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007 and National Policy for Old Persons 1999, Criminal Procedure Code 1972 (Section 125 for maintenance)

Implementation: Procedural delays are common and are a great hindrance to these beneficial legislation.

Status: As per a study almost 17,000 people in India turn 60 every day and 9000 among them are women. About 2500 old women die every day. (Agewell Foundation)

वाल्मीकी औरतों का स्कूल आंदोलन-एक ऐतिहासिक विजय

This story, which was published in Ujala Chadi in Jaipur, is about a Dalit village in Sikar in Rajasthan which did not have a school for children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. The Government school was 2 km. away and the private ones were expensive. So a group of Dalit women started a movement to open a school and finally succeeded in opening one after 2 years. The story also tells us about the obstacles they faced in the process.

राजस्थान के सीकर शहर के अंबेडकर नगर की वाल्मीकि बस्ती। यहां ६ से १४ वर्ष के लगभग २५० बच्चे। इन बच्चों के लिए बस्ती में कोई सरकारी स्कूल नहीं थी। बच्चे पढ़ने कहां जाते। बच्चों की पढ़ाई का बीड़ा उठाया बस्ती की ही वाल्मीकि समुदाय की औरतों ने। अपनी बस्ती में स्कूल खुलवाने के लिए इन औरतों ने तीन साल पहले आंदोलन शुरू किया। इस दौरान इनके सामने कई रुकावटें आईं। सभी ने मिलकर हर रुकावट का सामना किया। आखिरकार, २४ नवंबर २०११ को इन औरतों ने अपनी बस्ती में स्कूल खुलवाकर ही दम लिया।

कहने को तो बस्ती से २ किलोमीटर दूर सरकारी स्कूल बना है। वहां तक रेल की पटरियां और राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग को पार करके जाना पड़ता था। बच्चों के परिवारवालों को डर सताता रहता था। इनकी बस्ती में कई निजी स्कूल भी खुले। स्कूलों की महंगी फीस, डेस, जूते, भारी भरकम बस्ता इन गरीब परिवारों के लिए आसान नहीं था। ये तो अपनी ही बस्ती में स्कूल खुलवाना चाहते थे।

इस संघर्ष में साथ मिला “वाल्मीकि महिला अधिकार मंच” का। मंच से जुड़ी मंजू बताती है। २९ दिसंबर २००९ को हम तत्कालीन कलक्टर से स्कूल की मांग के

उजाला छद्दी
ग्रामीण समाचार पत्र
(मासिक)

Ramtarun, Ujala Chadi

Aruna Burte is a feminist activist and has been consistently writing on gender issues. She was awarded for Consistent Engagement with Gender Issues at the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Western Region.

लिए एक चिट्ठी लेकर मिलने गए। कलक्टर साहब ने कहा लोग तो विदेश तक पढ़ने जाते हैं। क्या आपके बच्चे २ किलोमीटर तक भी नहीं जा सकते ? तब हमने एक आवाज में जवाब दिया “साहब गरीब का कोई बच्चा विदेश पढ़ने नहीं जाता। केवल पैसे वालों के बच्चे पढ़ने जाते हैं। गरीब मजदूरी करके अपने परिवार को पाले या २ किलोमीटर दूर के स्कूल में बच्चों को छोड़ने और लेने जाए।”

औरतों की जिला कलक्टर से पहली मुलाकात, भले ही बेअसर रही। कलक्टर का टाल मटोलू रवैया, उनके इरादे को और मजबूत कर गया। तब से सीकर से जयपुर, जयपुर से दिल्ली तक अपनी आवाज को पहुंचाने में इन औरतों ने कोई कोर कसर बाकी नहीं छोड़ी।

इसी संघर्ष की साथी लक्ष्मी, हाजरा, प्रेम और नाथी बाई बताती हैं। लगातार २ साल तक हम लड़ते रहे। ५१ बार सरकारी दफ्तरों के चक्कर लगाए। ३२ बार मंत्री, मुख्यमंत्री और अधिकारियों को ज्ञापन दिए, २ बार तत्कालीन शिक्षा मंत्री से मिले। ५ बार सैकड़ों बच्चों के साथ रैली निकालते हुए कलक्टर, डीईओ का घेराव किया। राजस्थान बाल अधिकार आयोग एवं राष्ट्रीय बाल अधिकार आयोग दिल्ली तक बात पहुंचाई। तब जाकर २८ जुलाई २०११ को स्कूल स्वीकृति की एक चिट्ठी महिला मंच को मिली। खुशी का ठिकाना नहीं रहा। यह खुशी भी जल्दी ही चिंता में बदल गई। हमने चिट्ठी में शिक्षा विभाग की एक शर्त को पढ़ा। शर्त थी बस्तीवासी स्कूल के लिए अगर जमीन देंगे, तो स्कूल खुलेगा।

युवा कवि और समाजकर्मी हेमंत कुमार कहते हैं फिर हमने यह तय किया कि भले ही सरकारी जमीन ना हो। एक किराए के मकान में स्कूल चलाएं। इसके लिए भी हमें चार महीनों तक १९ बार शिक्षा विभाग और पीडब्ल्यूडी ऑफिस के चक्कर लगाने पड़े। अगस्त २०१० में तत्कालीन डीईओ ने अपनी जिम्मेदारियों से कत्री काट ली। जनप्रतिनिधियों का स्कूल नहीं खुलवाने का खुद पर भारी दबाव बताया। हमने “सूचना का अधिकार कानून” के तहत ८ सितंबर २०१० को एक आरटीआई लगाई। हमारी अर्जियों पर अब तक की कार्यवाहियों के बारे में जानकारी चाही। हमारे आवेदन से विभागीय अधिकारी लाल पीले हो गए।

१८ अक्टूबर २०१० को शिक्षा विभाग ने आरटीआई का लिखित जवाब दिया। कहा कि “कार्यवाही निदेशालय स्तर पर हो रही है। हम कुछ नहीं कर सकते हैं।” इसके बाद फिर भागदौड़ हुई। चिट्ठियां लिखी गईं। आज कल करते हुए फिर से चार माह गुजार दिए। फिर नए डीईओ आए। स्कूल आंदोलन की भावना समझी। भौतिक सत्यापन का भरोसा जताया। इसके बाद शिक्षा विभाग की बस्ती विजिट हुई। इस बार अधिकारियों से समुदाय बैठक के दौरान सीधे ही बच्चों ने स्कूल नहीं खोलने का कारण पूछा।

२८ जुलाई २०११ के स्कूल मंजूरी आदेश के बाद भी विभागीय अधिकारियों के रवैए में बदलाव नहीं आया। औरतों ने अपने जिला कलक्टर, जिला प्रमुख और डीईओ को ८ नवंबर को एक चेतावनी भरा पत्र लिखा। कहा या तो वे स्कूल खोलें अन्यथा हम ऐसे भेदभाव के विरोध में अनिश्चितकालीन धरने पर बैठेंगी। तब आनन फानन में १४ नवंबर को नए स्कूल के लिए दो शिक्षकों की नियुक्ति की गई।

बस फिर क्या था। २१ नवंबर का दिन तय हुआ “स्कूल उद्घाटन” समारोह का। टीम ने स्कूल के लिए बिलडिंग ढूंढी। रंगारंग पुताई की। मैदान की सफाई की और भेज दिया न्यौता, जिला प्रशासन और जन प्रतिनिधियों को। उस दिन उपस्थित जिला प्रमुख, शिक्षा अधिकारी और अन्य आगंतुकों ने वाल्मीकि महिलाओं के स्कूल आंदोलन की जीत की बहुत बहुत बधाईयां दीं। सच में इस दिन समूची बस्ती के बच्चों, महिला, पुरुष और संगठन के लोगों ने इसे एक विजय उत्सव की तरह मनाया।

इस दिन करीब १२० बच्चों ने हाथों हाथ नाम लिखाया। कोमल, ज्योति, चांदनी, पायल, मोनिका, विशाखा, पूजा, प्रमोद, राहुल हाथ में लड्डू लिए अपने नए स्कूल को एक टक निहार रहे थे। जिस पर लिखा था, नवीन राजकीय प्राथमिक विद्यालय, वाल्मीकि बस्ती, अम्बेडकर नगर। एक ऐसा स्कूल जिसका सपना उनकी मांओं ने आज से २ साल पहले देखा था।

आधी आबादी, पूरी दवेदारी

May 1, 2013

This feature highlights the empowerment of women in the underdeveloped and tribal areas of Bundelkhand district of Madhya Pradesh. The women Panchayat members were instrumental in the progress being made in their villages be it in education, health, sanitation, roads or agriculture. That their work is well appreciated by the community is established by the fact that they have been contesting and winning elections in the general category, thus changing the perception that politics is not for women.

धारणाएं बनने में, खास तौर पर जब वे नकारात्मक और महिलाओं से जुड़ी हों, ज्यादा वक्त नहीं लगता। आज से दो दशक पहले जब मध्य प्रदेश में पंचायती राज के चुनाव में महिलाओं को एक तिहाई हिस्सेदारी दी गई तब कई तरह की बातें कही गई थीं। इनमें से ज्यादातर का लब्बोलुआब था कि यह महिलाओं को आरक्षण देने के नाम पर अप्रत्यक्ष रूप से पंचायतों पर पुरुषों का कब्जा बरकरार रखने की ही कोशिश है। उसी समय यह बताने के लिए कि महिलाएं राजनीति नहीं कर सकतीं 'सरपंचपति' जैसे जुमले गढ़े गए। इस बीच पंचायतों में महिलाओं को पचास फीसदी आरक्षण भी दे दिया गया। ऐसे में इस धारणा की पड़ताल जरूरी है कि क्या सच में ग्रामीण स्तर पर महिलाओं के बीच से नेतृत्व उभारने की कोशिश कहीं पहुंची है?

मग्न में पंचायत का चुनाव हुए दो साल से भी अधिक का वक्त गुजर चुका है। मगर पंचायत चुनाव के आंकड़े एक जगह नहीं मिलने से राजनीति में महिलाओं की वजनदारी का पता नहीं चल पाता है। लिहाजा यह जानने के लिए तहलका ने पंचायती राज विभाग और चुनाव आयोग से मिले आंकड़ों को इकट्ठा करके जब छानबीन शुरू की तो कई चौंकानेवाले नतीजे सामने आए। सबसे पहला और सुखद



Shirish Khare, Tehelka

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निष्कर्ष तो यही मिला कि सालों से पंचायती राज में नेतृत्व की एक प्रभावशाली कड़ी बनी रही इन महिला सरपंचों और पंचों ने सियासत के कई पुरुषों व प्रतीकों को बदल दिया है। कई जगहों पर वे नेता बनने की परिभाषा और भाषा भी बदल रही हैं। यदि 1993 से लेकर अब तक की उनकी इस राजनीतिक यात्रा में जाएं तो उन्होंने इस बीच दो बड़ी पारियां खेली हैं। एक तो मप्र की इन महिलाओं ने सामान्य सीटों पर भी खासी संख्या में मर्दों को पटकनी देकर उनके भीतर से राजनीतिक श्रेष्ठता का भ्रम तोड़ा है।

उनकी दूसरी बड़ी उपलब्धि यह रही कि आरक्षित सीटों पर भी चुनाव दर चुनाव महिला उम्मीदवारों की संख्या बढ़ती रही। कम उम्र और अलग-अलग क्षेत्रों की महिलाएं मैदान में उतरीं, सामान्य महिला सीटों पर दलित या आदिवासी महिला सरपंच बनीं, उनमें से कई दूसरी और तीसरी बार जीतीं और उनमें भी कई जनपद सदस्य और जिला अध्यक्ष की कुर्सी तक पहुंचीं। इससे जहां काफी हद तक सूबे का सियासी परिदृश्य बदला, काम-काज के तौर-तरीके भी बदले और कई जगह वे आम लोगों को यह एहसास दिलाने में कामयाब रहीं कि उनका नेतृत्व मर्दों से बेहतर हो सकता है।

गौर करने लायक तथ्य यह है कि राजनीति की पहली सीढ़ी कहे जाने वाले पंचायती चुनाव में कुल 3 लाख 96 हजार जन प्रतिनिधि चुने गए और जिनमें से 2 लाख 5 हजार महिलाएं हैं। इनमें भी आधे से अधिक महिलाएं या तो आदिवासी तबके की हैं या दलित और पिछड़े वर्ग की। मप्र में एक सरपंच 1,695 लोगों का प्रतिनिधित्व करता है और इस लिहाज से यहां की करीब 12 हजार महिला सरपंच पौने तीन करोड़ लोगों का प्रतिनिधित्व करती हैं। इसका प्रभाव पंचायत के ऊपरी स्तर पर पड़ा है और पचास जिला पंचायत अध्यक्षाओं में से 30 यानी 60 फीसदी महिलाएं हैं। लेकिन इससे भी अधिक सुखद बात यह है कि यहां छह हजार से अधिक महिला जनप्रतिनिधि ऐसी हैं जिन्होंने सामान्य सीट पर मर्दों को मात दी। यह हाल तब है जब सामान्य सीट को पुरुष आरक्षित सीट बताकर गलत तरीके से महिलाओं को चुनाव लड़ने से रोकने की कोशिश की जाती है।

वहीं महिलाओं के लिए आरक्षित सीटों के आंकड़े गवाह हैं कि चुनाव में महिला भागीदारिता का ग्राफ तेजी से बढ़ा है। यह सच है कि प्रदेश में जब पंचायती राज कायम हुआ था तब प्रभावशाली लोगों को महिला आरक्षण से काफी खुशी हुई। उन्होंने अपने घर या अपने खेतों में काम करने वाले मजदूर के घर की महिला को आगे करके न केवल राजनीतिक महत्वाकांक्षा पूरी की बल्कि उनके नाम पर विकास का पैसा भी हड़पा। हालांकि एक तबका मानता है कि ऐसी बात केवल महिलाओं पर ही नहीं बल्कि उन मर्दों पर भी लागू होती हैं जिनके पद का फायदा कोई दूसरा उठाता है।

बावजूद इसके राज्य की महिलाओं में घूंघट खोलने की राजनीति का चलन बढ़ा है और चुनाव आयोग के कागजात देखें तो पहले सरपंच के चुनाव में महिला आरक्षित सीट पर महिला उम्मीदवार ढूंढ़े से नहीं मिलती थीं और 2010 के चुनाव में सरपंच के एक पद के लिए औसतन दस महिलाएं मैदान में उतरीं। तहलका ने दस जिलों की 1,760 महिला जनप्रतिनिधियों की पड़ताल की तो पाया कि इनमें से आठ सौ से अधिक महिलाओं की उम्र 35 साल से कम है। इनमें गैर आदिवासी इलाके के निजी स्कूलों और अस्पतालों में नौकरी करने वाली कई महिलाएं भी हैं। वहीं इस चुनाव में विदिशा की हिनौतिया और नरसिंहपुर की मड़ेसुर ऐसी पंचायतें हैं जिनमें सभी पदों के लिए महिलाओं को सर्वसम्मति से चुना गया है।

आम तौर पर महिला पंच-सरपंचों को यह कहकर खारिज कर दिया जाता है कि उन्हें राजनीति का तजुर्बा नहीं होता। लेकिन जो जमीनी हकीकत से वाकिफ हैं वे जानते हैं कि राजनीति में महिलाओं का काम करना कितना मुश्किल है। मप्र के बुंदेलखंड और बघेलखंड जैसे महिला हिंसा के लिए बदनाम इलाकों में पंचायती राज के बाद खास तौर से महिला सरपंचों पर जानलेवा हमलों और यौन हिंसा की वारदातों में इजाफा हुआ है। बीते कुछ सालों की वारदातों पर नजर दौड़ाएं तो बुंदेलखंड के छतरपुर जिले की महोई कला पंचायत की दलित महिला सरपंच ने जब विकास के लिए आया पैसा दबंगों को देने से मना किया तो उन्हें निर्वस्त्र कर गांव में दौड़ाया और पीटा गया। इसी तरह, शिवपुरी जिले की

सिनावल कला की दलित महिला सरपंच के साथ कई दबंगों ने सामूहिक बलात्कार किया।

जहां दलित या आदिवासी महिलाएं सरपंच बनीं, उन्होंने चुनावी राजनीति समझते हुए क्षेत्र की मतदाता सूची में अपने वर्ग के मतदाताओं के नाम जुड़वाए वहीं टीकमगढ़ के पीपराबिलारी की सरपंच गुदीया बाई को दलित होने के चलते स्वतंत्रता दिवस के मौके पर झंडा नहीं फहराने दिया गया। हालांकि ऐसा ही सलूक होशांगाबाद की जिला पंचायत अध्यक्ष उमा आरसे के साथ भी हुआ लेकिन उन्होंने गणतंत्र दिवस पर झंडा फहरा ही दिया. वरिष्ठ पत्रकार विजयदत्त श्रीधर के मुताबिक, 'ऐसेमाहौल में सरकार को चाहिए कि वह विपरीत स्थितियों में काम करने वाली इन जनप्रतिनिधियों के लिए सहयोग और सुरक्षा का एक ढांचा बनाए।'

जाहिर है ऐसी चुनौतियों के बीच यदि कोई वंचित तबके की महिला कामयाब होती है तो उसके नेतृत्व की कीमत का कोई मुकाबला नहीं किया जा सकता। उदाहरण के लिए सागर जिले की पथरिया की दलित फूल बाई सामान्य महिला सीट पर दो सवर्ण महिला उम्मीदवारों को हराकर सरपंच बनीं और उसके बाद उन्होंने न केवल पुलिस के भ्रष्टाचार का एक मामला उजागर किया बल्कि पुलिस से पैसा और अनाज भी वापस लिया। इसी तरह विदिशा जिले के गंजबासौदा की दलित सरपंच नब्बी बाई ने दबंगों से पंचायत की जमीन खाली कराई और वहां दाह संस्कार का बंदोबस्त किया। इसी कड़ी में इन महिला पंच-सरपंचों ने अपने संगठन बनाकर कई सामूहिक लड़ाइयां भी लड़ीं और कानूनों को बदलवाने के साथ ही उन्होंने व्यवस्था को दुरुस्त बनाया। जैसे कि 2010 के चुनाव में महिलाओं के लिए आधा आरक्षण तय करने के बाद बड़े पैमाने पर उन पर हिंसा की आशंका जताई गई थी। ऐसे में महिला जनप्रतिनिधियों के सामूहिक दबाव के चलते राज्य सरकार ने 24 घंटे की ऐसी हेल्पलाइन सेवा शुरू की जिसमें चुनाव के दौरान कोई भी महिला शिकायत कर सकती थी।

इसी तरह, पंचायती राज का एक नियम यह था कि जिनके दो से अधिक बच्चे हैं वे पंचायत का चुनाव नहीं लड़ सकते. इसका सबसे बुरा असर महिलाओं पर ही पड़ा।

कई महिलाओं के गर्भपात कराए जाने से उनके शरीर पर इसके दुष्प्रभाव पड़े। साथ ही इस नियम के चलते कई महिलाओं के लिए आरक्षण का कोई मतलब नहीं रह गया। लिहाजा महिला जनप्रतिनिधियों ने जब विरोध किया तो बीते चुनाव में सरकार को यह नियम हटाना पड़ा। जानकारों की राय में मप्र सरकार इन महिला सरपंचों को इसलिए अनदेखा नहीं कर सकती है कि गांव में रहने वाली 70 फीसदी आबादी की दुख और तकलीफों से वे रोज ही दो-चार हो रही हैं। लिहाजा सियासी समीकरणों के चलते राज्य सरकार की नजर में इनकी अहमियत बढ़ गई है।

घर से लेकर सरकारी दफ्तरों की अड़चनों के बीच यदि इन नई सरपंचों ने अपनी मंजिल तय की है तो इसलिए कि इस दौरान उन्हें चुनाव जीतना ही नहीं बल्कि अपनी तरह से पंचायत चलाना भी आ गया। राज्य सरकार में पंचायत एवं सामाजिक न्याय की प्रमुख शासन सचिव अरुणा शर्मा को इन महिला पंच-सरपंचों में जो खास बात नजर आती है वह है पर्यावरण और विकास के प्रति उनका नजरिया। शर्मा के मुताबिक, 'स्वच्छता के बिना विकास अधूरा है और जिन पंचायतों में सफाई दिखाई देती है वहां पारदर्शिता भी दिखाई देती है।' तहलका ने जब कई पंचायतों का मुआयना किया तो पाया कि पुरुष सरपंचों ने जहां निर्माण कार्यों को वरीयता दी है वहीं महिला पंच-सरपंचों ने मानवीय मुद्दों को अपने विकास का एजेंडा बनाया है. आम तौर पर शराबबंदी, बालिका शिक्षा, पानी, वृद्धावस्था पेंशन और राशन वितरण पर महिलाओं का अधिक ध्यान होता है और यही वजह है कि उन्होंने ऐसे कामों को सलीके से करते हुए यह साबित किया है कि वे किसी से कम नहीं। इस पूरी जद्दोजहद में जहां महिलाओं के भीतर मौजूद गुणों के चलते उनमें एक नई तरह का नेतृत्व उभरा है वहीं जिस शैली में उन्होंने वंचितों के विकास की राजनीति की है उससे एक नया रुझान भी आया है।

महिला सरपंच बताती हैं कि वे सरकारी कर्मचारियों से बात करती हैं तो अकेली नहीं बल्कि औरतों के समूह के साथ जाती हैं ताकि सामने वाला उन्हें कमजोर न समझे सतना जिले में मिरौवा पंचायत की सरपंच मुन्नी साकेत बताती हैं,

“पंचायतमें ऊंची जाति के लोगों का कब्जा होने के चलते हम लोगों की बात ही नहीं सुनी जाती थी। एक बार मेरा राशन कार्ड बनाने से मना कर दिया गया तब मैंने सरपंच बनने के बारे में सोचा। फिर जब चुनाव की तैयारी की तो पता चला मेरे साथ बहुत लोग हैं। सो आखिर मैं जीत ही गई।” मुन्नी साकेत का नेतृत्व इसलिए अहम है कि जिस व्यवस्था में एक दलित महिला का राजनीति में प्रवेश वर्जित है वहां उनके वर्ग के लोगों ने उनके संघर्षों को सफलता दिलाई। यदि मुन्नी साकेत जैसी महिलाएं बदल रही हैं तो इसलिए कि उन्होंने चुनाव की मुहिम में भागीदारी से लेकर जीत की माला पहनने तक यह जान लिया है कि उनमें कुछ है जो उनके लोगों ने उन्हें चुना है। सरपंच बनने के बाद मुन्नी साकेत ने मतदाता सूची में कई दलित मतदाताओं के नाम जुड़वाकर अपने चुनावी क्षेत्र को और मजबूत बनाया है। वहीं पंच से सरपंच की कुर्सी तक पहुंचने वाली रीवा जिले की मउहरा पंचायत की कुसुमकली को वोटों का खेल समझ में आ गया है। वे बताती हैं कि किस तरह से जब इस पंचायत में 16 पंचों में से 9 महिलाएं जीतीं तो उन्होंने आपस में तय करके एक महिला को ही उपसरपंच बनाया।

सीधी जिले में पोस्ता पंचायत की आदिवासी महिला श्याम बाई का मामला दिलचस्प इसलिए है कि उन्हें जैसे ही पता चला कि पंचायत चुनाव की घोषणा हो चुकी है उन्होंने अपनी बकरियां बेचीं और प्रचार के पर्चे बंटवा दिए। उन्होंने तीन ट्रैक्टरों से सैकड़ों लोगों को लेकर सरपंच पद के लिए अपना नामांकन दाखिल किया। इससे पूरे क्षेत्र में चुनावी माहौल गर्माया और श्याम बाई ने इस सामान्य महिला आरक्षित सीट पर भारी बहुमत से जीत हासिल की। पंचायत के चुनाव को लेकर श्यामबाई जैसी आदिवासी महिलाओं का जोश महिला नेतृत्व के नजरिये से एक शुभ संकेत है। वहीं रीवा जिले में देवगांव कला की सरपंच बेटी चौधरी ने रोजाना आठ घंटे पंचायत कार्यालय खोलकर जहां लोगों के सामने अपनी सहज हाजिरी दर्ज कराई है वहीं ग्राम सभा में सभी वंचित वर्गों की सुनवाई सबसे पहले करने की परंपरा शुरू की और राजनीतिक पकड़ बनाई। बेटी चौधरी की रणनीति बताती है कि वे हाशिये की राजनीति करके वापस

लौटना चाहती हैं। यही नहीं जिस तरीके से झाबुआ जिले के बीस वार्डों वाली सारंगी पंचायत में आदिवासी महिला फुंदीबाई बीते डेढ़ दशक में तीन चुनाव लड़कर दो बार सरपंच बनीं और जिस शान से मंडला जिले की खापा पंचायत की सरपंच शिवकली बाई ने चौथी बार पंचायत का चुनाव जीतीं और जिला पंचायत सदस्य बनीं उसने जता दिया कि बात चाहे विकास के नारे की हो या सियासत में नाम कमाने की, वंचित तबके की महिलाएं किसी भी मामले में कमजोर नहीं हैं।

दरअसल इस तबके की महिलाएं काम-काज के चलते खेत-खलिहान से लेकर हाट-बाजारों तक खुली घूमती हैं और उनके सामने घूंघट, पर्दा या चारदीवारी नहीं है। ऐसी स्थिति में मौका मिलने के बाद जब सवर्णों द्वारा उन्हें जितना दबाया जा रहा है वे उतनी ही मुखर होकर उभर रही हैं। तहलका ने ऐसी कई महिला सरपंचों से बात की तो उन्होंने बताया कि जब वे दबंगों या सरकारी कर्मचारी से बात करती हैं तो अकेली नहीं बल्कि औरतों के समूह के साथ जाती हैं। इससे जहां सबको यह पता लगता है कि वे अकेली नहीं हैं वहीं उनके आसपास भी सुरक्षा का घेरा बना रहता है। वहीं कुछ महिला सरपंचों ने बताया कि वे ऐसी स्थितियों से निपटने के लिए अपने साथ महिला पंचों और सरपंचों को जोड़कर एक निकाय की तरह काम करती हैं। जाहिर है यदि पंचायत राजनीति की बुनियाद है तो मप्र में महिलाएं पंचायत का चेहरा-मोहरा बन रही हैं। और नेतृत्व की लगाम जैसे-जैसे मर्दों से महिलाओं के हाथों में आ रही है वैसे-वैसे यहां नेतृत्व के मायने बदल रहे हैं। खुशी की बात यह है कि इस बदलाव की कड़ी में मर्दों का अहम ही नहीं टूट रहा है बल्कि कई जगहों पर वे उदार भी बन रहे हैं।

भले ही प्रेमचंद की मशहूर कहानी 'पंचपरमेश्वर' के जरिए हमारी आंखों के सामने न्याय की बेदी पर अलगू चौधरी के रूप में एक पुरुष ही विराजता है। किंतु मप्र में पंचायत की इस आदर्श अवधारणा की पीठ पर आधे से अधिक महिलाओं के सवार होने के साथ ही तस्वीर बदलती हुई नजर आ रही है।

মেয়েরা যেন কাজের সুযোগ না হারায়

October 13, 2013

The story below in Bengali is about the Rana Plaza fire last year in which 11 women garment workers died and hundreds were injured, opening up critical questions in Bangladesh's garment industry worth Rs. 2,000 crore. About 80% of the workers in this industry are women who are paid a pittance, with no minimum wage standard or safety norms. The fire is a wake-up call for the West, for the employers and the government to revisit the sector and see where things are going wrong.

এত নারীশ্রমিক নিয়োগ করে যে শিল্প, সেখানে কি তাদের সুরক্ষার কথা ভাবা হবে?

বাংলাদেশের বস্ত্র কারখানায় ধ্বংসকাতোর পরে প্রশ্নটা গুরুত্বপূর্ণ হয়ে উঠেছে।

শাহবাগ, হেফাজতে ইসলাম, নির্বাচন নিয়ে সরকার ও বিরোধী পক্ষের নিরন্তর সংঘর্ষের রাজনৈতিক টালমাটালের মধ্যে আরও অনিশ্চয়তা যুক্ত করতে গত ২৫ এপ্রিল ২০১৩ তারিখে হুড়মুড়িয়ে ভেঙে পড়ল সাভারের দশতলা রানা পলাজা। মারা গেছেন সহস্রাধিক বস্ত্রশ্রমিক, প্রধানত নারী। বন্যা-বড়ে প্রায়শই বিধ্বস্ত বাংলাদেশে এই মৃত্যুর প্রভাব হযত সাময়িক হয়েই থাকত, কিন্তু বাংলাদেশের শ্রম ও অর্থনীতির প্রাঙ্গণে এই দুর্ঘটনা সুদূরপ্রসারী প্রভাব ঘটাতে পারে। কারণ, বাংলাদেশের এই বস্ত্রশিল্প বিদেশি ক্রেতার উপর পুরটাই নির্ভরশীল এবং এই শিল্পে নারী শ্রমিকদের একচ্ছত্র প্রাধান্য। বাংলাদেশের দু'হাজার কেটি ডলারের বস্ত্রশিল্পে কাজ করেন ৪৫ লক্ষ মানুষ, যাঁদের ৮০ শতাংশই নারী। এই বিরাট শ্রমিকবাহিনীর অর্থনৈতিক অবস্থা নিয়ে বেশ কিছু আলচনা হয়েছে, হচ্ছে। বিশু-বাজারে বাংলাদেশের এই অভাবনীয় উপস্থিতির একমাত্র কারণ চরম দারিদ্র, এত কম মজুরিতে উৎপাদনের



Saswati Ghosh, Ananda Bazar Patrika, Kolkata

Saswati Ghosh has been active with the women's movement in Kolkata for the past 27 years. She is a founder member of Nari Nirjatan Pratirodh Mancha, Kolkata and Maitree Network. She writes regularly in various dailies and journals and her columns raise pertinent questions on various burning issues. She teaches Economics at the University of Kolkata. She was awarded for Consistent Writing on Gender Issues at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Eastern Region.

প্রতিযোগিতায় চীন, ভারত, শ্রীলঙ্কাকে হারিয়ে বাংলাদেশের উত্থান। কিন্তু গত নভেম্বরে ১১১ জন নারী শ্রমিকের আগুন পুড়ে মৃত্যু এবং আলচ এই দুর্ঘটনা প্রশ্ন তুলেছে – বস্ত্র শ্রমিকেরা কতটা ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন অধিকার পান, শক্তিশালী শ্রমিক সংগঠন ব্যতীত কতটা সমাধান সম্ভব, ইউরপ আমেরিকার ক্রেতাদের সদিচ্ছা কি এই শিল্পে পরিবর্তন আনতে পারে, ইত্যাদি। এই শিল্পে নানা অধিকার দেওয়ার কথা আগেই নাকি ভাবা হয়েছিল, রানা পলাজার দুর্ঘটনার পর শুধু সেই ঘষণাগুলি তুরান্বিত হয়েছে। এখন নূনতম মজুরির জন্য সব পক্ষকে নিয়ে একটি বর্ড তৈরি হবে, সবাইকে ব্যালেন্সের খাতা করে দেওয়া হবে, যাতে নিচুতলার আধিকারিকরা কথায় কথায় মাইনে আটকে বা কেটে রাখতে না পারে। সবচেয়ে বড় কথা, মালিকদের সম্মতি ছাড়াই শ্রমিক সংগঠন করার অধিকার দেওয়া হবে।

এই বিপর্যয়ের পর অনেকের আশঙ্কা – বাংলাদেশের বস্ত্রশিল্পের অবস্থা বিদেশি ক্রেতাদের বেআবু হয়ে গেছে, সেগুলোকে তারা নিজেদের দেশের একশ বছর আগের কারখানাগুলির মত বিপজ্জনক মনে করছে। সেই কারণে বিদেশিরা যদি কেনা বন্ধ করে? দেশের বস্ত্র রফতানিকারীরা আশ্বাস দিচ্ছেন, প্রযজনীয় সংস্কার করা হবে। কিন্তু মজুরি বা শ্রমিককল্যাণ বা আর একটু ভাল কাজের পরিবেশ সুনিশ্চিত করতে গেলে ত খরচ বাড়বে, মুনাফা কমবে। তাতে যদি মালিকরা রাজি না হয়? এই শিল্পে সরাসরি বিদেশি বিনিয়গ নেই, বিদেশিরা তৈরি পশাক কিনে নেয়। বিশ্বের নজরদারির সামনে মুনাফার হার একটু কমার সম্ভাবনা কি মেনে নেবেন বস্ত্রশিল্পের মালিকরা? এত বেশি নারীশ্রমিক নিয়গ করে যে শিল্প, সেখানে কি তাদের বিশেষ সুযোগের কথা ভাবা হবে? না কি কিছুই বদলাবে না? শ্রমিকের অধিকার ছাড়া কাজ করাটাকেই মেনে নেবেন নারী শ্রমিকরা? তা হলে ত অন্তত কাজটুকু থাকবে।

সুরক্ষার অর্থনীতি

গপ একশ বছরে শ্রমিকদের জন্য সামগ্রিক ভাবে নূনতম মজুরি, সুরক্ষা আর স্বাস্থ্যকর পরিবেশ বা শ্রমিক সংগঠনের অধিকারের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে নারী শ্রমিকদের জন্য বিশেষ ভাবে মাতৃকালীন সুবিধা, রাতের কাজে বা ওজন তলায় নিষেধ থেকে কাজের সময় নারী-পুরুষ বৈষম্য রোধ – এ সবের সুপারিশ হয়েছে। কথাও কার্যকর হয়েছে, কথাও নয়। শ্রমিক-অধিকার সমৃদ্ধ পশ্চিম থেকে ক্রমশই

শিল্পের ঠিকানা বদল হয়েছে কম মজুরিতে, নানা দেশে। মেয়েদের সুরক্ষা দেওয়াটা ব্যয়সাপেক্ষ। সেই ব্যয় শুধু নিয়গকর্তাকে বহন করতে হলে নারীশ্রমিক নিয়গের ব্যয় বাড়ে। সে ক্ষেত্রে নিয়গকর্তারা মেয়েদের নিয়গের পরিবর্তে পুরুষ শ্রমিকদের দিয়ে বা যন্ত্র দিয়ে কাজটা করানর চেষ্টা করবে, নয়ত মজুরি কমানর চেষ্টা করবে।

একশ বছর আগে পুরুষের বদলে মেয়েদের কাজে নিয়গে পারিবারিক কাঠাম ভেঙে পড়ার ভয়ে আর সুরক্ষার নামে, পরিবারের নামে মেয়েদের ঘরে ফেরত পাঠায় শ্রমিক সংগঠন আর রাষ্ট্র। বিশেষ ভাবে ১৬১৬ সালে আন্তর্জাতিক শ্রম সংস্থার সনদের ৪ নম্বর ধারায় মেয়েদের কাজে অনেক বিধিনিষেধ চাপান হয় – রাতের শিফটে কাজ নয়, মাটির তলায় কাজ নয়, নির্দিষ্ট ওজনের বেশি তলা যাবে না, ইত্যাদি। এ সবে কিছু মেয়ে হযত সুস্বিত পেয়েছিলেন, কিন্তু এ দেশের কয়লাখনিতে, কাপড়কলে বা বিদেশেও কারখানায় কাজ-করা বহু মেয়ে সেই নিষেধ মানতে চাননি। কাজ গেলে কালকে তাঁরা খাবেন কী? বাজার যেখানে মুখ্য, সরকারি সুরক্ষা যেখানে সীমিত, সবচেয়ে কম দামে উপাদান করে নিকটতম প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বীকে টেক্সা দেবার লড়াই যতক্ষণ চালাতে হবে, তখন সুরক্ষার বিনিময়ে কর্মী আর শ্রমিকেরা হযত কাজটাকেই করতে চাইবেন। তাই মধ্যবিত্ত নারী সদস্যরা যখন খনিতে হাঁটুজলে দাঁড়িয়ে মেয়েদের কাজ করতে দেখে শিউরে উঠে তাঁদের মূল্যবধ থেকে তা বন্ধ করার সুপারিশ করেন, তখন তাঁদের সেই 'সু'পরামর্শে জন্যবরাদ্দ থাকে নারী শ্রমিকদের তীব্র কটুক্তি।

আমাদের দেশে যে-সমস্ত মেয়েরা নানান বিপজ্জনক শিল্পে কাজ করেন, সে চম্পাহাটির বাজি কারখানা হক বা বাড়ির পরিচারিকার কাজ (সেটাও এখন বিপজ্জনক কাজের তালিকায় পড়ে!), তাঁরা অনেকেই সুরক্ষা নেই জেনেই কাজে আসেন, সুরক্ষা আর প্রাপ্তির তুলনামূলক বিচার নিজের মত করে করেন। আমাদের দেশে মেয়েদের জন্য রাতের কাজ এখনও নিষিদ্ধ – ১৯৪৮ সালের কারখানা আইনের সংশ্লিষ্ট ধারা সংশোধনের প্রস্তাব ২০০৭ সালে কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভায় পাশ হলেও এখনও কার্যকর হয়নি। সেখানে শপস্ অ্যান্ড এস্টাবলিশমেন্ট অ্যাক্ট সংশোধন করে মেয়েদের রাতে কাজের ব্যবস্থা করছে। আইটি, খবরের কাগজ, স্বাস্থ্য পরিষেবা, রেল, উড়ান সংস্থা, বিস্কনন্দনক্ষেত্র – এ রকম অনেক ক্ষেত্রে বহু দিন থেকেই মেয়েরা রাতে কাজ করেন। কনট্রিক

সরকার যখন বিপিওদের জন্য নারী কর্মীদের সম্মতির চিঠি, দিন-রাতের শিফটে ঘুরিয়ে ঘুরিয়ে কাজ দেওয়া, সন্তানদের জন্য ফ্রেশ আর খেলনার ব্যবস্থা করা, এ রকম আট দফা শর্ত রাখে, তখন কনট্রাক এমপলয়িজ অ্যাসসিয়েশন সে রাজ্যের শ্রম দফতরকে আপত্তি জানিয়ে চিঠি দেয়, কারণ তার ফলে বিনিয়গকারীরা অন্য রাজ্যে চলে যাচ্ছে। আমেরিকার মত দেশেও মেয়েদের কারখানায় কাজের সুরক্ষাবিধি চালুর প্রথম পর্বে, গত শতকের ষাটের দশকে মেয়েদের কাজের অনুপাত কমে। এখন সে দেশে ছেলেদের কাজে যগদানের হার কমছে, বাড়ছে মেয়েদের কাজে যগদানের হার। তার অন্যতম কারণ হল সরকারি সুরক্ষা।

বস্ত্রশিল্পে নারী শ্রমিকদের এই বিপুল সংখ্যায় অংশগ্রহণ বাংলাদেশের সমাজে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ পরিবর্তন এনেছে। মেয়েরা ঘরের বাইরে কাজে আসছেন, গ্রাম ছেড়ে শহরে যাচ্ছেন, এক সঙ্গে অনেক ধরনের মেয়ে নিজেদের মত সময় কাটাতে পারছেন – রক্ষণশীল সমাজ এই সব মেনে নিতে পারছে না। এই সমাজের অনেকেই চান মেয়েরা ঘরে ফিরে যাক। এখন প্রযজন সরকার ও ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন আন্দলনের যৌথ সাহায্য। বাংলাদেশের মালিকদের বুঝতে হবে, এই সনার হাঁসকে বাঁচিয়ে রাখতে হলে এই উচ্চ মুনাফার লভ ছাড়তে হবে। পেটে খেলে পিঠে সয় কাজটা ত চালাই, তা হলে বৈষম্যকে আমার মত করে আমি বুঝে নিতে পারব এক দিন, এটাই কি রানা পলাজা-পরবর্তী বাংলাদেশি বস্ত্রশিল্পের মেয়েদের ম্লগান? যাতে গলা মেলাবেন এ দেশের মেয়েরাও?

देश की पहली महिला ग्राम सभा जींद के बीबीपुर गांव में

- केंद्र सरकार के आदेश पर हो रही महिला ग्राम सभा
- जींद प्रशासन ने भेजनी केंद्र सरकार को सभा की विडियो रिकार्डिंग
- बेटी बचाने के लिए शुरू होनी है सभा की कार्रवाई ग्यारह बजे
- सभा में मौजूद रहेगी प्रशासन की सभी महिला अधिकारी

June 18, 2012

Pre-birth sex selection is most rampant in Haryana and the women in Bibipur village started a movement to stop this. The author of this story followed the entire movement by focusing on it. The origin of the movement is written about and how the women approached and engaged in a dialogue with the khap panchayat to gain its support to the movement and finally how it galvanized the Government of Haryana to initiate action against people involved in the practice of pre-birth sex selection.

बीबीपुर गांव(जींद)

अब तक आपने ग्राम सभा की बैठक में पुरुषों व महिलाओं को भाग लेते देखा सुना होगा। लेकिन जींद जिले के गांव बीबीपुर में देश की पहली ऐसी ग्राम सभा होने जा रही है। जिसमें गांव की केवल महिलाएं ही भाग लेंगी। महिला ग्रामसभा की गवाह बनने जा रही है कि गांव बीबीपुर की तिहाड़ा पाना की नीमवाली चौपाल। ग्राम सभा में पंचायत के सभी चुने हुए प्रतिनिधि तथा जींद प्रशासन की सभी छोटी बड़ी महिला अधिकारी शामिल होंगी। प्रशासन ने महिला अधिकारियों को आदेश दिए हैं कि वे ग्राम सभा की बैठक में जरूर भाग लें। क्योंकि ग्राम सभा की रिपोर्ट केंद्र सरकार को भेजी जानी है। ग्राम सभा की एक डक्यूमेंट्री भी केंद्र सरकार ने मंगवायी है। ताकि इसको देश की अन्य पंचायतों के समक्ष उदाहरण के रूप में प्रस्तुत किया जा सके।



Amarjeet S. Gill, Amar Ujala

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गांव में करीब दो सप्ताह पहले केंद्रीय पंचायती राज मंत्रालय के अपर सचिव डा. ऋषिकेश पांडया आए थे। इनके गांव में आने का केवल एक ही मकसद था कि किस तरह से पंचायतें कन्या भ्रूण हत्या को रोकने के लिए अहम भूमिका निभा सकती है। पांडया की मौजूदगी में गांव की चौपाल में एक कार्यक्रम का आयोजन किया गया था। इस आयोजन के दौरान गांव के सरपंच सुनील कुमार जागलान ने बताया था कि उनके गांव की महिलाएं कन्या भ्रूण हत्या को रोकने के लिए प्रयत्नशील हैं। इसी को मध्यनजर रखते हुए अब भारत सरकार ने निर्णय लिया है कि जींद के जिले के गांव बीबीपुर में पहली महिला सभा का आयोजन करके कन्या भ्रूण हत्या को रोकना का प्रयास किया जा सकता है।

महिला ग्राम सभा में कन्या भ्रूण हत्या को रोकने के लिए महिलाएं स्वयं कैसे भूमिका निभा सकती है। इस बारे में गहन मंथन होगा। इसके लिए महिलाएं पूरी तैयारी कर रही हैं। गांव की करीब सत्तर साल की महिला किताबो देवी बताती हैं कि लड़कियों की कमी होने के कारण लड़कों के शादी ब्याहे मुश्किल हो गए हैं। किताबो स्वीकार करती है कि कन्या भ्रूण हत्या के कारण ही यह विकट स्थिति बनी है। उनसे जब यह पूछा कि वह सोमवार को महिला सभा की बैठक में जाएगी। उन्होंने तपाक से कहा कि वह बैठक में जाएगी। उन्होंने बताया कि कुछ दिन पहले एक अधिकारी उनके गांव में आया था। उसने कन्या भ्रूण हत्या को लेकर काफी बातचीत की थी।

गांव के सरपंच सुनील कुमार जागलान ने दावा कि देश में अभी तक केवल महिलाओं की ग्राम सभा नहीं हुई है। उन्होंने बताया कि सभा में कन्या भ्रूण हत्या रोकने के लिए महिलाओं की भूमिका पर विस्तार चर्चा होगी।

जींद की खंड विकास एवं पंचायत अधिकारी नीलम अरोड़ा बताती हैं कि केंद्र सरकार के आदेशों पर सोमवार को गांव में महिला ग्राम सभा की बैठक आहूत की जा रही है। उन्होंने बताया कि सभा की पूरी रिपोर्ट केंद्र सरकार को डक्यूमेंटरी बनाकर भेजी जानी है। इसलिए प्रशासन की सभी महिला अधिकारियों को बैठक में मौजूद रहने के जींद प्रशासन ने आदेश दिए हैं।

Electronic Media

Kolhapurchi Leki

There have been more than 100 episodes of the show Reportage, a weekly issue-based programme in Marathi titled 'Kolhapurchi Leki' which is an analysis of the Save the Girl Child campaign being implemented in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra for one and a half years. It is about the challenges before the campaign and the measures taken by the Government to implement the PCPNDT Act in order to arrest the falling sex ratio in the district.



Prajakta Dhulap, IBN lokmat

Prajakta Dhulap is Associate Editor with IBN Lokmat, Maharashtra. She won the award for Best News Feature at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Western Region.

Samasyala Odi Badi

Most of the schools in rural areas lack basic infrastructure facilities like classrooms, benches, toilets, etc. Lack of toilets is a big problem for girls. While lack of these amenities is not spoken about or given importance, it is one of the main reasons why girls drop out of schools after a certain age. Samasyala Odi Badi, a programme in Telugu, depicted the problems of lack of toilet facilities and the difficulties faced by girls due to this. The issue is examined in the light of the Supreme Court Directive regarding clean toilet facilities in schools.



Kistaiah Nandagiri, Vanitha TV

Kistaiah Nandagiri is with Vanitha TV, Andhra Pradesh. He won the Best News Feature Award at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Southern Region.

Born in Conflict: Valley vs Ghadchiroli

Shai Venkataraman has been reporting on development related issues for over 17 years now. In the documentary 'BORN IN CONFLICT: Valley vs. Ghadchiroli', she raises the issue of health and maternal safety in conflict ridden Jammu and Kashmir and contrasts it with Ghadchiroli where services are being reached to the children and women by the NGO 'Search'. Because of the conflict and the Government apathy, women in Kashmir are not able to access quality health services leading to high maternal and child mortality.



Shai Venkataraman, NDTV

Shai Venkataraman was among 11 journalists from across the world selected to participate in a fellowship programme instituted by USAID (United States Agency for International Development). She is with NDTV, Mumbai. She won the award for the Best Documentary at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2011-12, Western Region.

Interpreting Research

Data is constantly being churned out by Government Departments, Agencies, Research and Academic Institutions, Non-Government and International Organizations. We also have the Budget and Economic Survey data which are also a good source of information and data on the investments made, their impact and the action that is intended to achieve social and economic development goals. All these documents are replete with information on gender indicators. However, hardly ever is there an attempt to analyse and report on these documents from a gender perspective. What do they say about the status of women, their access to institutions and resources? What are the allocations made for ensuring that the policies and programmes translate into benefits for the women? These are important questions that need to be analysed in the media.

Media also has the capacity to conduct opinion polls, surveys and research studies in collaboration with marketing agencies and academic institutions on the changing social mores and values. They provide an insight into how the world around us is changing and how that change is being perceived by the people. This is not only significant from a sociological perspective, but could be a major platform for advocating for change.

Both the articles featured in this section have gathered information from various data sources as well as collected first hand. While Priyanka Vora used the data to show how even in an environment that is bereft of resources to nurture children to protect them from malnourishment, girls are doubly disadvantaged due to the gender discrimination at the household level. Hemlatha on the other hand, dug into available data with various departments to highlight the prevailing practice of infanticide in the Chamrajnagar District of Karnataka.

The need for more such reporting cannot be ignored.

Print and Web Media

Healthy Meal: More Out of Reach for Girls

October 31, 2012

This investigative story is about how girl children are denied basic nutrition because of society's prejudices against them. The causes of malnutrition among children in Mumbai's slums range from poverty to lack of knowledge about healthy food to children being born underweight due to repeated pregnancies of the mother. An important fact is that girls are discriminated against. They are neglected, more malnourished and more underweight than the boys.

MUMBAI: Swapnali, 4, Supriya Gurav's fourth daughter, is three kilos underweight and malnourished, despite there being adequate food at home. A resident of Shiv Shakti Chawl in Andheri (east), the 38-year-old has five daughters, the youngest being 17-month-old Arya, who weighs seven kilos and is 1.5 kilos underweight.

Supriya blames the poor health of her daughters on her five pregnancies. "In pursuit of a male child, we have ended up with five girls," said Supriya, whose husband Santosh said they want a male child for religious reasons. Supriya is right: doctors said children like Swapnali and Arya don't attain healthy weight because they have low weight at birth, a result of the mother's poor health. Children who are born low weight can suffer health complications later in life, said child health experts. "With multiple pregnancies, the mother's health will be compromised. Children who have intra-uterine growth restrictions can suffer from diabetes and hypertension later in life," said Dr. Ashok Anand, professor Of gynaecology, J. J. Hospital, Byculla. In the slums of Andheri, young girls are more likely to suffer from severe malnutrition than boys.

Malnutrition figures based on gender classification in this area reveals that malnourishment is higher in girls. In July, 183 girls up to the age of six years were found to be severely underweight (SUW), a physical indicator used by the World Health Organisation to describe malnutrition, as compared to



Priyanka Vora, Hindustan Times

Priyanka Vora works with Hindustan Times, Mumbai. She won the Award for Best Investigative Story at the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, 2012-13, Western Region.

155 boys in the same age group. Under the Integrated Child Development Scheme's (ICDS) Andheri project, of 7,597 children weighed in September, 144 girls were SUW, compared to 127 boys. "Somewhere, the mother is upset that she has delivered girls and she unknowingly or knowingly neglects the health of the girl child. The data may be reflecting this bias," said Prema Ghatge, child development project officer, ICDS Andheri.

Such discrimination is not restricted to Andheri alone – the slums in Bandra and Dharavi too reflect the trend. Dr. Anand said a woman needs to recuperate after childbirth.

"Multiple pregnancies will not let the mother supply adequate nutrients to the foetus." To address the health needs of malnourished children, Andheri's ICDS has tied up with Larsen & Toubro Health Centre in Andheri, and aanganwadi workers take the children and their mothers there for free consultation. "Most of the malnourished children suffer from iron, vitamin A and C deficiencies, which affect growth. Their resistance is low so they are susceptible to various diseases and many have worm infections," said Dr. Shubhada Joshi, paediatrician, Larsen & Toubro Health Centre, in Andheri.

Despite the availability of such facilities in the area, six year-old Sahil Sawant, who lives in Subhash Nagar slums, which is spread on a hilltop, is eight kilos underweight. His mother Saylee has not yet taken the boy, who should weigh at least 17 kilos, to a hospital. Children in the area who get interventional medical care have responded well and gained weight. Three-and-a-half-year-old Kartiki Patil from Janshakti Nagar slums is the youngest of three girls. At 10 kilos, Kartiki is about two kilos underweight. "Kartiki weighed less than 2.5 kilos at birth. Till six months ago, she could not even walk properly, but after having vitamin tonics, she has now started gaining weight," said an aanganwadi teacher, on condition of anonymity as she is not authorized to speak to the media. Some slum residents claim they visit expensive private clinics because the government clinics often don't have doctors and medical staff. "We take our son to a doctor who charges Rs. 700 a visit. We can't afford it, but we have no option as there are no doctors at these government dispensaries," alleged Mayuri Dhuri, whose 20-month-old son Vedant is malnourished and ill all the time.

Major Slums Covered Under ICDS

Andheri: Pump House, Subhash Nagar, Gundawali in Andheri (East)

According to ICDS, there are around 12,000 children between 0 and 6 years who live in these slums

FIGHTING MALNUTRITION

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION defines severe acute malnutrition or SAM by a very low weight-for-height ratio, by visible severe wasting, or by the presence of nutritional oedema, which is a swelling caused by insufficient protein intake. According to WHO indicators, used by India, malnutrition is measured in three ways: weight-for-age (underweight), height-for-age (stunting), and weight for- height (wasting). THE CENTRE'S INTEGRATED CHILD DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (ICDS) adopts the weight-for-age criteria, where the child's weight is calculated as per his or her age and is classified as severely underweight (SUW) and moderately underweight (MUW). The women and child development department implements ICDS in the state. In Mumbai, there are 33 projects under ICDS in slum pockets. Each project includes aanganwadis, which look after the health and education of children, their mothers and pregnant women in the assigned area. Children between 0 and 6 years are covered under the ICDS.

WHAT SOME NGOS ARE DOING

A charitable trust, Ojus Medical Institute has initiated a pilot malnourishment eradication programme in Nehru Nagar slums, Juhu, which aims to identify malnourished children between 6 months and 5 years and treat the children to recovery. At a health camp, children from 30 aanganwadis in the area were screened, and 36 children were found to be suffering from severe acute malnutrition. OMI is now giving these children eggs every alternate day. They claim to have reduced the number of severely malnourished children in Nashik's slums by 10% through this same exercise last year.

2 kg underweight: Bhakti Mestri, 22 months old

At seven kilos, the girl is severely underweight. She lost her mother when she was six months old and is looked after by her grandmother, with whom she lives in a tiny room in Malpa Dongri, Andheri (east).

2 kg underweight: Kartiki Patel, 3 and a half years old

She is the youngest of three girls. At 10 kilos, this girl from Janshakti Nagar slums weighed less than 2.5 kilos at birth. Until six months ago, she could not walk properly, but vitamin tonics from the aanganwadi have made a huge difference.

Crime Report: Graph Shooting

November 23, 2013

MORE AWARENESS, OR IS IT GETTING WORSE? On almost all counts, be it lewd behaviour that is many times accepted as 'routine', or molestation and even rape, the data of the police force from Chandigarh, SAS Nagar and Panchkula show a spike. While many, including top cops, attribute it to increased awareness, many others see a more basic problem: As women assert themselves, crime against them increases too.

CHANDIGARH: In the past five years, crime against women has seen a significant spike in Chandigarh. SAS Nagar and Panchkula are no different.

Be it molestation, rape or even the cases of snatching, all went up. In comparison to around 200 cases of crime against women registered in 2009, this year till November 20, 345 cases have been registered. Last year, around 300 cases were registered. The maximum number of cases is of molestation –129 so far, as against 45 last year.

The surge in molestation cases is also being attributed to awareness drives initiated in the city by police, with SSP Naunihal Singh holding talks in colleges and schools. The 16/12 Delhi gangrape last year appears to have had its effect too in terms of awareness.

Under the 'sexual harassment' head, there is a dip in cases, as per the data, but a comparison over the long term shows that the cases have increased significantly since 2008. However, this year, 35 rape cases were registered, as against 27 last year. The majority of these cases had minor girls as victims, particularly those from slums, and the offenders were relatives or neighbours.



Hindustan Times, Chandigarh

Carrying out a survey of women in the three cities of Chandigarh, Hindustan Times ran a campaign 'Fighting Shame-Safer Tricity For Women' for nineteen days highlighting the findings and coming out with suggestions to make these places safer for women. Run by six reporters spearheaded by Monica Sharma, this well designed campaign helped in putting this issue of violence against women in the public domain and creating awareness and was awarded The *Laadli* Media and Advertising Award for Gender Sensitivity, 2013-14 for The Best Campaign.

With the advent of technology, misuse of the virtual space is also being witnessed. At least 12 cases were registered by the cyber crime cell, wherein women complained that someone had morphed their pictures and out them online.

SAS Nagar district has seen almost double the number of molestation and rape cases as compared to last year. While it saw 66 cases of molestation as against 31 last year and just 13 in 2010, rape incidents went up to 46 in comparison to 22 last year and 24 in 2010. But ‘eve-teasing’ (categorised as sexual harassment in the law now) cases were only three, reflecting that girls here still hesitate to complain about something casually seen as ‘routine’.

In Panchkula too, data of the past four years shows a drastic increase in molestation cases, at 35 till now in 2013, as against nine last year in the district. Panchkula police attribute this to the amendments in the Indian Penal Code that widened the definition of sexual harassment. The law now includes stalking and other such forms. The number of rape cases has also witnessed a 50% increase from last year.

‘I Rejected His Proposal...He Pointed a Pistol at Me’*

Working with a pharmaceutical company at Manimajra right above the Motor Market, I had to bear dirty looks of the mechanics every day. One of these days, a shabbily clad middle-aged man walked up to me with a ‘friendship’ proposal. I rejected his proposal, but the matter did not end there. The man, working as a mechanic in the market, would follow me every day, from office to home, home to office. He also got my mobile number and would send me text messages and keep call. I was harassed, but did not what to do. When I told him, point blank, that I was not interested in him, he got agitated and threatened to kill me. Once, he even pointed a pistol at me. That’s when I decided to lodge a formal complaint with the Manimajra police station in September this year. I did not even reveal the matter to parents, who would have not allowed me to work if I would have vented my heart out. Sadly, after the police complaint, there was no change, as he was out on bail. A day before Diwali, he came and started abusing me in full public view. He even threatened to give me “an injection of AIDS”. That day, I recorded his act in my mobile phone and told him that I would give the video to the police if he did not stop. I haven’t seen him since, but the possibility of encountering him again sends shivers down my spine.

** The writer is a 26-year-old woman who wishes to remain anonymous*

Crime Against Women: Police Data			
Type	2011	2012	2013*
Chandigarh			
Sexual Harassment	46	87	56
Molestation	21	45	129
Rape	27	27	35
SAS Nagar			
Sexual Harassment	2	10	3
Molestation	13	31	66
Rape	24	22	46
Panchkula			
Molestation	5	9	35
Rape	16	14	21
What Women Say: HT-IDC Survey			
Has Sexual Harassment Increased? Yes			
Chandigarh	SAS Nagar	Panchkula	
89%	97%	80%	
Reported Matter To Police? Yes			
Chandigarh	SAS Nagar	Panchkula	
9%	20%	12%	

**Till November 29, 2013*

Official Speak

Environment Changing

“The overall environment and mindset of people are changing. Women should come forward to report sexual harassment, and must not bear such torture. The social awareness campaign by the Chandigarh police has witnessed more and more women coming forward to report crimes. Of the 129 molestation cases, we have cracked 118.”

– R. P. Upadhyaya, Inspector General of Police, Chandigarh

More Awareness Now

“A helpline, woman police squads and awareness against sexual harassment have resulted in a positive change. Women squads remain present outside

colleges and schools, which encourages female students to come forward and complain without hesitance. The increase in the number of cases is also due to the changes in the law and more awareness among women."

– *Swarndeeep Singh, Supdt. of Police, City, SAS Nagar*

It's Getting Better

"There are several reasons behind increase in the cases. Police staff have been asked to register cases immediately and also arrest and present chargesheet in 30 days. Awareness courses are being conducted and staff being sensitised. Women have also started feeling secure as the cases are dealt with on priority."

– *Rajbir Deswal, Commissioner of Police, Panchkula-Ambala*

VOX POP

Need Positive Roles

"The problem of unsafe environment for women has been there for ages. The reasons of the visible increase in number of cases pertaining to crime against women are: social consciousness and increase in reporting the issue. Media has to play a positive role. Civility is on discount. Parents and educational institutions, along with the community, have all been found wanting."

– *Dr. Pam Rajput, Social Activist, Chandigarh*

Complain, Now

"We are not doing anything special for women safety across tricity other than challaning motorists. Teen girls are the most unsafe and vulnerable. We should have effective women safety cells in the police. More woman cops need to be deployed and we need more police presence around schools and colleges. Also, women should come forward to complain."

– *Harjinder Kaur, councillor, Ex-Mayor, Chandigarh*

Safe, Comparatively

"Compared to neighbouring cities of Punjab, the tricity is quite safe for women. People here are quite broadminded, and women do not face any major incident of harassment, even if they move about late at night. City youngsters are an aware lot, and they generally do not resort to sexual harassment. But healthy teasing, commenting on girls, is common."

– *Gautam Bhardwaj, IT Executive, Chandigarh*

Dress Matters

“Tricity is safe in comparison to other cities in the region. Police also bring about a sense of security even while moving around late at night. But how safe a city is largely depends upon the way you dress up. I have noticed if I take a stroll or move out wearing a salwar-suit, no one comments. Once you wear jeans or pants, eyes of many youngsters turn to you.”

– *Neelam Sharma, housewife, SAS Nagar*

PGs to Blame

“The tricity is not safe at all for women. The main reason is the mushrooming of paying guest accommodations in almost all the sectors. Boys zipping around the city in swanky cars and commenting on girls is a common sight in almost all the markets. Chandigarh police should deploy more woman cops so that girls can approach them in case of any problem.”

– *Raj Malhotra, Educationist, Chandigarh*

Need More Cops

“The tricity is a safe place to stay in a broad sense. But the police presence needs to be increased, particularly at night and in SAS Nagar and Panchkula. Women working at call centres and IT companies have odd working hours, often ending their work late at night. With more police at night, the number of incidents of sexual harassment can come down.”

– *Akanksha, IT Professional, Chandigarh*

Know the Law: Stricter after the Delhi Gangrape Last December

What is ‘Sexual Harassment’?

The definition of sexual harassment now includes any avoidable sexual advances, verbal or through gestures or use of suggestive or pornographic material, includes whistling, obscene remarks; demand of sexual favours; threats, innuendoes; avoidable physical contacts, touching, patting, pinching, etc.

Stricter provisions in Indian Penal Code

Section 354A: Sexual Harassment

- Entails rigorous imprisonment up to 5 years, with fine, or both in case of physical contact and advances involving unwelcome and explicit sexual overtures; or a demand or request for sexual favours

- Imprisonment up to 1 year and/or fine in case of making sexually coloured remarks; forcibly showing pornography; or any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

354B: Act with Intent to Disrobe a Woman

Assaults criminal force to any woman or abetment of such act with the intention of disrobing or compelling her to be naked; punishment is Imprisonment not less than 3 years, up to 7 years, and fine.

Section 354C: Voyeurism

Means watching or capturing a woman in private act, which includes an act of watching carried out in a place which, in the circumstances, would reasonably be expected to provide privacy, and where the victim's private parts are exposed; or the victim is using a lavatory; or the person is doing a sexual act that is not of a kind ordinarily done in public. Punishment in case of first conviction, imprisonment not less than 1 year, may extend to 3 years, also liable to fine. On subsequent conviction, jail 3-7 years and fine.

Section 354D: Stalking

Means following a woman and contact, or attempt to contact, such woman to foster personal interaction repeatedly despite a clear indication of disinterest by such woman; or monitor the use by a woman of the internet, email or any other form of electronic communication. Punishment is imprisonment not less than 1 year, may extend to 3 years, plus fine.

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Advertising Awards

Advertising Professionals have for long argued that their job is to sell products and not bring about social change. They claim that they reflect reality and changing that reality is not their calling. However, anybody who watches advertisements knows that it is constantly creating new images, aspirations and perspectives to create new demands for products and services. Is it possible to make advertisements that move beyond gender stereotypes and reflect the emerging aspiration for a more gender equal and gender just world? More importantly, can this be done without undermining the bottom lines? The ads featured in this section show that it is possible to do so and reflect a growing commitment of young Advertising Professionals who are part of the social change reflecting the same in their communication.

Advertising Awards

Amul Moppet / Sylvester Da Cunha

Special Jury Award (2011-12)

Considered the most recognizable character to grace hoardings for 50 years, the iconic girl in a polka-dotted dress, the Amul moppet, continues to enthrall everyone with witty and tongue-in-cheek humour. This was awarded for being one of the most successful creations of Indian advertising. This is probably the first ad campaign to use a girl child as the mascot as early as the 1960s and continues to engage people around topical issues. The ads are a humorous take on everything that bothers society. The Amul girl is like a spokesperson of the masses; she plays the role of a social observer.

Age of Marriage / DDB Mudra

Best Public Service Advertisement (2011-12)

Half of India's 50-million girls are married off before the legal age of marriage which affects their health and leads to pregnancy and then maternal and infant deaths. The National Rural Health Mission gives out the message on the right age of marriage. This advertisement in Hindi uses masculinity as a tool to overcome one of the most important problems which the country faces. The importance of girl child education is stressed upon and it breaks the silence on the right age of marriage. While the ad shows other male members in the family bragging about their masculinity by fighting goons, one man says he fought with the whole system to ensure that his daughter goes to school.



Sumanto Chattopadhyaya of O&M advertising agency being awarded for Best Advertisement by S. V. Sista (Executive Trustee, Population First).

Tejaswini / Corporate Film of Tata Steel / Sumanto Chattopadhyay / Ogilvy and Mather

Best Advertisement (2011-12)

This is about the Tejaswini project that took an unprecedented step in the Indian steel industry by imparting technical training to women in the steel plant. Technical work in steel plants was always considered an exclusively male domain. This project thus broke gender stereotypes. The corporate film of Tata's 'Tejaswini' made by Ogilvy and Mather in Hindi highlights the efforts of the Tatas to empower women and provide opportunities of alternative livelihoods through vocational education. The tribal women members near Kalinanagar area in Odisha were being trained to undertake various activities and become self sufficient. The film reflects the success of Asha Hansda who took training for 2 months to become a heavy vehicle driver under the project.



O&M advertising agency team being awarded for the Bournvita ad by Suresh Shetty and Dr. A. L. Sharada.

Aadatein / Bournvita / Ogilvy and Mather

Best Advertisement / Product (2012-13)

The advertisement for Bournvita *Aadatein* – mother and son shows a mother inspiring her child to greater heights by enhancing rather than subduing her own skills so that he actually competes with her. It shows the mother having the confidence to step out of home and be a high energy, high action role model for her child with a compelling message that a mother can bring out the best in her child by bringing out the best in her. It encourages mothers to inculcate strong habits in their kids and focuses on the importance of motherhood in shaping a child's life.



Team from Lowe Lintas advertising agency being awarded for Best Advertisement Service at the National LMA, 2012-13 in Mumbai.

Bhagyalakshmi / LIC HFL / Lowe Lintas

Best Advertisement / Service (2012-13)

The advertisement for the Bhagyalakshmi Scheme of LIC for women's home loans is a path breaking one which highlights the right of a woman to own her own house independent of her father's or husband's house. The ad aims to cater to the needs of a growing number of women home seekers. This is a particularly radical thought in a world where women own less than 1% of global property.

Hum Chhuyenge Aasman / Government of Madhya Pradesh

Best Campaign on Girl Child (2012-13)

This campaign which won the best campaign on girl child is a comprehensive multi media campaign that promoted sports among girl children through various interventions. The well designed campaign by the Department of Sports and Youth Welfare, Government of Madhya Pradesh had a direct impact on the participation and performance of girls in a number of sports events at the state, national and international levels.

TVC / *She Can, You Can* / Saloni / Tupperware / IBD INDIA

Best Brand Promotion (2012-13)

This ad celebrates women's entrepreneurial and leadership skills to make a difference to the lives of other women. The television campaign features the stories of Saloni Malhotra, who started a business process outsourcing unit in rural India; and Chhavi Rajawat, credited with being the youngest woman sarpanch in the country. The baseline is "She can, you can" as the campaign hopes to get women to aspire to fulfil their dreams by joining the Tupperware salesforce. The inspirational story of Saloni draws a parallel between her and the increasing number of women who earn money and are empowered through the direct marketing of Tupperware products.

Ladki Hui Hai / Kaun Banega Crorepati / Leo Burnett / TVC

Best Programme Promo (2012-13)

The promo *Ladki hui hai* for Kaun Banega Crorepati depicts the story of a woman fighting gender discrimination from birth, till she wins the one crore prize money. It sensitively showcases scenes of discrimination which are still everyday occurrences in most parts of India. Her triumph at the end and the never-say-die spirit all through the commercial is greatly inspiring to all women, particularly parents of girls. The promo featuring Amitabh Bachchan and aired frequently at prime time had created widespread awareness about gender discrimination in families.



Team from Leo Burnett being awarded for Best Programme Promo at the National LMA, 2012-13 in Mumbai.

Hawa Badlegi/Court Marriage / Havells Fans Lowe Lintas / TVC

Advertisement / Product (2012-13)

The series of ads speak about inclusiveness and gender equality and have been crafted to highlight the need to initiate change in mindsets and stop discrimination and inequality. The ads talk about the notion of a better tomorrow with the tagline *hawa badlegi*. This is an attempt to change people's mindset through a campaign that chronicles change. The ideas of social equality and gender equality have been adopted to promote the product. The series of ads focus on greater inclusivity with the tagline "Hawa badlegi" and feature a man offering to take his wife's surname, a family inviting a housemaid to join them at the dining table and the parents leaving the choice of choosing the religion to the child – all challenging gender and other forms of discrimination.

Special Awards

Special Awards

Films

Gauri Shinde: *English Vinglish*

Best Mainline Film (2011-12)

Gauri Shinde won the award for English Vinglish, which deals with the issue of under valuing of women's work at home and the humiliation that women are subjecting to for frivolous reasons, in this case her inability to speak English, by the family members. The journey of Shashi to USA and her success in gaining her own identity and self-respect makes it an interesting film that drives home the message without compromising on the entertainment value.

K. P. Suveeran: *Byari*

Best Feature Film (2011-12)

K. P. Suveeran was awarded (2011-12) for directing the film made in Beary language and spoken by the Muslim communities in parts of Karnataka and Kerala. It depicts the culture and tradition of the Byari community. It highlights the strict laws and regulations of marriage, the pros and cons of divorce in Islam and how it affects women. The film is based on issues connected with marriage and divorce in Islam and tries to bring such problems to the notice of Islamic law -makers.

Mrinal Kulkarni: *Prem Manjhe Prem Manjhe Prem Asta!?*

Feature Film (2012-13)

Mrinal Kulkarni was awarded (2012-13) for the film *Prem Manjhe Prem Manjhe Prem Asta!?* This Marathi film brings out the nuances of changing gender equations by portraying the romance between two single parents, Anushree and Rohit. The film, while portraying Rohit as taking over the responsibilities of child care and the household without reservation, also shows how Anushree picks up the pieces and gets on with her life. The coming together of the two and the appearance of their estranged spouses into their lives brings face to face the conventional expectations of society from the woman to return to her husband and her desire to get on with her life with the new companion.

Theatre

Purva Naresh: *OK, Tata Bye Bye*

Special Jury Award (2011-12)

Purva Naresh was awarded for the Hindi play *OK, Tata, Bye Bye*, which is based on Bachchda women, who by tradition are sex workers. The play tackles the sensitive issue of caste-based prostitution. Directed by Rabijita Gogoi and written by Purva Naresh, the play is the story of a filmmaker couple, Pooja and Mitch, who come to India for shooting a documentary on the subject but have to face a lot of problems in their journey.

Ramanjeet Kaur: *Baawre Mann Ke Sapne*

Ramanjeet Kaur (2012-13) was awarded for the Hindi play *Baawre Mann Ke Sapne*, an all women production enacted by homemakers who have gone through vigorous training in discipline of time, space and body besides sessions on acting and communication. The play talks about upper and middle class Indian women as being the most unprivileged lot in terms of not having a voice. It has used theatre as a therapy for homemakers. The actors, all homemakers, have shared their anxieties, deep dark secrets, and joys and sorrows. Excerpts from short stories by Indian women writers like Jhumpa Lahiri and Bulbul Sharma have been woven into the narrative.

Books

Gita Aravumudan: *Disappearing Daughters: The Tragedy of Female Foeticide*

Special Jury Award for Best Book – Non-Fiction (2011-12)

Gita Aravumudan got the Special Jury award for her book 'Disappearing Daughters: The Tragedy of Female Foeticide'. She talks about an organized crime with the assistance of ultrasound technology to determine the child's sex. A compelling account of 'female foeticide' in India, the book is a valuable study of the problem. She has used investigative reporting to explore different aspects of the issue, its beginnings and backlash and how it can be stemmed. The book combines interviews, case studies, analyses, statistics and history and also suggests the way forward that may save future generations of daughters.



Author Gita Aravumudan with Dr. A. L. Sharada, Director Population First at the National LMA, 2011-12

Ranjit Lal: Faces in the Water**Special Jury Award for Best Book – Fiction (2011-12)**

Ranjit Lal was awarded for 'Faces in the Water' which deals with the subject of infanticide and son preference. The Diwanchand family boasted of having only sons; no daughters. The water from a magical well in their farmhouse was the reason behind this 'good fortune', they said. One day, fifteen-year-old Gurmi sets out to look for the well and what he sees changes everyone's world forever. The faces of three girls look up at him from the water, and draw him into a world of fun, games and cyber magic. And Gurmi has to face up to an unnerving truth as murky as the surreal well. 'Faces in the Water' is the story of lives lost to appease our society's insatiable hunger for male children, and the price families pay for its sake.

Dr. Lakhbir Kaur: *Desh Vibhajan aur Naari ki Trasadi***Non-Fiction (2012-13)**

Dr. Lakhbir Kaur Verma was awarded for her non-fiction book in Hindi *Desh Vibhajan Aur Naari ki Trasadi*, an analysis of more than 40 novels and 100 short stories written in a number of languages during partition and post partition period. The author analyses the projection of women in these writings and also the impact of partition on women. What happened to the thousands of women during partition? Women who were violated, raped, abducted? Women who were left homeless? Women who went missing? Children who were born out of rape? These were the questions which had driven the study but unfortunately the literature of one of the most traumatic periods of our history does not provide many answers.

Special *Laadli* Awards

Special *Laadli* Awards



Shaukat Kaifi receiving the 'Laadli of the Century' Award from Naseeruddin Shah.

Shaukat Kaifi

***Laadli* of the Century (2012-13)**

Shaukat Kaifi was given this award for her years of sincerity and dedication to the world of theatre and cinema. She has played diverse characters – ranging from the meekest to the vilest person. She is remembered as Pagli in the play *Pagli*, as the black woman in *Africa Jawan Pareshaan*, Amma in *Garam Hawa*, Khanum Jaan in *Umrao Jaan* and Madam of the brothel in *Salaam Bombay*. She showed the world glimpses of the reality of a woman's life through her different roles. She started her career in Prithvi Theatre playing various characters in plays like *Deewar*, *Ahooti*, *Africa Jawan Pareshaan*, *Naokrani ki Talash*, and *Pagli*. While with IPTA, she acted in *Garam Hawa* in 1974 directed by M. S. Sathyu.



Bhanu Athaiya receiving the 'Laadli Lifetime Achievement' Award from Filmmaker Ashutosh Gowariker.

Bhanu Athaiya

Lifetime Achievement Award (2011-12)

Bhanu Athaiya was given this special award. She started as a freelance fashion illustrator and went on to become the most well-respected costume designer of Indian cinema. She has worked in over 100 films since the 1950s with noted Indian directors as well as International ones like Conrad Rooks and Richard Attenborough. She won the Academy Award for the Best Costume Design for her work in the 1982 film *Gandhi*. She was the first Indian to win an Academy Award. She has also won two National Awards.



Artist Lalitha Lajmi receiving the 'Lifetime Achievement' Award from Shabana Azmi and Health Minister, Shri Suresh Shetty.

Lalitha Lajmi

Laadli Lifetime Achievement Award (2012-13)

Lalitha Lajmi was given this Award because her paintings portray women with mirrors, symbolizing self reflections and masks, indicating how everyone puts a mask to conceal their true feelings. Her focus has always been on women and man-woman relationships. She started painting in the early 1960s when she participated in a group exhibition at Jehangir Art Gallery. Her first solo exhibition was in 1961. Over a career spanning five decades, she has had several exhibitions both at national and international platforms.

Rina Mukherji

Laadli Extraordinaire (2012-13)

Rina Mukherji was given this Award because she challenged her her illegal termination arising out of a complaint of sexual harassment at the workplace against The Statesman, Kolkata. She won her case after more than ten years of relentless pursuit. The judgement, delivered by the Industrial Tribunal in Kolkata. It was the first such delivered in India, which ordered that she be reinstated with full back wages. This award honours those journalists who have shown exemplary courage, tenacity and commitment in fighting against gender violence and for gender justice.

Our Jury

2011-12

Pradyuman Maheshwari	Media Professional
Vishwanath Sachdev	Writer, Former Editor, Maharashtra Times
Prakash Bal Joshi	Artist and Author
Sathya Saran	Executive Editor, Enclomedia
Mahesh Bhatt	Director, Producer, Screen Writer
Juhi Chaturvedi	Screen Writer and Advertising Professional
Deepa Gahlot	Writer and Journalist
Aanand Mahendroo	Screen Writer, Director and Producer
Vimla Patil	Social Activist and Media Professional
Ramesh Narayan	Advertising Professional
Neeru Nanda	Writer
Pradeep Guha	Managing Director, 9X Media Pvt. Ltd.
Mrinmayee Ranade	Editor, Madhurima, Dainik Divya Marathi
Sameera Khan	Journalist and Writer
Goutam Rakshit	Advertising Professional

2012-13

Vishwanath Sachdev	Editor, Navneet Journal
Sidharth Bhatia	Journalist
Shishir Joshi	CEO, Joining Dots & Founder Trustee of Engage India Foundation
Sathya Saran	Journalist
Shobhaa De	Writer and Columnist
Lynn de Souza	Founder, Social Access Communications
Nandini Sardesai	Sociologist
Dilip D'Souza	Writer and Journalist
Satish Nandagaonkar	Senior Editor, The Telegraph
Monica Wahi	Founder and Director of South Asian Children's Cinema Forum
Mrinmayee Ranade	Editor, Madhurima
K. V. Sridhar (POPS)	Chief Creative Officer, India Sub-continent, Leo Burnett
Monica Tata	Managing Director, South Asia, HBO India Pvt. Ltd.
Ranjona Banerji	Freelance Journalist

Our Coordinators

Dolly Thakore has been the Coordinator of the National *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity since its inception in 2007. She is a veteran theatre actress and casting director. Trained in radio and television with BBC London, she became one of the leading newscasters and television hosts, interviewing prominent citizens from India and abroad. Dolly Thakore came into the limelight as News reader in English for *Mumbai Doordarshan*. Most of her career has been spent on the stage, acting in plays by master playwrights including Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire*, Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, and Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. She has been associated for over 10 years with *The Vagina Monologues*, a part of a global movement to end violence against women

Western Region Coordinators

Revathi Asokan, Bhairav Desai – Mumbai

Ila Vakharia, Harita Talati – Ahmedabad

Tanu Dwivedi – Jaipur

Mumbai Secretariat: Miral Gosalia, Bhakti Vasani and Smita Pagnis

Northern Region Coordinators

Alka Pande – Lucknow

Madhavi Shree – New Delhi

Kumud Singh – Bhopal

Sohan Singh Rawat – Chandigarh

Southern Region Coordinators

Susheela Nair – Bengaluru

Bhuvaneshwari S., Sudha Swaminathan – Chennai

Siby Kattampally, Bina Nair, Meera Ashok – Thiruvanthapuram

Satyavati Kondaveeti, Roopa Vani Koneru – Hyderabad

Eastern Region Coordinators

Manjira Majumdar – Kolkata

Manipadma Jena, Sanjaya Jena, Sandeep Sahu – Bhubaneswar

Shikha Jyothi Hazarika, Ujjal Borah, Partha Prabal Goswami – Guwahati

Collaborating Agencies

Southern Region

Kesari Memorial Journalists' Trust is a philanthropic organisation that works for the capacity building and welfare of journalists in Thiruvananthapuram. It was established about four decades ago and many well known journalists were its office bearers. The name Kesari comes from the legendary Malayalam Journalist, Kesari Balakrishana Pillai, who shaped Malayalam journalism and played a pivotal role in shaping Malayali culture and thought in the last century.

Bhumika Women's Collective, Hyderabad was started in the year 1994 to provide legal assistance to women in distress. Since 2006, they are running a helpline "Bhumika Helpline" to support women in distress through telephonic counselling and linkage building. Bhumika has emerged as an advocacy organisation at the state level. It is also coordinating an initiative called "Support Centre for Women" located in police stations as a support mechanism for survivors of violence.

Eastern Region

Kolkata Sanved pioneered the use of dance movement as an alternative approach to recovery, healing and psycho-social rehabilitation of victims of violence and trafficking, and is working towards establishing itself as a Centre of Excellence for Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) in South Asia. Kolkata Sanved has been conferred the prestigious *Beyond Sport Award 2009* in the 'Best Project For Health' category, *The Diane von Furstenberg (DVF) Award* in 2011 and *The 24 Ghanta News Maker 2012 Award* for outstanding achievement.

Northern Region

Sahayog, Lucknow is an NGO working for women's empowerment and emancipation. By providing relevant information to poor rural marginalized women, Sahayog helps them access and realize their individual rights and makes them aware of all the privileges they are entitled to. It works with the mission of promoting gender equality and women's health by strengthening partnership-based advocacy.

TRIOs Development Support Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi is a national level professional research and consultancy organisation established by a group of experienced development professionals. It provides a basket of affordable, competent and high quality innovative solutions and technical support and services to various State Governments, Development Partners/Donor Agencies, Foundations, Corporate Sector and Civil Society for Sustainable Social Development.

Our Supporters: 2011-2014

Dynamic Technologies Ltd.

Essar Services India Ltd.

Make A Difference Foundation

R. Jhunjhunwala Foundation

Aditya Birla Managements Corporation Pvt. Ltd.

Cowasji Shavaksha Dinshaw Adenwalla Trust

Godrej Industries Ltd.

Hitkari Trading Corporation

Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation

Niraj Bajaj (Wular Trust)

Puncham A Child Aid Association

Reliance Industires Ltd.

Satellite Foundation

Simone Naval Tata & Noel Naval Tata

Skindia Finance

Symphony Ltd.

Tata Sons Ltd.

United Phosphorus Ltd.

Our Media Partners

Patrika Group

CNBC Awaaz

Exchange4media.com

Infochange

Hindustan

Tehelka

Metro India

Chhattisgarh Times

Our Creative Contributors

Dance by Students of NGO Umang

Group Performance by Klnkini, Jaipur

Solo Dance by Ms. Suranjana Dasgupta

Dance by Kolkata Sanved, Kolkata

Songs by Usha Uthup, Kolkata

Dance by Noopura Institute of Classical Dance and Music, Thiruvanthapuram

Dance by Soorya Group, Thiruvanthapuram

Dance Performance by Children of NGO Asha Jyoti, Lucknow

Kathak Recital by Dr. Kumkum Dhar

Dance by Students from AMCHI Project, Thane Dist. Mumbai

Music Performance by Padmashri Shubha Mudgal

Recital by Saxophone Sisters, Mumbai

Dance Performance by Shiamik's Victory Arts Foundation, Mumbai

Music by Members of National Street Performing Arts, Mumbai

Dance by Massunoori Dance Academy, Hyderabad

Dance by Children from Melody Foundation, Delhi

Odissi Performance by Ms. Kasturi Pattanaik and her Troupe, Delhi

Dance by Students of Kangaroo Kids, Mumbai

Theatre by The Creative Arts, Kolkata

Dance by Children of NGO Samvedna, Ahmedabad

Play by Aditi Desai and her troupe, Ahmedabad

Dance by Children from NGO Kopal Vani, Chhattisgarh

Pandavani Recital by Smt. Ritu Verma, Chhattisgarh

Population First

Population First is a communications and advocacy initiative for a balanced, planned and stable population. It was registered in March 2002 under the Bombay Public Trust Act 1950. Our key objectives: to help reduce gender imbalances in the population; sensitize the youth to gender and social development issues; and work towards gender sensitive and social development oriented health and population programmes.

AMCHI – Action for Mobilisation of Community Health Initiatives is a community health and village development project which is being implemented in 66 villages in the Shahapur block of Thane district in Maharashtra. Our focus is on community mobilisation and empowerment of women, youth and village institutions to ensure efficiency, accountability, and transparency in the implementation of health and social development programmes.

Youth Interventions – The project includes a series of capacity-building workshops for college teachers in training and communication skills, for addressing gender and sex selection issues with the youth. The *Laadli* Changemaker Clubs launched in 2011, also aims to sensitise college students through various activities about gender issues.

Our Trustees

Keshub Mahindra (Chairman), Mrs. Rajashree Birla, Jamshyd Godrej, Deepak Parekh, Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, Mrs. Urvi Piramal, Dr. Indu Shahani, S. V. Sista (Executive Trustee).

Laadli

Laadli works with various stakeholder groups to change the mindset that undervalues the girl child and makes her unwanted in millions of Indian homes. Through our comprehensive communications campaign we try to address the gender discrimination and inequality between the sexes, which is at the root of this problem. We work with the youth, media, medical community at large to change this mindset and question the deep-rooted son preference in our society.

The *Laadli* Media Advocacy initiatives put the focus on gender in the media and work towards building a gender-just society. Population First is committed to building such a perspective by engaging the media in discussions on how it can shape, indeed, change mindsets. Through our media interventions, we hope to accelerate the behaviour change.

We have conducted interactions with Creative Directors of advertising companies and entertainment channels. We have also instituted Media Fellowship for working journalists. With our National Creative Excellence Awards for Social Change (NCEA) project we brought the rich pool of creative professionals in the country to support the cause of the girl child by developing appropriate, creative and high-impact communication messages. The shortlisted entries can be viewed on our website. Our 'Power Media For Social Justice' workshop for working and student journalists are highly appreciated.



Laddi

Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

www.populationfirst.org

Dr. A. L. Sharada

Dr. Sharada is active in the developmental sector for the last 25 years as a researcher, trainer and programme manager. She is the Director of Population First since the last 12 years. She had the opportunity to work with international agencies like UNICEF, UNFPA and other non-government organisations as a consultant. She was on the faculty of the Central University of Hyderabad and Indian Institute of Health Management Research, Jaipur. She was invited by the State Department of USA to represent India under the International Visitors Leadership Programme (IVLP) on Role of NGOs in Global Gender Issues. She is a special invitee to the State Supervisory Board on PCPNDT Act, and was a member of the Committee constituted to suggest amendments to the MTP Act.

Nita Shirali

Nita Shirali completed her post-graduation in History from Jadavpur University, Kolkata. After a brief stint in a Kolkata-based newspaper, she has, since 1990, been associated with several NGOs working on women's issues in Kolkata and then in Mumbai. Among the organisations she has worked with in Mumbai include Akshara and, more recently, Population First.


Population First



Through the Gender Lens brings to you the writings from across the country that reflect exemplary courage, commitment and sincerity of media persons in reporting on gender issues. It is a compilation of some of the most gender-sensitive writing chosen specifically from our award winning entries from print, electronic and web media. The media persons represented in *Through the Gender Lens* cut across different types of media organizations – from national newspapers and TV channels to regional publications to community newspapers and radio. The stories from regions facing insurgency, Naxalism and armed conflict are particularly riveting as they give us an insight into their impact on women and their lives.

The articles and features showcase how events, incidents, programmes, policies and data could be analyzed using a gender lens. They demonstrate the role of the media as the watchdog, the conscience keeper and the change maker. The insights they bring out are thought provoking and the stories they narrate are inspiring and at times heart-rending.

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