



# Rashtra Mahila

JANUARY 2006

Published by the National Commission For Women

## Editor's Column

The National Commission for Women feels disturbed by the ghastly rape and murder of a call-centre employee by a pick-up driver in Bangalore. The heinous crime has caused wide-spread concern not only in the city where it occurred but has raised serious questions about the safety and security of all women employees, throughout the country, who as per their job requirements, work at odd hours.

Admittedly, a large number of women, whether at Bangalore or Mumbai, Pune or Kolkata, Gurgaon or Delhi work in BPOs and call centres and those on night shifts return home very late at night or at the wee hours of the morning.

As far as the Bangalore incident is concerned, the tragedy occurred because the cab driver picked up the girl on false pretence. That she agreed to get into the cab without verifying why the regular driver was missing proved that she was accustomed to such a thing happening. Her

employers, on their part, did nothing even after being informed by the regular driver that someone else was ferrying her. That was a serious security lapse and the cavalier attitude of her employers cost her life. Had they taken pains to find out the truth on receiving the regular driver's call, her life might have been saved.

FOCUS

**SAFETY OF  
WOMEN  
EMPLOYEES**

This incident cannot be dismissed as a "stray, one-off incident". Instead, it is a warning to the call centre owners that the worst can happen and the safety of women cannot be ignored either at workplace or outside. Thus, there is need for a serious rethinking of their transport arrangements given the fact that women constitute 40 per cent of the 3,50,000 call centre employees in India.

The Amendment to the Factories Act which allows women to work between 10 p.m. and 6.00 p.m., in IT among other sectors, also clearly puts

the onus of ensuring safety of women employees on the employers.

However, the fact of the matter is that the authorities of the call centres, the BPOs and all commercial and industrial establishments are convinced that their responsibilities begin and end by providing pick up and drop facilities to their women employees at night.

In this context, the NCW held a round table discussion on the issue with the representatives of BPO industry, the police, NGOs, women activists and officers from the Ministry of Information Technology.

Among the steps that NCW put forward were setting up of committee to deal with sexual harassment of women, training women employees in self defence, sensitisation of male colleagues so that they could safeguard the interest of women employees, regular police verification of cab drivers as well as dropping-first-and-picking-later for women employees and installation of global positioning systems in all cabs, which will also govern the speed of the vehicles.

## Meeting on Maternal and Child Health

A two-day South Asian Parliamentarians' Focus Group Meeting on 'Maternal and Child Health' was organised in New Delhi. The meeting was inaugurated by Dr. Girija Vyas, Chairperson, NCW.

The meeting brought together Parliamentarians from South and South East Asian countries to share experiences, negotiate collaborative net works, reaffirm political commitment in improving maternal and child health in the region.

The meeting discussed a range of maternal and child health issues related to the perceived role of parliamentarians in solving the problem of maternal and child health as well as incorporation of behaviour change communication strategy together with issues of vulnerability, support and care.



Dr. Girija Vyas addressing the meeting.

## 10m Girls 'Missing' in India

According to a study of birth rates by British Medical Journal *Lancet* around 10 million female fetuses may have been aborted in India over the past two decades because of ultrasound sex screening and a traditional preference for boys.

Researchers based in Canada and India looked through data from a national survey, conducted among 1.1 million households in 1998, and at information about 1,33,738 births that took place in 1997.

They found that in cases where the preceding child was a girl, the gender ratio for a second birth was just 759 girls of 1,000 boys.

And when the two previous children were girls, this ratio fell even further, to 719 girls to 1,000 boys.

On the other hand, when the preceding child or children were male, the gender ratio among successive births was about the same.

Based on the natural sex ratio in other countries, around 13.6-13.8 million girls should have been born in India in 1997 - but actual number was 13.1 million. The prenatal sex determination and selective abortion accounts for 0.5 million missing girls yearly.

If this practice has been common for most of the past two decades since access to ultrasound became widespread, then 10 million female births have been aborted in India during the last two decades.

### Nodal Authority for Sex Workers

The Centre has decided to constitute a nodal authority to effectively prevent and combat human trafficking.

A provision has been made in the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2005 for the

constitution of a nodal authority which will be exclusively devoted to listening to the complaints of sex workers, redressing their grievances and investigating cases regarding them.

The authority - to be headed by a chairperson - is expected to have police officers from different state cadres. The authority will have the power to take suo moto cognizance of any offence committed under the Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act, 1956.

### NCW Seeks Report on Hand-chopping case

Taking cognizance of the gruesome incident of armed persons chopping off the hands of a woman in Madhya Pradesh, burning her house and beating up her family members for refusing to withdraw a rape complaint, the National Commission for Women has sought a report in the matter from the state police.

### Gender Cell to Help NRI Women

Women Power Connect (WPC) representing various prominent women organisations in the country is working out strategies to set up the NRI gender cell in support with the ministry of overseas Indian affairs and National Commission for Women for rescuing women, who become victims of fraudulent marriages or are tortured by their husbands in a foreign country.

Strongly advocating the need to create an emotional and legal support mechanism for NRI women, who face many problems in countries of their residence, the Women Power Connect had also lobbied for setting up the NRI gender cell at recently held Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2006 in Hyderabad.

Some of the issues specific to NRI women to be taken up by the proposed cell will include failed and fraudulent

marriages between NRI grooms and Indian brides in USA, UK, issues related to dissolution of marriage - recognised in one country, but not in other countries, annulling of marriage solemnised between NRI man and Indian woman by country of residence, desertion of wife or forced divorce by NRI husband.

### Govt. to Consider Flexible Work Facility for Women

The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, said the UPA Government would consider gender responsive budgeting and may consider flexi work facility for women in some sectors aimed at creating jobs in industrial areas and service sectors.

Referring to women's welfare, Dr. Singh said governance would be made more gender sensitive with the adoption of legislations that address their concerns.

He further said a greater share would be given to them in decision-making at all levels.

### Profile in Courage

A Hindu girl recently smashed her bangles and erased her sindoor just after the marriage ceremony at Balasore, in Orissa, when her greedy husband demanded more dowry.

According to the police, Tanushree Pani married Ranjit Sarangi at Utsav Mandap in Balasore. The girl's father, who had given Rs. 2 lakhs before the wedding, promised to give the remaining Rs. 1 lakh later. However, minutes after the wedding, the bridegroom demanded another Rs. 3 lakhs.

This led to a clash between the two sides. Following an FIR filed by girl's father, the bridegroom and a few of his relatives have landed in jail.

## Important Decisions

### Quota Benefit not for Upper Caste Woman Marrying SC, ST

The Supreme Court has held that a woman from an upper caste Hindu family cannot take benefit of contesting elections from a reserved constituency on the grounds of her marriage to a man belonging to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe.

### HC Lifts Ban on Pregnant Student

The Kolkata High Court rejected the decision of a private primary teachers' training institute to prevent a married student from attending classes because of her pregnancy and upheld its earlier observation that every mature woman had the right to attain motherhood.

The court directed the principal of the Goksai Aurobindo Sangha Primary Teachers' Training Institute to allow the petitioner to attend her classes in the present session (2005-2006) with immediate effect.

### Jobs for Women in Military Intelligence

Army Chief General J.J. Singh has said more women would be inducted into the Military Intelligence Corps from this year. Women will be employed as interpreters, translators and assistant attaches, he said.

### Say no to Dowry Demands

Remember :

- Giving dowry is crime.
- Demanding dowry is crime.
- Facilitating dowry payment is crime.

Also remember that Indian Penal Code 1860, 1872 and 1973 provides for strict penal provisions in this regard.

## Members' Visits

- Member Yasmeen Abrar visited Sawai Madhopur to attend a public hearing on ST and SC women organised by Sanskriti. She also went to Moradabad to attend a meeting with NGOs on child marriage and foeticide. Ms. Abrar was the chief guest at the Women's Awareness seminar held at Hodal in Faridabad. Later, she attended a workshop cum seminar on 'Sex Selection and Pre-birth Elimination of Female' at Kanpur.



*Ms. Abrar answering questions at the Public Hearing.*

- Member Malini Bhattacharya attended the inaugural function of the Legal Awareness Programme organised by Gana Unnayan Parishad sponsored by NCW. About 60 persons participated, comprising counsellors, members of self-help groups and grassroot workers. Ms. Bhattacharya visited the villages of Habichak and Narkarchak in Medinipur District (East) to meet about 30 women artists to discuss the proposed state-level workshop to be held with NCW's assistance. Later, she visited Thakurpukur Vivekananda Co-Education College and inaugurated a seminar on women and violence. She spoke on the impact of globalisation on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of Pratibha Town Library Sarsuna.
- Member Nirmala Venkatesh visited Hyderabad and chaired a meeting of the Forum of Social Upliftment of Women. She also went to Bangalore to investigate into the alleged dowry - murder case of Poornima Rashmi, an airhostess. There she attended a meeting with women Krishi Samaj and discussed the problems of women agriculture and tree plantation workers. Ms. Venkatesh attended a workshop at Chennai on sexual harassment at workplace of domestic and sanitary workers organised by Women's Struggle Committee. Thereafter, she went to Bangalore to investigate into cases of sexual harassment of women employees of Karnataka Legislative Council and Assembly. Later, she investigated into the alleged

dowry death of Jyothi Mittal. She suggested that the culprits should be externed from the place of crime till the case is disposed of. She also attended a meeting with harassed women labourers of granite cutting at Ilkal.

Ms. Venkatesh attended a meeting between the police and call centre officers held in the wake of rape and death of a call centre employee in Bangalore. Later, she looked into the case of Vidya, who was being harassed for dowry demands. Thereafter, she attended a meeting to discuss atrocities by the police on the Remand Home girls.



*Ms. Venkatesh at the meeting with police officers on safety of call centre employees. Dr. Ajai K. Singh, Police Commissioner is on her left.*

- Member Neeva Konwar was the chief guest at a two-day seminar on 'Economic Empowerment of North Eastern Rural Women - Problems and Prospects', organised by the Centre for Women Studies at Dibrugarh. The seminar was sponsored by NCW.



*Ms. Konwar addressing the gathering.*

## Making a Difference

Over a million women in Chhattisgarh comprising Adivasis, Dalits and other backward sections of the society living below the poverty line are members of 76,000 self-help groups in the State. And their accumulated assets have crossed the Rs. 1.30 million mark.

No challenge is beyond their means as these women, mostly illiterate, are running mines, fisheries, vast agricultural tracts and even *haats* (weekly markets) etc. sidelining contractors.

They have taken over the traditionally male-dominated tasks of running limestone and stone quarries and are prepared to undertake big construction projects.

## Well Done NCW

Due to persistent efforts of Member Malini Bhattacharya, Mrs. Jayanti Bala Das, who was allegedly raped by BSF personnel and was put in jail for safe custody for two and a half years, with her infant daughter, was released from jail and rehabilitated. It was only after Ms. Bhattacharya, accompanied by Ms. Bharati Mutsuddi, advocate, Kolkata High Court and member of the West Bengal Commission for Women visited the Basirhat CJM Court, that the papers of the victim girl could be traced and after moving back and forth between the Presidency Jail and Basirhat Court for four days, they were able to get Jayanti released and put her in the safe custody of her elder brother.

*for further information visit our website at : [www.ncw.nic.in](http://www.ncw.nic.in)*