



Rashtra Mahila

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Editor's Column

When stories of atrocities and domestic violence against women are rife in the society, the courage and determination of a 60-year-old woman of Chandipur village in Birbhum district of West Bengal, comes as a breath of fresh air. She fought a two-year long battle against societal mindset to marry off her young-widowed daughter in law, who lost her husband in a thunderstorm, barely two months after they were married. Witnessed by hundreds of people, the girl was married once again at the Pahareswar temple.

The decision to get her married could have been prompted perhaps by the realisation that society could be brutal to a young widow. Hence, the mother-in-law fought against all odds and barriers to rehabilitate her in the society.

However, her first challenge was to convince her daughter in law, who

had even contemplated suicide, to agree to marry again; and next was to deal with a prejudiced society, which tried to block all her efforts to arrange for a groom.

Yet, her eventual success indicated a growing awareness in parts of rural India of social alternatives to prejudices, pulls and

FOCUS
**LONE
CRUSADER**

pressures that have been responsible for a great deal of women's suffering and distress.

Nearly 150 years ago, great social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Pandit Vidyasagar had advocated widow remarriage followed by legal sanctions to prevent atrocities against hapless widows, specially in the rural areas. Even so, Sati is a lingering curse, while never ending stories of bride burning, female

foeticide, domestic violence haunts the conscience of the nation.

Under these circumstances, the endeavours of a simple woman in a remote village reveals not just personal awareness of an obligation to give a new life to a young girl but also the courage to stand against all societal odds.

Admittedly, stories like these, is far more effective than governmental publicity or documentary films advocating social reforms. Such success stories will have greater impact because of the message that reaches a large number of people, particularly widows, who can hope to lead a better life. Examples of personal commitment can yield better results than crores spent on propaganda for social changes.

Therefore, there is need to highlight acts of such lone crusaders which could inspire and embolden many others.

Police to Coordinate with Call Centres under NCW Guidance

The Delhi High Court has directed the Delhi police to coordinate with the call centre owners regarding the safety of women employees working at odd hours under the guidance of the National Commission for Women. The court has also directed the Delhi police to issue a circular to every police station.

So far the Delhi Police has appointed special women police officers, list of which is put on display

in all the police stations. In its last meeting convened in July 2006, with the call centre executives, the Delhi police has briefed them that at no point of time, a single lady should be allowed to travel alone in a vehicle either en route to the call centre or on return journey to her residence. They have also been directed to ensure that atleast one security personnel from the BPO/call centre should travel in the company vehicle. Chief executives of the call

centres have been directed to ensure that the drivers should neither take a short cut and nor should they pick up passengers other than the employees of call centres to avoid car-hijacking.

The walkie-talkie sets are already fitted in most of the vehicles engaged with the call centres. Hence, the police has asked the call centres owners to ensure that the sets work properly and that the drivers lodge their exact position with BPOs control rooms.

The National Commission for Women recently sponsored a workshop on 'Integrated plan of action to prevent and combat human trafficking with special focus on children and women' at Hyderabad. The workshop revealed alarming statistics. Of the total sex workers in the country, 35 percent are from Andhra Pradesh. The workshop intends to provide solutions and suggestions in rescuing sex workers and the NCW's aim will be to rehabilitate these women and their children.

In 2005, there were 35 cases of trafficking in Hyderabad and in 2006, the number swelled upto 58.

As per reports, flesh trade is encouraged in Nalgonda, East Godavari and Vijayawada. The Lambada community in Telangana form 35 to 40 percent of women sex workers in the state.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Renuka Chowdhary, Union Minister of State for women and child development said that the centre was planning to make laws on child and women abuse tougher but the biggest drawback was the lack of proper implementation of laws.

She also said that the main problem that dogged women in the country was that they were

not treated as equals and even in rehabilitation programmes women get a raw deal.

The police training curriculum, she said, should be revised so that it could sensitise police recruits to issues concerning women.

The Chairperson NCW, Dr. Girija Vyas in her address said "Though there are laws to combat human trafficking, they are hardly implemented. Even the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act lacks rehabilitation packages for women rescued from the flesh trade. Therefore, the plan of action now being formulated will mainly address this issue".

She said that, when she addressed a workshop for 17,000 sex workers in Kolkata earlier this year, they all sought rehabilitation as did the 5,000 devadasis who visited her in New Delhi.

Dr Vyas said, "We will provide them with shelter and some money till they are employed. The main idea is to ensure that the children of these exploited sex workers are accepted into the mainstream and not discriminated".

The recommendations also include addressing the issue of identifying and concentrating on districts that are more prone to sexual exploitation of women.



Ms. Renuka Chowdhury (right) has a word with NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas at the workshop.

Members' Visits

- Member Neeva Konwar attended an awareness programme on female foeticide organised by Adarsh Saraswati Shiksha Samiti at Sonipat. Speaking on the occasion, the chief guest Ms. Konwar said that female foeticide has become a national problem and there was need for stringent action against the perpetrators. She said that women, who were not getting justice could

approach the Commission for redressal. Ms. Rajni Patil, Chairperson, Central Social Welfare Board also participated in the workshop.

- Member Nirmala Venkatesh recently attended a women's convention held as part of the Tamil Nadu Bank Employees' Federation at Chennai. She also visited Vishakapatnam and interacted with women inmates of the Central jail at Adavivaram.



Ms. Neeva Konwar (centre) with Ms. Renu Nagar and Ms. Rajni Patil at the awareness camp.



Member Nirmala Venkatesh at the central jail.

Legislation to Ensure Safety of Women

NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas addressed the 15th conclave of the Utkarsh Academy at Merchants Chamber Hall in Kanpur.

Speaking on the occasion, she said that the govt. was actively considering to frame a new law on rape and to introduce 21 new laws in Parliament to ensure respect and safety to women in the society. The Commission had sent recommendations, in this regard, to several states, but only a few states have introduced these laws while the others had remained insensitive to it.

She said that youth could play a vital role in nation building by treading the path shown by the great leaders.

Dr. Vyas said that Uttar Pradesh stood second to Maharashtra in cases

of atrocities against women and concerted efforts should be made to bring a halt to women victimisation.

She said that the bureaucrats were setting a bad example in the society by acting as stooges of the politicians. She appealed to the youths aspiring for the civil services to be sensitive to human emotions and play a responsible role in the nation's upliftment.

Dr. Vyas said once Kanpur was considered to be the Manchester of the East but had lost its glory.

She praised Utkarsh Academy for an active role in moulding bureaucrats who were also sensitive to human values.



NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas being felicitated by Utkarsh Academy Director, Dr. Pradeep Dixit

From the Complaint Cell

- The commission received a complaint from Ms. Chandrika regarding physical and mental abuse by her husband and in laws. Ms. Chandrika an MBA, married for four years, working in Hong Kong, complained of dowry demand and domestic violence against her husband, employed as a senior consultant in a Finance Company based at Hong Kong. As the marriage was beyond rapprochement, Chandrika had lodged a complaint at the Nanakpura Women Cell, but was dissatisfied with the proceedings at the Crime Against Women Cell and wanted an FIR under section 406/498A to be lodged.

Earlier, she had complained to the local police in Hong Kong but the Police explained that they could not take any action since the matter pertained to Indian citizens. Ms. Chandrika then approached CAW Nanakpura, to get a criminal case registered against her husband and in-laws. However, the CAW Cell was also reluctant to lodge an FIR and were unnecessarily delaying the matter. Coordinator Ms. Bhavana Kumar contacted the CAW Cell and pressed upon them to register an FIR. An FIR U/s 498A and 406 was registered on the intervention of the Commission on the same day itself. The matter is now being sent to the court.

- The Commission received a complaint from a grandfather from Dankaur Distt., in Uttar Pradesh. He alleged that his granddaughter Monika (16 years) in the garb of marriage, was being sold off

by his son to an antisocial alcoholic, aged 40 years. The grandfather approached the Commission in December, 2006 when the local police, including the Deputy Superintendent of Police, refused to register a case against his son.

SSP Dankaur was contacted telephonically and was requested to take immediate action. The local police, on the intervention of the Commission, lodged an FIR u/s 363 and under Child Marriage Restraint Act. Thereafter, Monika's father was arrested.

- The Commission received a distress call from Hauz Khas that a girl had been badly beaten up by her husband and had been locked up in her house. The girl was pleading for help and wanted to be rescued and sent to her parents in Calcutta. The Commission took cognizance of the case and immediately contacted the local Police Station. The Police sent two constables, who took the girl out and guarded her till her parents arrived. Meanwhile, her husband was taken into police custody for 14 days. The girl, along with her two minor daughters, were sent to her mother's house in Calcutta. The accused Nirmal was called to the Commission after his release from jail. He apologized for his misbehaviour in the past and promised to maintain peace and harmony in his family in the future. After his assurance, his wife was contacted in West Bengal, who also wanted to join him back in Delhi.

During the months from October - December 2006, 3054 complaints were registered in the Complaints and Investigation Cell. The complaints were received under the various heads such as Dowry, Dowry Death, Sexual Harassment at Workplace, Police Apathy etc.

Deputy Secretary to Visit Pretoria

Ms. Gurpreet Deo, Deputy Secretary, NCW, has been nominated to visit Pretoria, South Africa, to attend Strategy Workshop with Women's Constituencies from Troop and Police Contributing Countries, to be held from 7th to 9th February, 2007.

Ms. Deo will speak on good practices on building partnerships between women constituencies, Defence and Security Sectors.

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