



## Editor's Column

Fierce controversy with regard to Shani Shingnapur temple in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra has once again raised the issue of gender equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

After a woman entered the Shani temple, the issue of women being 'impure' was brought into focus. The deity was purified by the priests with milk to restore its pristine sanctity.

Now women are protesting against this practice and demanding the right to enter the sanctum sanctorum, which had been prohibited for hundreds of years. It is relevant to mention here that articles 25-28, dealing with fundamental rights, specifically say that "no person shall on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be denied the right to profess or practice his or her religion". Incidentally, the

Supreme Court is also questioning why women are being kept out of Kerala's Sabarimala temple for centuries. The case will be heard on 8th February.

A women outfit named Bhumata Brigade, is spearheading the campaign against banning entry of women devotees to the Shani temple. A day after police foiled the attempt by 400

FOCUS

Gender  
Barrier

women activists to barge into the temple, the Bhumata brigade leader met the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and presented a memorandum of demands seeking elimination of gender bias and pressing for unrestricted entry of women in all religious places.

The Chief Minister in response, in a tweet said 'In Indian tradition and Hindu religion, women have always had freedom to worship. Our culture says that there should be change in traditions

and rituals according to changing times. It is not in our culture to discriminate over access to worship". But institutions like Shani Shingnapur and Sabarimala temple insist that they are defending century-old traditional customs and not speaking for Hindu religious authority.

Admittedly, traditions should change with time and age. Traditions, which are beneficial, certainly should be preserved but traditions which are detrimental to women causing gender inequality in the society must be eschewed.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister has asked the temple authorities, the Collector, the police and the civil society at large to resolve the issue through dialogue. The Maharashtra Chief Minister has taken the correct stand by supporting the rights of women and it is hoped that sooner rather than later all restrictions on entry of women in temples will be revoked.

## Important Decisions

- Government has taken an important step to improve gender equality in the paramilitary forces by approving 33% reservation for women at the constable rank in two major central paramilitary forces - CRPF and CISF and also setting a 15% quota in the border forces BSF, SSB and ITBP. These forces together comprise around 9 lakh personnel, of whom only around 20,000 are women as of now.
- The Supreme Court has said dowry articles gifted to a woman have to be given to her children or returned to her parents in case of her unnatural death within seven years of marriage. The Bench added that the parents-in-law or husband can at best be described as trustee of those articles. Relying upon Section 6 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, the Bench also said the dowry articles must be handed over to the woman within three months of the marriage and the husband or in-laws could be prosecuted for not giving back the movable and immovable properties within the stipulated time.
- The Centre has decided to set up a dedicated agency to tackle organized crimes relating to trafficking of women and girls. While the Centre will have to consult the states with regard to implementing the proposal, the agency will initially be funded out of the Nirbhaya fund set apart by the Centre in the wake of the brutal gang-rape of a Delhi girl.

### Congratulations!

Tamil Nadu cadre IPS officer, Archana Ramasundaram has been appointed as the Director General of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB). The SSB is entrusted with guarding the country's frontiers with Nepal and Bhutan. There are five paramilitary forces-SSB, Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force and Indo-Tibetan Border Police - and none has ever had a woman chief.

## Educating for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

An International Conference on “Education as a Driver for Sustainable Development Goals”, was held in January, 2016, by the Centre for Environment Education in Ahmedabad, in co-operation with UNESCO, UNEP, Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change. The inaugural session “Educating for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls” was chaired by Dr. Pam Rajput, Chairperson, High Level Committee on Status of Women, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India and the speakers included NCW Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam, Ms. Mirai Chatterjee (Director, Social Security, SEWA) and Mr. Reiner Mathar (Coordinating expert for ESD, Ministry of Education and Training, Germany). Dr. Rajput pointed out that as Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) did not have a set time-frame, it would be better to focus on Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning) which was time bound.



*NCW Chairperson (2nd from left) Ms. Pam Rajput, Mr. Reiner Mathar, Ms. Mirai Chatterjee at the Conference*

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam highlighted the need for non-formal education to focus on building self-esteem, which was crucial to empowerment, as literacy did not cultivate the same. She also emphasized that boys and men should be taught to be gender sensitive. While responding to a question on the prevalence of patriarchy, NCW Chairperson emphasized the need to address the fact that sometimes women themselves were the protagonists of patriarchy.

## Bangalore Conference

The 14th National Conference of Akhil Bhartiya Adhivakta Parishad, attended by 4500 lawyers from all over the country, was inaugurated in Bangalore. The theme of the conference was “Realizing our Constitutional Goals-Challenges Ahead”.

Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam, Chairperson, National Commission for Women, delivered the keynote address on “Gender mainstreaming-Role of Law and Judiciary.” Ms. Nivedita Bhide Vice President, Vivekanand Kendra, spoke on “gender-social, cultural and religious prospective”, and Ms. Pramila Nesargi, Senior Advocate, Karnataka High Court, spoke on “Women and decision-making”. The session was presided by Ms. Jyotika Kalra, Advocate, Supreme Court of India, who concluded by saying that though the Constitution had been written carefully, it cannot become a living document, till people are committed to its enforcement.



*Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam sixth ( from left) along with others at the national conference.*

## From the Legal Cell

The National Commission for Women organized a consultation on “Marital Cruelty and Section 498A IPC. A recent judgement of the Supreme Court in the case of Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar, stated that no immediate arrests to be made without following the procedure mentioned in Section 41(a) CrPC. It was brought to the notice of the Commission that the implementing authorities are misusing the directions given in the Arnesh Kumar’s case. In view of the above mentioned concern, the Commission, organized the consultation. A Review Petition was filed by the Commission, which was declined by the Supreme Court. NCW now plans to file a Curative Petition.

The Consultation was attended by various stakeholders, including NCW Chairperson and Members, social activists and eminent people from the legal fraternity. The complainants, who have faced marital cruelty, were also invited to share their experiences to provide a fresh perspective on the issue. A study conducted by NCW was also released on the occasion.

The Consultation began with a presentation by Adv. Kirti Singh and was attended by senior advocates like Adv. Geeta Luthra, Adv. Jyotika Kalra and representatives of various organizations such as Swayam, AIDWA, Himmat and others, who have worked extensively on issues pertaining to marital cruelty. The Joint Commissioner of Delhi Police, Mr. Robin Hibu and the former Supreme Court Judge Justice Gyan Sudha Mishra provided valuable inputs. The Consultation came up with some path-breaking recommendations which would be sent to the government for further action.



*At the consultation (from left) Member Rekha Sharma, Member Alok Rawat, Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam, Justice Gyan Sudha Mishra & Member Secretary Preeti Madan*



*A view of the complainants*

## Making a Difference

Sandeep Kaur a Dalit girl, and a diploma holder in computer applications from Matoi village in Sangrur floated an Ekta Club along with a group of 10 Dalit girls. They launched a two-month long agitation and managed to convince the Dalit families of Matoi of the need to bid collectively for the land.

There was another problem-the government base rent was Rs. 7,200 per bigha, which the agitators thought was too steep for the poor Dalits. They wanted it down to Rs. 3,200 per bigha. “We were fighting two battles-high base rents and proxy bidding. The auction was cancelled four times because of our protests last year,” said an activist. The girls, in fact, represented their community during the bidding last year. There were clashes on the auction day and rich farmers managed to win using a dummy candidate but this year they won. Now, they do not need to beg upper caste farmers for even cattle fodder. The land is enough to feed cattle of all Dalits in Matoi.

## NCW Felicitates Drukpa Kung Fu Nuns

The National Commission for Women felicitated 250 Drukpa Kung Fu nuns, for their immense grit, strength and will for undertaking the arduous Cycle Yatra from Kathmandu to New Delhi, across the states of Bihar and UP to create awareness for women’s empowerment and environmental consciousness.

## Complaints received by NCW in January, 2016

Month	Complaints received	Number of complaints on which action taken	Closed
January, 2016	1849	1701	378

NCW had taken up suo moto cognizance of 11 cases in January, 2016

## Members' Visits

❖ Member Sushma Sahu, visited Ahmedabad and Patan in Gujarat to discuss Gujarat-based complaints with the police authorities. ● Ms. Sahu attended a Lok Adalat, at Ahmedabad, along with District Legal Services Authority and interacted with the complainants to know their case details to resolve the issues amicably. Later, she visited the Gujarat Women Commission's office and discussed women-related issues. ● The Member attended a two-day National Seminar on "Sexual Harrassment and Redressal", sponsored by the National Commission for Women and organized by the Committee against Sexual Harassment of Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University at Patan. ● The Member visited Bhopal to discuss Bhopal based-complaints with the police authorities and also made surprise visits to Sultania Hospital at Bhopal and Nariniketan at Ujjain to examine the infrastructure and facilities provided to the patients and the inmates. Thereafter, she met Shri Babulal Gowd, Hon'ble Home Minister of Madhya Pradesh and discussed issues pertaining to crimes against women and also requested him to constitute the MP State Commission for Women. Since then, a Commission has been constituted and a Chairperson nominated. ● Ms. Sahu attended a Lok Adalat at Bhopal along with District Legal Services Authorities and the Police to discuss complaints received from women. Later, she met the DGP to discuss complaints registered in the National Commission for Women. ● She visited Murshidabad in West Bengal with the NIMHANS team for taking interviews of the patients, their families and other service providers of the Berhampur Mental Hospital. She examined the structure and functional facilities as well as hospital records. ● The Member also met the Commissioner of Police, Kolkata, to discuss issues pertaining to women.



*Member Sushma Sahu lighting the lamp at the Seminar on Sexual Harassment*

❖ Member Laldingliani Sailo attended the launch of a compendium of Bina Aggarwal's collections on "Gender Challenges", at India International Centre, New Delhi. This compendium has opened new channels of economic empowerment for millions of poor women around the world.

❖ Member Rekha Sharma visited Silvasa to attend a National level Seminar, organized by the Human Rights Association of India as the Chief Guest. She addressed a gathering of about 1200 people. ● Ms. Sharma visited Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, Shahdara, and met a victim of trafficking, who is now a patient of HIV. She was admitted in the hospital on 28th October, 2015. The Member also met the Medical Superintendent and other concerned doctors to inquire about the wellbeing of the girl. A few days later, she called the Medical Superintendent of Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital for a hearing. ● The Member visited Shamli in Uttar Pradesh to talk to SSP on a long pending case. She also met the DSP and the concerned inspector and directed them to expedite the case. She asked the police authorities to take strict action against a lady constable, against whom many corruption complaints came up during the hearing. The constable was later suspended on the Member's recommendation. ● The Member visited Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh as Chairperson of the Inquiry Committees to enquire into the recent case of rape and abortion of an inmate of Nari Niketan at Dehradun and the alleged rape of Tribal women by security personnel respectively.



*Member Rekha Sharma addressing the Human Rights Seminar*

❖ Member Secretary Preeti Madan visited the Institute of Psychiatry & Human Behaviour at Panaji in Goa and Pavlov Mental Hospital in Kolkata respectively, with regard to a research study commissioned by NCW in collaboration with NIMHANS on "Addressing Concerns of Women Admitted in Psychiatric Institutions."

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