



Rashtra Mahila

Vol. 1 No. 148 | November 2011

Published by the National Commission for Women

Editor's Column

Recently a PIL was filed in the Delhi High Court by a social film maker, challenging provisions of Delhi Motor Vehicle Rules, which exempt women from wearing helmets while riding pillion. The Delhi High Court has sought views of the Delhi Transport Department under Police's plan to amend the Delhi Motor Vehicle Rules. According to the present rule, helmets are 'optional' for women. This irrational concession is proving fatal for many women. As per statistics, out of 522 two-wheeler victims, who died this year, 43 are women. Last year, 64 women on two-wheelers were killed in fatal accidents.

The police claimed that many lives could have been saved if women wore helmets while riding two-wheelers. Therefore, the police, through the electronic and print media are urging women to wear helmets while riding alone or as a pillion rider. Hospital officials also claim that the extent of

head injuries is more among women pillion riders as women sitting in the rear have nothing to hold on to unlike the driver, who steers the bike or the scooter. After an accident, many a time, the pillion rider falls off and faces the risk of being run over, apart from suffering serious head injuries.

Responding to the PIL, which demanded that helmets be made compulsory for women, the Delhi

FOCUS

Helmets for Women

government has filed an affidavit supporting this view. However, the government would leave the ultimate decision to the court, preferring a judicial directive bringing in the required changes in the law.

Admittedly, if riding without helmet is as risky for a woman as it is for a man, then why wearing helmets

is compulsory for men driving two-wheelers while it is 'optional' for women? Are women's lives less valuable than men's? It is an exception they can do without.

Therefore, it is suggested that wearing of helmets should be made mandatory for women irrespective of their religion, caste, creed and colour, which incidentally is the law the world over. What is necessary is education and awareness on this issue.

This is precisely what a group of youngsters in Chandigarh did on the Karva-Chauth day, when women pray for the long life of their husbands. They offered rewards to women scooter-riders for wearing helmets to drive home the point that their safety and longevity are of equal importance and their lives are as precious as their husbands. For, when an accident takes place, it does not discriminate between men and women and injuries are sustained, irrespective of the sex.

Chairperson's Press Conference

On completion of her 90 days in the Commission, the Chairperson, Ms. Mamta Sharma held a press conference and apprised the media of her priorities and objectives on taking over as the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women.

She said that she would concentrate not only on women's empowerment but also on their growth and development, including health care and education. In order to bring down atrocities committed against women, there should be interaction between NCW, the police and the media, she added. Ms. Sharma said that the Commission plans to launch a toll free helpline for women in distress within the next three months where women could call up to lodge their complaints.

The call centre would ensure that victims, who do not get a hearing in their states, do not have to come to NCW to lodge their complaints. This helpline will also provide

counselling and immediate help to those in need.

Reacting sharply to the criticism that the Commission had not taken any step in the Bhanwari Devi case, Ms. Sharma informed that just after a few days of her kidnapping, the Commission took suo moto cognizance and wrote a letter to the Rajasthan DGP but the matter has now gone to the CBI and is being heard in the court. So the Commission could not interfere in a sub-judice matter. She also promised that cases pending for many years in the Commission would be concluded expeditiously and women working in the corporate sector would also be given speedy justice, if they became targets of social and sexual harassment at workplace. The NCW has also decided to launch an awareness campaign about women's rights initially in four states-viz, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Kerala and the Punjab on 14th November, the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi.



Workshop on Prevention of Sexual Harassment

A workshop on "Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace" was organised by Bank of Baroda Staff College in collaboration with the National Commission for Women at Ahmedabad. The workshop was attended by women officers from Gujarat, UP, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and West Bengal.

Speaking on the occasion, NCW member Dr. Charu WaliKhanna emphasised the fact that women have the right to work in a safe and congenial environment as well as enjoy equal pay, benefits and opportunities of job advancement. Sexual harassment at workplace infringes on the fundamental rights of a woman to gender equality as guaranteed under Article 14 of the Constitution of India and her right to live with dignity under Article 21, she added.



Member Charu WaliKhanna (2nd from left, first row) with the participants of the workshop



Dr. Charu WaliKhanna with Chairperson Smt. Leelaben B. Ankoliya displaying NCW publication 'Meera Didi Se Puchho' in Gujarati

Mr. S.M. Sharma, while proposing a vote of thanks highlighted the women-centric, progressive HR policies of the Bank which make special efforts to groom women employees, who are branch heads as well as organise exclusive programs for women officers associated with Credit and Retail Banking.

A book entitled "Speak, Resist, Report Sexual Harassment at Workplace" was released on the occasion.

Dr. WaliKhanna also had a meeting with the Gujarat State Commission for Women and had a fruitful interaction with the Chairperson Smt. Leelaben B. Ankoliya and the NGOs.

Profile In Courage

Twenty-two year old Preeti Rajput was on a rickshaw on her way to Rajouri Garden Metro Station, when two youths on a bike pulled up to her, grabbed her purse and smashed their way through the busy traffic outside a Mall in Rajouri Garden.

Preeti was neither scared nor ruffled. She did not wait for the police to act or the passers-by to come to her help. She jumped off the rickshaw on to an auto to give chase to the culprits. Displaying incredible bravery, Preeti caught up with the youths and got them arrested. When the culprits tried to jump the traffic light and flee, Preeti raised an alarm and the police nabbed them. The police have rewarded her with a commendation card and a cash reward of Rs. 1000/-. Preeti is extremely gratified by the certificate given by the police and says that next time when goons target a woman on Delhi roads, they should think twice.

Incentive for third child, if it's a girl

To combat skewed sex-ratio, the Maharashtra state government is now planning to give incentives on the birth of a third child - but only if it is a girl. The idea is to reduce the gap in state's child sex ratio, now among one of the worst in the country at a dismal 883 girls for every 1,000 boys, according to the recently released provisional figures for Census 2011. The national average of child sex ratio is 914.

The state government will reward those couples, who give birth to a third child, who is a girl, by funding her education and offering other financial incentives. The existing laws will be changed to ensure government employees, elected representatives at all levels, including the gram panchayats are not disqualified for giving birth to a third child.

Women's Rights Programme

Mahila Adhikar Abhiyan was launched by the National Commission for Women in collaboration with Haroiti Utsav Ayojan Samiti at Kota on November 19th,

registered. Though there is plethora of laws favouring women, yet as these are not implemented properly, women do not get any relief from them.



Ms. Mamta Sharma addressing the gathering.



A view of the audience

2011. Another programme was later held in the rural area at Sultanpur by Sree Shakti Seva Sansthan as part of the same programme.

Inaugurating the Abhiyan, NCW Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma said that even now women remain victims of deceit and injustice; when they come to the police stations to lodge complaints, their complaints are not

Therefore, it is necessary to empower women through education and development and Women Rights Programmes to create awareness among women. Hence, NCW has decided to organise such programmes initially in four states-Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala, she added.

Member Secretary's visit to Kolkata

In the course of her visit to Kolkata, NCW member secretary Anita Agnihotri attended a meeting organised by the State Commission for Women, West Bengal. Commission members and a number of NGOs attended the meeting.

The State Commission and NGOs welcomed Member Secretary's idea of better integration and networking by NCW with State Commission and other NGOs, including teleconferencing connectivity. Regarding issues like increasing rate of crimes against women, implementation of PWDV Act and Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act were identified as the most important problems. NGOs and activists narrated problems regarding rescue of women and children and related legal hassles, shelter for rescued women, pushback of foreign nationals, and lack of social infrastructure in the absence of family not being ready to accept the trafficked women. It was felt that a research study could be undertaken on the subject, the work done by NCW and other organisations so far would also be enumerated. As far as violence against

women in West Bengal is concerned, an in-depth analysis should be done to analyse the causes behind it.

Ms. Agnihotri also visited the women's correctional home at Alipur. The total number of women inmates was 270. The offences committed by them related to dowry, murder, abduction, kidnapping, etc.

The condition of the Home was relatively clean and the health of children, who were staying with their mothers was good. However, a large number of women and particularly foreign nationals need legal counselling and assistance to carry forward their



Member Secretary (top left) in discussion with the West Bengal State Commission for Women

cases. The condition of Bangladeshis and one Chinese is sad. 13 of them have been released from prison and yet they are continuing in the correctional home for action to be taken by the Home Department, the Intelligence Bureau or the Border Security Force.

IMPORTANT DECISIONS

Police must verify people, who are given charge of rape victims

A Delhi city court has directed the Delhi Police chief to ensure that a rape victim is not handed over to the custody of someone of dubious antecedents. The additional sessions judge also asked him to verify the antecedents of that person before giving them the charge of these victims.

The court's directive came as its summons could not be served on a rape victim as the person, who took her custody said that she had returned to her native place. Later, the court found out that the person, too, was involved in a few rape cases.

"This is an aspect which required to be highlighted.... so that due care is taken in future to ensure that the antecedents and criminal background of the complainants and 'superdars', to whom the victims of sexual abuse are handed over... are checked and verified before the release of the said victims to them," the court said.

Harassment by step-family is also domestic violence: Court

Broadening the scope of Domestic Violence Act, a Delhi trial court has said that a woman, who is facing harassment and ill-treatment from her stepmother and step-siblings, is entitled to seek protection under the Act.

The Additional Sessions Judge made the remarks while upholding a trial court's summons to the alleged victim's step-brother and step-sister, who along with their mother, have been accused of harassing her.

Dismissing the appeal by the brother-sister from Uttam Nagar against the magisterial court order, the sessions court said as per Domestic Violence Act, domestic relationship between two persons does not mean that they should be related only through marriage. "The parties are in domestic relationship if they are related to each other by consanguinity (blood relation), adoption, or are family members living together as a joint family".

The woman had approached the magisterial court seeking legal protection from harassment and maltreatment by her step-mother and five step-siblings.

Rajasthan HC puts a brake on quick Arya Samaj weddings

Arya Samaj weddings may no longer be a quick and smooth affair for rebellious couples, who do not get parental consent. The Rajasthan High Court has banned ceremonies under Arya Samaj traditions if the parents of both the bride and bridegroom are not informed about the intention of their children. A bench comprising justice Dalip Singh and justice Sajjan Singh Kothari also ruled that no love marriage through Arya Samaj will be allowed to be solemnised unless it has been approved and recommended by two distinguished persons of both sides.

Rape victim's testimony can't be questioned: SC

The Supreme Court has ruled that in rape cases there was no need for corroboration and conviction can be imposed on the sole statement of the victim, as her testimony cannot be looked at with suspicion.

"It is a trite law that a woman, who is the victim of sexual assault, is not an accomplice to the crime but is a victim of another person's lust," the apex court said.

The prosecutrix stands on a higher pedestal than an injured witness, as she suffers from emotional injury. Therefore, her evidence need not be tested with the same amount of suspicion as that of an accomplice. The Indian Evidence Act nowhere says that her evidence cannot be accepted unless it is corroborated in material particulars, the apex court added.

'Maid no substitute for mother'

Engaging a maid to take care of a child is not sufficient to fulfil the growing requirements of a child and cannot compensate for the love of a mother. A Delhi court made this observation while adjudicating upon a child custody case.

The girl had been living with her father for the last four years. The court said that the absence of a woman in her father's house would hamper the development of her "personality" and that her father's better financial status was immaterial, the guardian judge said while granting custody of the nine-year-old girl to her mother.

Even though the girl told the court that she preferred to stay with her father, the court said she was going to get a more favourable atmosphere with her mother, which would help her imbibe the right "moral and ethical" values.

for further information visit our website at :
www.new.nic.in