



## Editor's Column

There has been a perceptible spurt in the incidents of "honour killing" in the recent past with the latest victim being Bhavna Yadav, a 22-year-old student of Delhi University. She was tortured and strangled by her parents and her uncle because she had dared to marry a boy from a different caste and region. The far more disturbing phenomenon is that cases of young couples being persecuted in the name of family honour continue to be reported from all across the country – from Punjab, Haryana and UP in the north to Tamil Nadu in the south, from Rajasthan in the west to West Bengal in the east.

What drives otherwise normal citizens to kill their own near and dear ones, has to be seen in the context of India's peculiar social milieu, wherein a marriage within the same 'gotra' or outside one's caste invites social disapproval, forcing members of a close-knit society to resort to what has come to be known as "honour killings".

If it is not only the caste-conscious families, who indulge in honour killings without any fear of law, we have Khap Panchayats, who pronounce judgements against those, who go against established community customs and rest of the village upholds the strictures, using whatever means necessary.

At a recent meeting in Muzaffarnagar, 18 Khap leaders

### FOCUS

### No 'Honour' in honour killing

declared that love marriage is completely prohibited in the Jaat community and those who defy this dictate would be killed and their bodies thrown away. This was not all; they also asked their community members to stop their daughters from using mobile phones, facebook, whatsapp or wearing jeans.

Because of widespread social sanction, killing in the name of 'honour' still do not provoke the kind of revulsion that the murder of

innocents usually does. It is mainly the politicians, who have let the society down. They have not come out openly and strongly against the Khap Panchayats doling out medieval justice because the Khaps can influence votes. If the political class dithers, the police too, turn lenient in enforcing the rule of law.

However, as India's democracy has been deepening, educated youngsters no longer dependent on their parents for a living, are unwilling to surrender their choices to conservative forms of authority or to unquestioning culture of subservience. They have started asserting their rights to choose their life partners. Thus, there is a burning need for a special legislation against killings followed by effective implementation to fight this medieval scourge. Unless the fear of law is drilled into the minds of law breakers, incidents like Bhavna's death would continue to recur to our eternal shame.

## Important Decisions

- The New Delhi government has ordered that a full-time domestic help, hired through a placement agency, has to be given government prescribed minimum wages. The order also ensures that placement agencies do not hire minors. Any complaint will have to be dealt with within 30 days.
- A Delhi court has said that even if a rape survivor retracts from a statement during the trial, it does not compel the court to pardon the accused. In a recent case, where the woman had turned hostile and retracted from her complaint, the court held the man guilty of rape, cheating and bigamy.
- The Madhya Pradesh government will gradually raise the reservation of women in state police from the current 10% to 30% so that more women join the police force.
- The Union Government has amended the service rules for govt. employees to widen the definition of sexual harassment and make the workplace more conducive for women to work. Humiliating treatment of women that is likely to affect their health and promise of preferential or detrimental treatment can now amount to sexual harassment under amended service rules. Besides, interference with her work or creating hostile work environment for women employees may also amount to sexual harassment.

## National Forum for Single Women

A two-day national convention on Single Women Rights was organized by the National Forum for Single Women Rights in New Delhi. The objective of the event was to bring national attention to the plight of 40 million single women in the categories of abandoned, deserted, never-married, women with missing husbands, as well as, single women headed households struggling for identity, as they have been excluded in government's schemes and programmes. Single women leaders across all age groups and subcategories voiced issues and challenges being faced by them in availing of access and utilization of government schemes and programmes for them. They demanded a minimum pension of ₹ 2000/- for widowed, separated, divorced and sought changes in the law to ensure single women have land and property rights and are able to access health and education facilities, besides social security schemes.

Speaking on the occasion, NCW Chairperson Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam extended necessary and feasible support with respect to advocacy points raised by the forum such as mechanism needed to combat violence being inflicted upon single women like branding as witches, eviction from the household for the sake of property and land. She mentioned the current initiatives the Commission has taken for women branded as witches in the tribal belt of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and women into devdasi practices in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. She felt that issues of single women should be addressed with a holistic approach and skill-building should be coupled with sustainable livelihood measures for their all-round empowerment. The event also witnessed participation of senior officers from the Ministry of Women and Child Development and a team of technical experts from the National Mission for Empowerment of Women.



Chairperson addressing the single women forum -  
(below) Single women enacting a role play demanding their social and economics rights

### Profile in Courage

After struggling with poverty in the villages of Assam, Rinki Rota, a 16-year-old came to Delhi in search of work. After being exploited and tortured by her employers for quite some time, she managed to convey her distress to the neighbourhood maids, who, in turn, informed the activists of Nirmala Niketan Cooperative about her plight. She was rescued by the activists of Nirmala Niketan. Now, 24-year Rinki has broken all gender barriers to become a vehicle driver after a vigorous training of 6-months and earns ₹ 7000/- a month. She currently drives the staff of Nirmala Niketan, where she had come once seeking refuge. Today, she is an important team member and dreams of building a house for her family with her earnings.

### Making a difference

Sangita Awhale sold her "mangalsutra" to build a toilet in her house. For 12-years Sangita, had been pleading with her husband for a toilet in her house and her resolve grew stronger as her adolescent daughter faced the same problem of relieving herself in the open. She decided to sell all her gold ornaments to get the work done. None of her family members backed her move but she preferred "sauchalaya to sona".

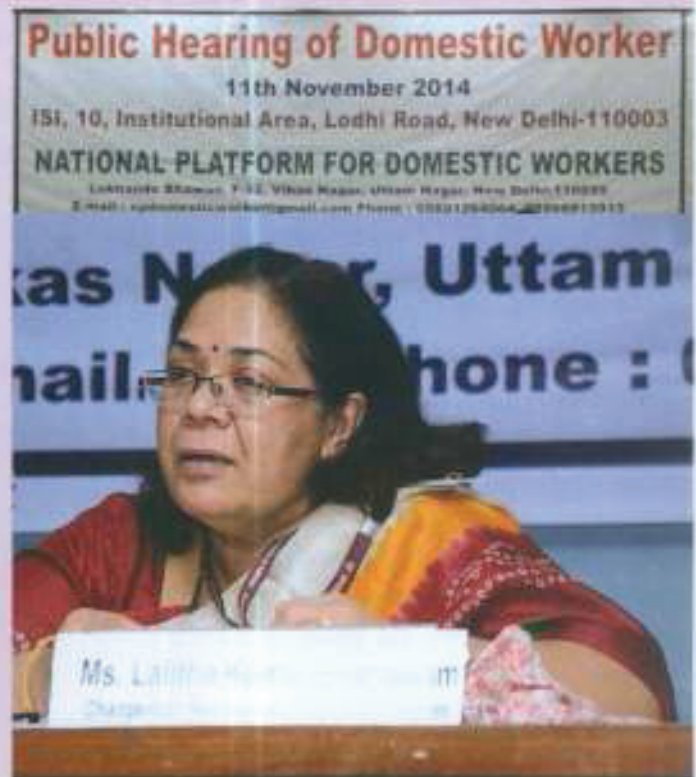
As a token of appreciation, Maharashtra's Rural Development Minister Pankaja Munde felicitated Sangita and also gifted her a gold necklace.

## Public hearing of domestic workers

A public hearing was organized by the National Platform of Domestic Workers in New Delhi on issues faced by domestic workers. Women domestic workers, both full-time and part-time, including those trafficked for labour by individuals and placement agencies spoke on the rough and rude treatment meted out to them, like withholding of wages, arbitrary dismissal from work, overwork with no overtime wages, false allegations of stealing, and even cases of rape and murder, before an eminent jury, headed by NCW Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam.

The National platform demanded a comprehensive legislation for domestic workers as well as ratification of the ILO Convention 189, Decent Work for Domestic Workers, which was passed in June, 2011. They said the law should regulate employment and conditions of work, fix wages and hours of work, regulate placement agencies and provide a mechanism for resolution of disputes and protection of employment. Social protection provisions should include social security, healthcare, education, childcare facilities, housing, skill training and pension.

Advocate Amiy Shukla presented the findings of the jury, which made a unanimous recommendation in favour of a comprehensive law for domestic workers.



*CP addressing domestic workers*

## World of India's Girls

Save the Children recently released its flagship report "Wings 2014 – World of India's Girls" in New Delhi. The audience included 55 print and electronic media persons, civil society activists, government functionaries, donors and partners. The report made recommendations that called for a national policy for the girl child to improve their conditions. The report also looks at how girls have fared with access to healthcare, nutrition, water, sanitation facilities, education and protection from abuse. It says that for the girl child the struggle for survival begins in the womb. Even after she is allowed to be born, widespread neglect makes her survival precarious. The census of 2011 shows that overall there are 38 million missing women.

Releasing the report, Minister for Minority Affairs, Dr. Najma Heptulla affirmed that the government was taking bold measures to improve the lot of India's girls. "The report points out the rising aspirations of the girls to be full citizens and their desire to have greater control over their lives beyond the defined roles of wife and mothers", – and our government is committed to the realization of these aspirations," she added.

NCW Chairperson, Lalitha Kumaramangalam, who released the report alongwith Dr. Heptulla, reiterated that the government, the civil society, the media and other stakeholders must work together to secure the future of girls in every part of India and emphasised the need for proper implementation of laws related to women by the enforcement agencies.



*Chairperson (third from left) alongwith Dr. Najma Heptulla and others releasing the report*

## Members' Visits

❖ NCW Member Hemlata Kheria was the Chief Guest in a two-day Kasturba Gandhi Sabla Sammelan organised by NGO Aahwan on "Gramin Mahila Netritva and Dalit Samaj ki Mahilaon mein Rajnitik Chetna Ka Swaroop" at Motihari in Bihar, attended by 500-600 women. ● Later, the Member met the Musahar community women at Koila Belwa, Kalyanpur, Motihar. While interacting with them, she discussed issues related to untouchability, health, water and sanitation. She assured them of Commission's help to resolve their problems, if they approached it. ● Ms. Hemlata Kheria also met Gandhiwadi social activists at Gandhi Sangrahalay, Motihari. ● She visited the Motihari Central Jail and met the Jail Superintendent and other officials to discuss issues relating to female inmates. She found that there was space crunch for 91 female inmates, and the women were not given counselling, vocational training, legal aid, as well as medical facilities.



*Member Hemlata Kheria addressing Musahar dalit women*



*Member Shamina Shafiq (center) at the seminar on Women's Land Rights*

❖ Member Shamina Shafiq was the Chief Guest at a seminar on "Securing Land Rights for Women and Gender Equality - Issues and Challenges" organised by the Post-graduate Department of Economics of Isabella Thoburn College, in association with NCW at Lucknow. Speaking on the occasion, she said that the Govt. should keep in mind the gender perspective while implementing policy decisions. She lamented that though women have legal property rights, they often have to take the help of courts to claim their rights. Ms. Shafiq said that it was necessary for students to be aware of their rights which would help them to be empowered in the future. ● The Member attended the programme "God's Power for Great Transformation and to Restore Respect and Honour of Women", organised by Bramhakumaris at their Gurgaon

Centre. Apart from distinguished guests, the event was attended by Sister Shivani, Sister Asha and Subhash Ghaiji. ● Ms. Shafiq participated in the Talk Show on Divorce, organised by Doordarshan.

## Intervention by NCW

NCW Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam has written to the Human Resource Development Ministry to make schools pay for sexual violence against students on their premises.

She said "It is the school's responsibility to ensure that a child is safe on its premises and if sexual exploitation of children happens on their premises, schools have to pay a price."

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