

Imrana case raises political storm

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 29. — The Imrana case has set off a political storm in the wake of Darul Uloom Deoband's edict that Imrana, who was allegedly raped by her father-in-law, cannot live with her husband.

The BJP accused the Congress of playing "vote-bank politics" by keeping mum on the issue. The ruling party at the Centre, on its part, made it clear that the law should take its own course in the episode in which the *fatwah* has drawn condemnation from a cross-section of society.

Imrana was reported to be "untraceable" after a local panchayat's recent

decision that she cannot live with her husband and must marry her father-in-law after the rape incident.

"We are governed by the Constitution and law of the land," the Congress spokesman Mr Anand Sharma said. UP Congress chief Mr Salman Khurshed said: "We have to support the law of the land. What the law says about Imrana, we have to get from a judge." He added: "The law of the land respects personal law."

Keeping the heat turned on the Congress, the BJP spokesman Mr Prakash Javadekar asked the former to clarify whether it endorsed the views of Mr Khurshed's reported remark that the issue was a

"religious" one. "The BJP wants the Congress and its alliance partners to make their stand clear."

UP chief minister Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav defended *fatwah* saying the decision taken by Muslim clerics must have been "well thought-out".

CPI-M general secretary Mr Prakash Karat, however, termed the edict "a serious violation of human rights". "If the personal law of any community infringes upon the genuine rights of women, the law of the land should take centre-stage and impart justice". Meanwhile, a team of the National Commission for Women is to visit Muzaffarnagar tomorrow to talk to Imrana.

Imrana in a bind

The case suggests a moral obscurantism that has no place in civilised society

THE Deoband ulema and the Muslim Personal Law Board have made it quite apparent that, even in the 21st century, authorities that act under the imprimatur of religion do not understand one simple principle: that a woman is a person in her own right. She should be allowed to exercise her choices. Imrana was a victim of a heinous double crime. She was a victim of violence. And she was a victim because the trust of an intimate relationship was betrayed. But the authorities have compounded this unspeakable injury by adding the weight of their own coercive powers. They want to deny Imrana the basic right to choose whether she wants to live with her husband or not.

Unfortunately this is not an isolated incident. Fairly recently, we had the case of Gudiya. Self-appointed custodians of religion took it upon themselves to determine whether she would have to live with her first husband, who had been assumed dead but eventually returned from Pakistan, or whether she should continue to live with her current husband. In numerous instances panchayats

are denying women the right to determine the course of their own lives. Even secular courts have occasionally crossed the line by trying to second guess the "real" interests of a violated woman. Women are still not acknowledged as agents in their own rights. That religious authorities are using even the terrible situation that Imrana faced to assert their own writ, suggest a moral obscurantism that has no place in a civilised society.

It is legitimate to ask whether institutions and practices legitimised under the banner of any authority that deny women their basic rights should be tolerated. In times of crisis, religious leaders and public authorities should be a source of compassion rather a further source of coercion. But if any decrees made in the name of religion violate basic human dignity, they will only expose religion to further ridicule. The question is not simply whether a uniform civil code will achieve justice for women. We need to recognise a far deeper crisis: our inability as a society to allow women their choices. In the process, they are denied their dignity and humanity.

Pak court orders Mai rapists' re-arrest

MUBASHIR Zaidi
Islamabad, June 28

PAKISTAN'S HIGHEST court on Tuesday ordered the re-arrest of five people accused of gang raping a woman on the orders of a tribal jury. The ruling came after the victim, Mukhtaran Mai, filed an appeal in the Supreme Court to prevent the release of her rapists, which was ordered by Lahore High Court earlier this month. After a preliminary hearing of two days, a three-member bench of the Court issued non-bailable warrants against the accused and ordered their retrial in the Supreme Court.

The order brought relief to Mukhtaran Mai, 33, who was gang raped in 2002 after her 12-year-old brother was accused of having an affair with a woman from a powerful clan. She spoke out about her ordeal, provoking an international outcry about the treatment of women in rural Pakistan, many parts of which are still under the sway of feudal and tribal laws.

The Pakistani Supreme Court also ordered the arrest of eight other persons who were released on the orders of the Anti-Terrorist Court in 2002. They belong to the Mastoi tribe, which ordered the gang rape of Mukhtaran.

Earlier, Attorney General for Pakistan in his arguments dubbed the order of the High Court as pure conjecture. "In rape cases the sole statement of the victim is sufficient to mount a conviction," he said.

Mukhtaran Mai's lawyer Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan asked the court to review the tribal jury system, which he said was anti-women and protected the people who commit violence against women.

In 2002, Pakistan's Anti-Terror Court had awarded the death penalty to six men accused of raping Mai, while acquitting eight others. The decision was followed by a back-and-forth legal battle between various Pakistani courts.

In March this year, Lahore High Court overturned the convictions of five of the men, and reduced the death sentence of the sixth to life in prison, citing lack of evidence. Amid strong criticism from rights groups, Pakistan's Islamic Court stepped in to suspend the high court's judgment, reinstating the convictions of the six men.

The Lahore High Court then again ordered the men be freed on June 12, but the authorities refused and the accused remained behind bars.

The Supreme Court finally stepped in to declare the Islamic Court's ruling unconstitutional, and decided to hear the appeal itself.

Try Imrana case in ^{29/6} _{HR/13} fast-track court: ^{Women}Body

Muzaffarnagar/New Delhi, June 28

CITING THE speedy trial of the German tourist rape case in Rajasthan, a Muslim society on Tuesday demanded that the Imrana rape case also be heard in a fast-track court.

Maulana Mohammad Khalid of the Fazahe Insaniyat Welfare Society said in a statement that an early decision was required in Imrana's case so the accused could be "taught a lesson". He also raised the matter of looking after the victim's children, saying someone should be delegated responsibility.

The case made headlines when a panchayat ruled that Imrana, who was raped by her father-in-law, should now treat her husband as her son. Women activists had termed the verdict "bizarre and reprehensible".

The Darul Uloom in Deoband recently said in a *fatwa* that Imrana's living with her husband Noor Ilahi had become untenable as per Islamic law. The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board had endorsed this decision and Imrana had agreed to abide by it. The accused, Ali Mohammad, was arrested on June 15 and remanded to 14 days in judicial custody.

Meanwhile, criticising the *fatwa*, Islamic law expert Tahir Mahmood on Tuesday said the woman's fate couldn't be decided by "ancient juristic wisdom".

"That a woman subjected to sexual indignity by any of her husband's ascendants or descendants becomes *haram* (prohibited) for him was a rule of worldly wisdom evolved by some religious jurists of Arabia over a thousand years ago," said Mahmood, who is a member of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

He said the rule — pronounced in a society where almost instant remarriage of divorced women was the order of the day — was a pro-woman norm enabling wives outraged by the sexual misbehaviour of their in-laws to walk out of their marital bond and seek a new life.

"In a country like India, where Islamic law is selectively applicable under the authority of its own law, the rule need not be strictly imposed on couple desirous of continuing in marriage," Mahmood said. **PTI**

ইমরানা-কাণ্ডে আইনের বদল চায় বিজেপি

নয়াদিল্লি, ২৮ জুন: শাহ বানুর পরে ইমরানা। ফের প্রস্ন উঠল, ভারতীয় সংবিধানের সঙ্গে সামুজ্য রেখে কি মুসলিম ব্যক্তিগত আইনের সংশোধন প্রয়োজন? আজ ধর্মিতা ইমরানার প্রস্ন তুলে বিজেপি দাবি করেছে, শরিয়ত আদালতের ফতোয়া খারিজ হোক। ইমরানাকে তাঁর স্বপ্তর ধর্মণ করার পরে মুসলিমদের সর্বোচ্চ আদালত দারুল উলুম দেওবান্দ রায় দেয়, স্বামীর সঙ্গে থাকতে পারবেন না ইমরানা। মুসলিম পার্সোনাল ল' বোর্ডও সেই রায় সমর্থন করে।

অবিলম্বে মুসলিম ব্যক্তিগত আইনের সংশোধন চায় বিজেপি। প্রকারান্তরে তারা অভিন্ন দেওয়ানি বিধিই বলবৎ করতে চাইছে। আজ বিজেপির মুখপাত্র অরুণ জেটলি বলেন, “ইমরানা মামলা যে পথে এগোচ্ছে, তাতে সারা দেশ চিন্তিত। ধর্মণের পরে মেয়েটিকেই সাজা দেওয়া হচ্ছে। সভ্য দেশের আইনে এটা ভাবা যায় না।” প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহনের কাছে তিনি আর্জি করেছেন, কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার ও কংগ্রেস যেন এ বিষয়ে তাদের মনোভাব স্পষ্ট করে জানিয়ে দেয়। ধর্মীয় নেতাদের কাছেও আর্জি, তাঁরা যেন ইমরানার পাশে দাঁড়ান। — পি টি আই

29 JUN 2005

AN'D'ROSAI

Pak SC overturns rape acquittals

Justin Huggler
in Islamabad

June 28. — Pakistan's Supreme Court today overturned the acquittal of five men in a gang-rape case that has become an international cause celebre and put the treatment of women in Pakistani society under unprecedented scrutiny.

The five men were originally found guilty of gang-raping Ms Mukhtaran Mai on the order of a village council as an "honour punishment", and sentenced to death. But in March this year the original verdict was overturned by the Lahore High Court, which ordered the men freed.

Today, responding to a joint appeal by Ms Mai and Pakistani prosecutors, the Supreme Court suspended the acquittals and said it would retry the men itself.

The Supreme Court ruling came a day after 34-

29/6
56-3
year-old Mai appealed the acquittals at the court. "I am very happy. I hope those who humiliated me will be punished," she told reporters outside the court.

Ms Mai's lawyer said the court order covered all the 14 accused and it quashed all previous judgments. This meant that the court could be hearing the case afresh, he said.

It was a major victory for Ms Mai, who became an icon for the women's rights movement in Pakistan and around the world after she refused to stay silent, as most Pakistani rape-victims do, but instead testified against her alleged attackers in court.

There was international revulsion when the details of her case emerged, and the courtroom in Islamabad has been thronged with diplomats, journalists, and NGO workers.

But in the final weeks before the two days of hear-

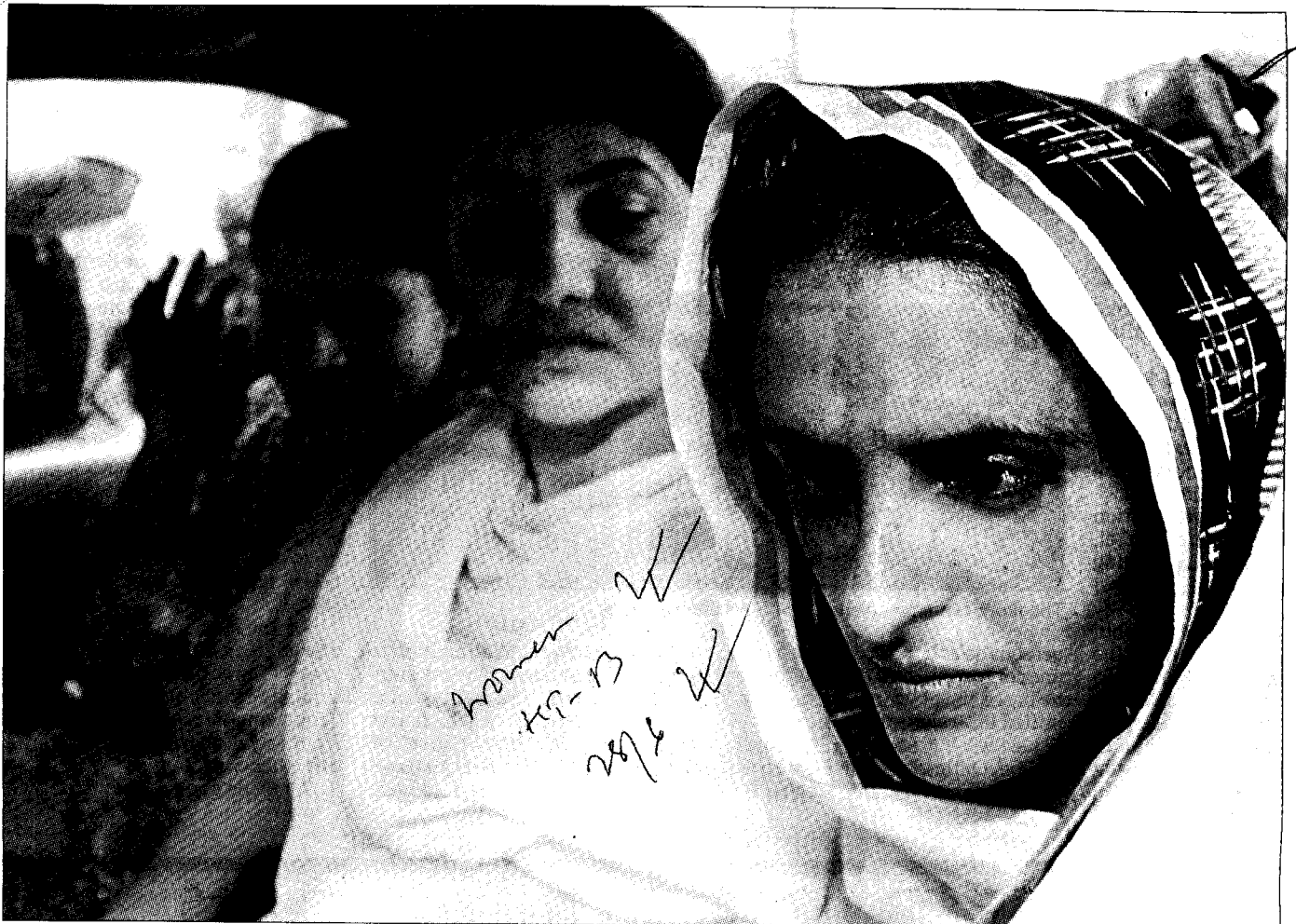
ings, the case has unexpectedly pitted Ms Mai against the government after she was banned from travelling abroad — a move President Pervez Musharraf took personal responsibility for.

Ms Mai's story began in June 2002, when her then 12-year-old brother, Shakoor, was accused of having illicit relations with a woman from another clan, the Mastoi. Ms Mai's family claims that charge was fabricated, and that Shakoor had himself been sexually assaulted by men from the Mastoi clan — a claim that is supported by the fact three men were later found guilty in court of sodomising Shakoor.

But a village council ordered that Ms Mai should be gang-raped as a "punishment" for her brother's "crime". She was summarily dragged to a nearby hut and raped by four men. — **The Independent** (With inputs from PTI)

JUN 29 2006

THE STATESMAN



Mukhtaran Mai with social activists as she leaves the Pakistan Supreme Court after the hearing on Monday.

AFP

A trial for women's honour in Pak

Islamabad, June 27

PAKISTAN'S SUPREME Court began hearing an appeal against the acquittal of five men who allegedly gangraped a woman on the orders of a village council, in a case that sparked international outrage.

Victim Mukhtaran Mai's appeal will be a test case in Pakistan where, like other parts of South Asia, women often suffer brutal "honour punishments", including rape and murder, to pay for the alleged crimes of relatives.

The 33-year-old was raped for more than an hour in June 2002 on the orders of a tribal council in the remote village of Meerwala in reprisal for her brother's alleged affair with a woman from a powerful rival clan. Six men were sentenced to death in August 2002 after she defied local customs and testified. But the Lahore High Court acquitted five of them on appeal on March 3 and commuted the sentence of the sixth to life imprisonment.

The decision shocked the country and

was condemned around the world, while Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf caused further anger earlier this month by briefly banning Mai from leaving the country. The Supreme Court opened the case and adjourned it until Tuesday after a 45-minute hearing on legal matters.

"I have high hopes. I hope the original verdict will be upheld and that my attackers will be punished," she told reporters at the court, where she was accompanied by rights workers who have supported her pursuit of justice. "We have a strong case. We have evidence on record and we want the Supreme Court to reappraise the record and decide it," Mai's lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan told reporters after a full bench of three judges adjourned the proceedings.

Ahsan said he had opposed a move to have the case heard before the country's top Islamic court, which itself had disputed the acquittals. Pakistan has a dual secular and Islamic legal system but the Supreme Court has the final say. "That will prolong the proceedings. We want the

Supreme Court to decide it," he added.

The case as a whole has shone an unflattering spotlight on the treatment of women in Pakistan and on the atavistic forms of tribal justice that persist in parts of the conservative Islamic country.

The US heavily criticised Islamabad for barring Mai from travelling to Washington to meet top US officials and rights groups to discuss abuses against women in South Asia. Musharraf was reported as saying that he ordered the ban because he thought her US visit would give Pakistan bad publicity. However, Islamabad dropped the travel ban a few days later after the George W. Bush administration said it was "dismayed" and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice secured a personal pledge from Pakistani foreign minister Khurshid Kasuri.

On Monday, Mai said the government had finally returned her passport, which it confiscated when it placed her on the so-called Exit Control List. The list is normally reserved for criminals and political opponents of Musharraf.

AFP

Curbing domestic violence: inching forward

The need for spreading awareness about the draft Bill against Domestic Violence cannot be overemphasised.

Poornima Advani

THE UNION Cabinet's recent approval of the Bill against Domestic Violence is a step against assaults on women's most basic fundamental right, that is, the right to life. It is a year since the Bill was finalised by the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) for circulation among the various Ministries. This was preceded by wide-ranging consultations with women's organisations, activists and the National Commission for Women (NCW).

In fact the seed was sown as early as 1997-98 when the NCW forwarded its first draft to the Government. Several women's organisations across the country had campaigned for a comprehensive legislation to protect women from the daily threat of violence. This was in the context of the total inadequacy of the existing framework of criminal laws to deal with this form of violence that was both endemic and all-pervasive — cutting across all strata of society.

The Bill, which was tabled in Parliament in March 2001, got referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resource Development where it was analysed and debated at length both on its conceptual approach and the penal provisions for combating the menace. The resultant draft legislation was circulated by that department among various Ministries almost a year ago and it is a happy augury that it has at last received the nod of the Cabinet to be introduced in Parliament once again.

Domestic violence is the most pernicious and insidious form of violence prevalent in

society. It is pernicious because it is directed against women who are supposed to carry the generation forward and goes against all canons of civilised behaviour. It is insidious because it takes place within the closed walls of the home, which is supposed to be the safe sanctuary for its occupants. The woman suffers in silence because of the social norms, on the one hand, and her economic dependence on the perpetrators of the violence, on the other. It is also a type of violence seen by everybody and yet not seen by anybody because even neighbours or relatives who know that the woman is being abused would not intervene because it is a domestic matter. It is this seeing and yet unseeing attitude which makes even the existing laws inoperative because the courts would rather not peer into what happens inside a home.

The draft Bill is an improvement on the previous versions. Firstly, its definition is comprehensive covering not only actual abuse but also the threat of abuse, that is, physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic.

Harassment by way of unlawful dowry demands to the woman or her relatives would also be covered by this definition. One of the most important features of the Bill is the woman's right to secure housing. The Bill provides for the woman's right to reside in the matrimonial or shared household, whether or not she has any title or rights in the household.

Moreover, the Bill also seeks to cover those women who are or have been in a relationship with the abuser where both parties have lived together in a shared

household and are related by consanguinity, marriage (not necessarily legal) or a relationship in the nature of marriage, or adoption. In addition, relationships with family members living together as a joint family are also included. What this means is that even those women who are sisters, widows, mothers, single women, or living with the abuser are entitled to legal protection.

The draft Bill provides for appointment of protection officers and NGOs to provide assistance to the woman in regard to medical examination, legal aid, safe shelter, etc. The reliefs envisaged under the Bill also include orders that prevent the abuser from aiding or committing an act of domestic violence or any other specified act, entering a work place or any other place frequented by the abused, attempting to communicate with the abused, etc.

A great advance for the women's cause. But only two cheers are called for at this stage. The Bill has yet to go before Parliament.

Langushing Bills

Other Bills concerning women have been languishing in the House, most notably the Women's Reservation Bill. Many other Bills have been maulled or made toothless. In the give and take of legislative bargaining where real or imaginary fears have been played up to tone down various salutary provisions of draft legislation, one only hopes that the domestic violence Bill having been approved by the Cabinet would be taken up by the two Houses in the coming monsoon session and

would be passed with all its protective provisions intact.

Let us also remember that legislation is only part of the battle, particularly in relation to social problems whether they relate to gambling or drinking.

Even more so when the legislation relates to women where centuries of social conditioning result in desultory enforcement at every level — investigative, prosecutive and judicial. One cannot overemphasise the need for spreading awareness about the contemplated law among its proposed beneficiaries, on the one hand, and the sensitisation of the entire administrative machinery, the police as well as the courts, on the other.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act and the Dowry Prohibition Act have been in the statute book for decades and the evils they are supposed to combat continue unabated. Dowry Prohibition Officers have been provided by the law but it has made no dent in the incidence of this social evil. Let us only hope that the protection officers contemplated in the new proposed law would be able to perform their functions more effectively and given the support of the NGOs and the community, the soaring graphs of domestic violence would decline. May we also hope that the Women's Reservation Bill will also be taken up for consideration in the coming session. If passed, that will call for a big hurrah for women's rights because adequate representation for women in the House would pave the way for more gender sensitive legislation and administration.

(The writer is a former chairperson of the National Commission for Women.)

Bill will increase women's access to legal protection, says AIDWA

'Allowing husband's relative to file complaint against wife is a flaw'

Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The All-India Democratic Women's Association has welcomed the Cabinet decision to approve the long-pending Domestic Violence Bill that will "greatly increase battered women's access to legal protection and relief from violence within the home."

In a statement here on Friday, general secretary Sudha Sundararaman said women were now looking forward to the Bill being adopted in the coming session of Parliament.

The AIDWA congratulated the Government on addressing some of the weaknesses in the earlier draft. It said the definition of violence was comprehensive and included physical, mental, sexual, verbal and economic violence, and the threat of

violence as well.

However, the Bill had a "major flaw". It allowed a woman relative of the husband to file a complaint against the wife or live-in partner. This, AIDWA said, could lead to gross misuse of the law since false and counter cases could be filed against the wife. "In fact, in our experience of more than 20 years of dealing with such cases, in most cases of domestic violence the husband's family not only sympathises with him but often also participates in perpetuating acts of violence within the home," the statement said.

"Urgent necessity"

National Commission for Women Chairperson Girija Vyas, welcoming the Bill, said the law on domestic violence was an urgent necessity. It

showed the Government's keenness to have a law on the issue.

The NCW submitted recommendations on the Bill and hoped that these would be incorporated.

Women Power Connect, a national-level organisation to monitor and influence policy in Parliament and Assemblies, says: "We are happy to see the content and the definition of the revised Bill. We are confident that when passed in Parliament, the Bill would ensure greater protection to women from violence at home."

According to Ranjana Kumar, president of the organisation, 50,703 cases were registered under 'torture' in 2003. According to the National Crime Record Bureau, of the 1.5 lakh crimes registered annually against women all over the country, nearly 50,000 related to domestic violence.

25 JUN 2005

THE HINDU

Legal leash on domestic violence

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 23. — The Cabinet today gave its approval for a law to check domestic violence against women.

The proposed Bill, "Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Bill, 2005", is likely to be introduced in the monsoon session of Parliament. It would provide effective protection and remedy to women against domestic violence of any kind and also ensure that women get their legal rights.

The Bill will not only take care of married women, but also include women in a relationship with the abuser or those who are sisters, widows, mothers, or adopted children of the abuser. It covers those women who are or have been in a relation-

ship with the abuser where both parties have lived together in a shared household.

The Bill defines domestic violence as actual abuse or the threat of abuse — physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic.

Harassment, by way of unlawful dowry demands, to the woman or her relatives would also be covered under this definition.

The domestic violence Bill has also taken up the right of women to secure housing and ensures the right of a woman to reside in her matrimonial home or shared household, "whether or not she has any title or rights in such home or household".

All these rights can be secured by a residence order which would be passed by a magistrate.

The Bill empowers the magistrate to pass a protection order in favour

of the victim to prevent the abuser from aiding or committing an act of domestic violence.

The magistrate can prevent the abuser from entering the workplace of the victim or any other place frequently visited by her.

The magistrate has also been empowered to issue orders against the abuser to prevent him from isolating the victim from any asset used by both parties. The magistrate can also bind down the abuser to prevent him from causing violence to the abused, or her relatives or others who provide her assistance.

The Bill provides for the appointment of a "protection officer" and registration of non-governmental organisations as service providers to give assistance to the abused with respect to her medical examination, obtaining legal aid and safe shelter.

THE STATESMAN

Rapist in-law has confessed: Cops

Future of victim, mother of five, rests on a verdict by a local madarsa next month

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

MUZAFFARNAGAR, JUNE 16

EVEN as police here arrested 60-year-old Mohammed Ali, accused of raping his daughter-in-law at gun point about a week back, the fate of the victim, a mother of five children, hinges on the decision of a local madrasa.

Ali was remanded to 14 days in judicial custody by a local court, said Dehat SP G N Goswami, who claimed that the accused had "confessed". Ali told reporters that he "went into the house and she (daughter-in-law) followed me."

The madrasa's decision, which would be pronounced next month,

would be crucial since a panchayat decision has already declared the victim's relationship with her husband null and void.

Fearing social ostracism, the victim had reportedly left her husband's house in Chatarwal and moved to her brother Imran's house in a nearby village Kukra.

In an FIR registered at Chatarwal police station on June 13, the victim had alleged that few days back, she was sleeping in her house when her father-in-law came at about 1 p.m., placed a revolver at her neck and raped her. He allegedly asked her not to make any noise. When the victim cried for help, her mother-in-law Zarif and sister-in-law Fatima came running.

The victim claims that Ali threatened them also. The victim in her complaint alleged that she informed her husband, Noor Ilahi, a labourer,

on telephone.

"When the next morning the villagers came to know about the incident, they did not allow me to report the matter to police. I finally contacted my brother Imran who took me to Kukra," the victim has claimed in her complaint.

After the news about the alleged rape spread, police picked up both the victim and Imran from Kukra on June 13 and brought them to Chatarwal police station where a case of rape was registered.

The SSP of Muzaffarnagar district, Amarendra Kumar Sengar, said, "Ali was arrested from Nirdana area of Muzaffarnagar on Wednesday evening. We are interrogating him."

When the incident came to the notice of the local panchayat, a meeting was organised on June 11. The panchayat members reportedly

asked the victim not to approach the police and go according to the laws of the Shariat.

Dr Shamshad Tyagi, a member of the panchayat here said, "Ali is an old man and could not have done this. Even if he had done it we asked the victim to take the opinion of the Muslim personal law and whatever is decided would have to be binding on her." After the matter came to light, the Darul Uloom Deoband had to sit up and take notice.

They later referred the matter to the Madrasa Mahmudiya Sarvat in Muzaffarnagar. Imran on Wednesday moved an application to Madrasa Sarvat.

Mufti Zulfikar Ali, a religious leader, said, "Ideally, Deoband should have given a reply, I don't know why they have transferred it to us. We will try to pronounce our judgment as soon as possible."

They wait for their mother to

return. Express photo by

Ravi Batra

SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 2005

The gender gap persists globally

The Gender Gap study released by the World Economic Forum, while highlighting the areas in which less developed countries lag behind in gender equality, also indicates the huge gaps between men and women in the developed economies. According to the study, released recently, no country has yet managed to eliminate the gender gap, although the Nordic countries with a long tradition of social democracy and welfare systems have significantly narrowed the gap. Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and Finland occupy the top five spots among the 58 countries covered by the study; they included all 30 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries and 28 from the "emerging market" world. The United States, ranked 17, trails East European countries from the former socialist bloc, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. While ranking fairly high (8) in educational attainment, it is way behind on economic opportunity (46) and health and well-being (42). According to the WEF study, U.S. fared poorly on account of meagre maternity leave, lack of maternity benefits, and limited government-provided childcare. The low score in economic opportunity tallies with the image of the "glass ceiling."

Not surprisingly, welfare states with robust government social safety nets fare better than the rest. While the Nordic welfare states score high in educational attainment, political empowerment, and economic opportunities, they do not perform as well in economic participation of women. The former socialist countries, in contrast, score in economic participation, opportunity, and education, but fail in the area of health. Apparently, while women in the developed countries "opt out" of work, those in less economically developed East European countries are doubly burdened: in addition to their paid work, they take on an overwhelming share of the chores at home. Thailand, which ranks 44 overall, is right at the top when it comes to economic participation of women; this could, in part, be an index of exploitation. Among Asian countries, China ranks highest (33), followed by Japan (38). India, at 53, is virtually at the bottom of the ladder, scoring, however, way above its league in political empowerment (24). In health and well being, the country is ranked 34; in economic opportunity 35; in economic participation 54; and in educational attainment a shocking 57. Only Pakistan, Korea, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt fare worse overall. Evidently, the high school dropout rates among girl children and wage inequality are key factors in India's abysmal ranking. Clearly, in the era of globalisation, the lesson for India and the other poorly ranked countries is that they should strengthen and enhance the governmental support systems — not dismantle them in the name of market efficiency. One thing is clear: as economic inequality increases within a country, so does the gap between male and female.

1 1 THE HINDU

Women at home not safe from AIDS

DRIMI Chaudhuri
Kolkata, June 9

WHEN SHIKHA Sarkar (name changed) was detected with AIDS eight years ago, her in-laws threw her out of the house. She failed to convince them that she had contracted the disease from their son.

Shikha is not alone in her plight. Being a housewife, she belongs to the group most vulnerable to the disease. The realisation that housewives, and not commercial sex workers, are more prone to AIDS, has forced the West Bengal State AIDS Prevention & Control Society (WBSAPCS) and NGOs across the world to change the focus of their campaigns.

Beginning with the *Bula-di* campaign in October 2004, the society has taken active part in promoting the 'What Kind of Man are You?' campaign by an international human rights NGO, Breakthrough. WBSAPCS officials said *Bula-di* was portrayed as an educated middle-class housewife so that she could reach the message to housewives that they are most vulnerable to HIV and AIDS.

The Breakthrough campaign, on the other hand, focuses on a woman's right to say 'no' to unsafe sex as a human rights issue. The nationwide campaign, now on its way to Kolkata, stresses the growing incidences of HIV/AIDS among women.

Breakthrough officials have pointed out that latest figures by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) revealed that of the 52 lakh HIV/AIDS victims in India, 20 lakh are women and commercial sex workers number about 8,700 or only over 0.4 per cent. Confirming the

viability of such staggering numbers, WBSAPCS officials said that in a study conducted last year, it was found that of the 3,262 women HIV/AIDS victims in and across the city, around 1,988 (61 per cent) were married.

"The myth that infected women are mostly sex workers needs to be broken as most of these women are housewives. Most of them learnt they have contracted HIV when they went for pregnancy checks. NACO revealed that around three per cent of all women visiting antenatal clinics are HIV-positive," a WBSAPCS official said.

Mrinal Kanti Dutta, project coordinator of city-based sex workers' forum Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee, said: "Once a woman is tested HIV positive, she is ostracised and is often thrown out of the house. Some of these women have no other option but to come and live in the red-light districts to avoid being noticed."

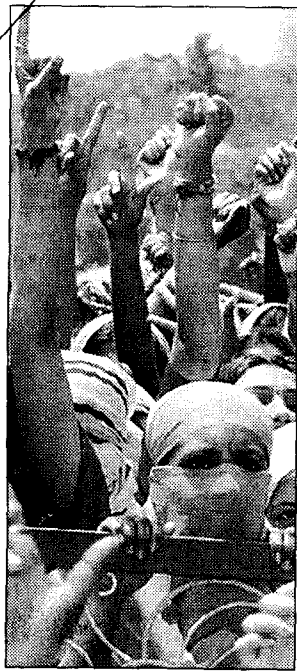
A doctor associated with WBSAPCS said: "During a visit to the HIV ward at a government hospital, we saw that while the male ward had many women visitors to look after the patients, the women's ward had few callers. This reveals how women are expected to take care of their infected husbands but hardly receive the same concern."

A senior WBSAPCS official admitted that the society lacks the budget to run individual programmes targeted at housewives.



10 JUN 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES



Dance bar girls protest the ban in Mumbai. (PTI)

Bar girls leave city

CHANDRIMA S. BHATTACHARYA

Women
Gr B
Mumbai, June 5: With just a day to go for dance bars to implement the state government ban on them, 10,000-odd bar girls have been forced to leave town or go underground.

Although the ban is not total — it asks dance bars to separate the dance floor from the area where alcohol is served — it will lead many dance bars to down shutters, at least temporarily.

“About 5,000 women have migrated to Hyderabad on contracts,” said Varsha Kale, who heads the Indian Bar Girls’ Association. “There are unlicensed ladies’ bars in Hyderabad where some of the girls have gone. Others will work in orchestra bars where female singers are employed and which enjoy occasional licences (when performances are held). There are several underground bars, too, where some of the girls will go and some of them may be pushed directly into prostitution,” she said. “Some bars in Hyderabad are asking for dance floor licence.”

Kale informed that “around 1,000 women have left for Bangalore to work on contracts in about 150 bars, 60 of which are licensed”.

“Many others are leaving for their homes in Agra and Bengal. Several women, who were from Sonagachhi in Calcutta, are reported to have gone back,” she added.

Kale said bar dancers going to perform in another town on contract was an established practice. “They would go on a one-to-three months’ contract and get paid about Rs 10,000 to 15,000 per month. Since their food and stay would be taken care of, many women went willingly as they could save the entire amount.”

“But now, with so many women out of their jobs, the supply is more than the demand. The women are being forced to go for less money,” Kale said.

Many are also queuing up to go to the Gulf, where a three-month contract in Abu Dhabi, Muscat or Dubai would fetch around Rs 3 lakh. But now they are settling for “half the amount”. “The bar girls are a frightened lot,” she said.

CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

Police Themselves Must Respect The Law

By HL KAPOOR

5/8
2015
Rape is the most inhuman crime to which women are subjected. The double bench comprising Justice Arijit Pasayat and Justice HS Kapadia described it as "the most depraved act" which becomes abominable when the victim is a minor.

Rapes take place under several categories. They are committed under threat of murder or using a deadly weapon. They are committed when the women are employed in some company or service, poverty being the root cause. They are committed after abduction on the pretext of marriage which never takes place. They are committed after the marriage and the wife is forced into the flesh trade. They are committed by those who are rich enough to bear the expenses, including compensation offered at a later stage. They are committed on helpless women in custody.

Every 50 minutes

In India, several studies have been made by private organisations which have concluded that a rape is committed every 50 minutes in the country. Some of the victims do not disclose it to their parents and relatives to avoid the social stigma while some are bold enough to resist it and then report the matter to the police. The case of a student of Maulana Azad Medical College is a pointer.

A 15-year-old girl was kidnapped from Jangpuri and raped by a man called Bir Singh who was arrested on 22 April. The mother of the victim is also said to be involved in the crime and she is absconding. A woman was gang-raped in Noida Sector 71 on 22 April. The rapist robbed her of her belongings. A student of a Delhi college, she was rushed to a private hospital. Her family was informed by the Noida police but the police are yet to trace the culprits.

In another case, three policemen including an SHO and two constables were arrested in the third week of April though they had committed crime two years ago. The Jahangirpuri police arrested the policemen after hectic efforts and the policemen were remanded to judicial custody. They had picked up the girl from Jahangirpuri for interrogation and raped her. In another case a wealthy builder raped a girl. Initially the police tried to rush up the matter by bringing the parties to a compromise. But the girl Preeti Maan, daughter of Inderjit Singh Maan, did not agree. The accused threatened to murder members of the fa-

mily. The house of Inderjit Singh Maan in Delhi was set on fire. Later acid was also thrown at the victim's mother. A daughter was born out of the alleged intercourse and this was proved by a DNA test. The case was reported on 23 May, 2002 and

his maidservant. The police officer has since died.

Instances are not lacking where destitute women have been molested, beaten up and stripped naked and even paraded in the most shameful manner. Some women kept in



the hearing has started only on 23 May — that is after three years. The wealthy builder is the principal accused. The case was televised on 25 April. The Maan family is firm on pursuing the case in court.

A two-year-girl was raped in February. A man, Kishan of Shahabad dairy in the north-west area, had taken the girl to a lavatory and sexually assaulted her. An MLA of Samajwadi Party is facing trial for rape and murder of a young girl who refused an abortion. The case was later transferred to the CBI. A Swiss diplomat was raped in October 2003. There has been no breakthrough despite the announcement of a reward of Rs 50,000 for the arrest of accused.

The latest example of police brutality is the rape of a minor by a Mumbai police constable who has been arrested and remanded to police judicial custody. Resentment among the public reached its peak when the police commissioner had to close the police post. The alleged accused has been dismissed.

In custody

In Haryana, the SHO and two constables have been arrested by Delhi police for committing rape and abduction of a woman from Jahangirpuri, Delhi. People may recall a barbaric act of rape in the Ganga Nagar (Rajasthan) police station in 1996-97. The father of the girl later committed suicide. An additional police commissioner, Delhi, was arrested in Dehra Dun in 2003, for raping

of male/ female relatives so that she is not put to any inconvenience.

Instances are plenty where the police cross their limits and summon/ keep innocent/ illiterate women in their custody. Needless to say in many cases the poor women fall prey to the savagery of the policemen. It was because of these barbaric acts that the government thought it prudent to amend the CrPC. However, where the female is interrogated and her involvement is proved in cognisable crimes, she has to be arrested.

Search

In such cases the arrest of the woman has to be made by an officer. A female police officer has also to be present when the arrest is made. Further, the personal search of the woman accused must be conducted by a female as laid down in Section 51 CrPC(2) which specially lays down that the "search will be made by a female with strict regard to decency".

The Indian Penal Code should be amended and life imprisonment made compulsory for rape and a minimum fine of Rs 1 lakh should be imposed. The law should be further amended so that if the victim conceives and gives birth to a baby, the child is given a share in the property of the guilty. Jails should be set up exclusively for women and these should have a senior woman IAS/ IPS officer in charge. The entire jail staff should be female. It is imperative that the female accused should be saved from mental harassment, sexual abuse and malnutrition.

It is essential that women officials both in the police and in jails or in jail hospitals are deployed for duty to attend to women. Often women are required to be medically treated at odd hours in jails. So the availability of qualified female doctors round the clock is an absolute necessity. Poor houses and nari niketans should be set up in all districts/ towns. These should be headed by female officers and vocational training should be imparted to the destitute.

Custodial rape is the most heinous crime as it is believed that women would be safe in police custody. Lack of proper and adequate supervision on the part of the senior officer is the reason of such shameful crimes. Sometimes rapes have been committed on mentally retarded persons. Recently the government has amended the CrPC to ensure that no woman is called to a police station between sunset and sunrise except under special circumstances. People would expect the police to respect the law.

Sati puja inside, whispers outside

TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Banda (Uttar Pradesh), May 26: Sati puja has moved indoors after police launched a crackdown last night on devotees thronging Banhudarhi, near Allahabad, where a 70-year-old woman died on her husband's pyre earlier this month.

A tense silence enveloped the village today: the devotional songs had stopped abruptly, as had the offerings of coconut and flowers at the memorial to Ramkumari and her husband Jageswar Tiwari and the hulabaloo caused by 50-60 devotees streaming in everyday.

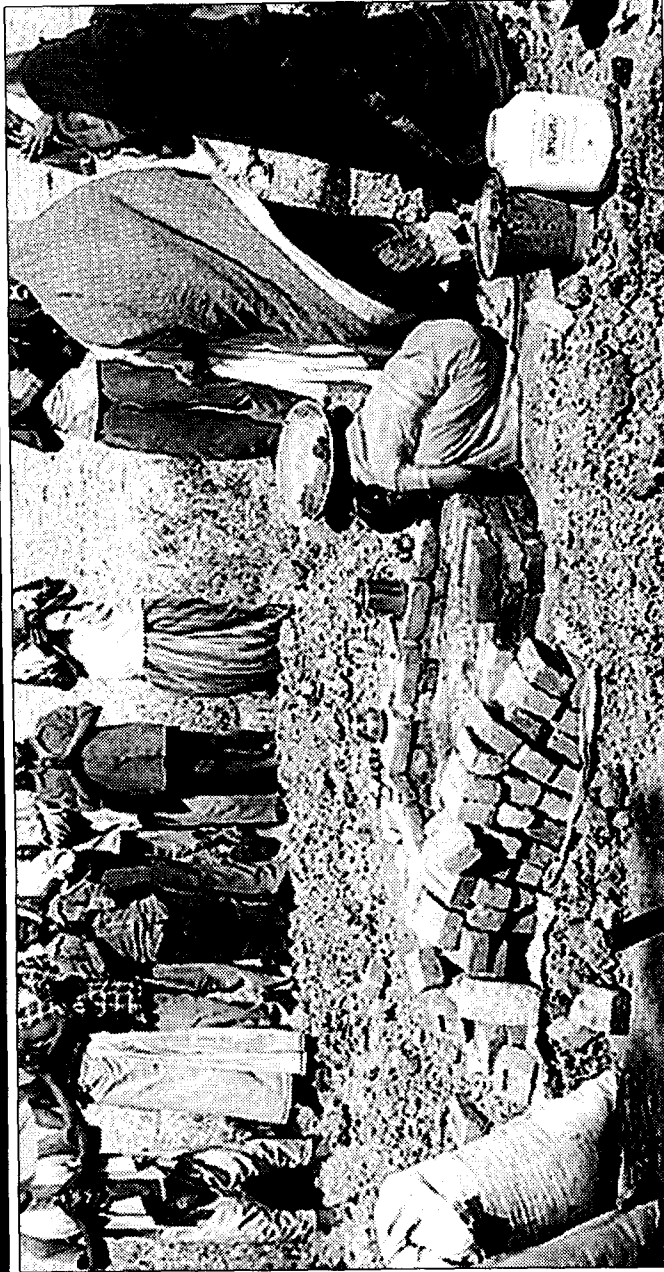
Some crows flew in and out of the burning ground, feasting on the broken coconut and sweets left behind by devotees on the 4 ft x 5 ft platform over six days. A group of armed policemen stood guard at the "sati memorial" in the empty field outside the village that serves as the burning ground.

Another group of four policemen patrolled the near-deserted road to the Tiwari home in the village over a km away.

The family had locked the house and disappeared, fearing arrest. Knocks on doors of other houses in the neighbourhood went unanswered. At the other end of the village, people spoke in whispers about Jageswar's "holy" wife.

Dhiraj Sahu, the district magistrate of Banda, border-

'WRAPPED IN MYSTERY'



Devotees stand around the memorial of Ramkumari and her husband. A Telegraph picture

ing Madhya Pradesh, denied there had been any puja.

"We had to deploy the police to see that no glorification of sati took place. The villagers are innocent. They may be misled by gossip to glorify the cult of sati," he said.

Sahu holds that there is no need for a criminal case, arguing that Ramkumari had ei-

ther died by accident or committed suicide.

The circumstances in which Ramkumari died on the night of May 7 have, however, left a lot of questions unanswered. Her family, now in hiding, failed to explain how the frail and ill woman, who could not see without her glasses or walk without a stick, managed

to cover the one-and-a-half-km distance from her home to the burning ground. Her glasses were later found in her room, the police said.

It is also surprising that on the day her husband died, Ramkumari was left alone in a room although there were other women in the house, including her daughter-in-law.

No one saw her leave.

A local women's group, Vanangana, which has conducted probes into sati elsewhere in the Bundelkhand region, described the incident as "wrapped in mystery."

But district police chief Jackie Ahmed said inquiries so far have suggested no foul play. Asked why the police had not

registered at least a case of unnatural death, he said: "It will intensify speculation about sati."

Some villagers said the policemen had entered their houses last night and warned them of arrest if they were caught talking about sati.

"The police seem to have suddenly become alarmed over the rise of Sati Maiya in the village," said Rameswar Yadav, a former *pradhan* (headman) who believes in sati, like most villagers.

Even Samajwadi Party leader Jamuna Prasad Bose, whose visit to the village on May 19 brought attention to Ramkumari's death, had scooped up some ash from the pyre and smeared it on his head.

"We saw the villagers walking around the concrete structure built on the pyre. Some of them were chanting mantras," says Bhagwan Prajapati, 55, who looks after a small mango orchard owned by the Tiwari family, which also owned 50 acres of land.

The police presence scared and angered villagers, but did not stop sati puja. "*Hum to Sati Maiya ka ghare me puja karbe* (I will do the sati puja at home)," said Champa Devi, a housewife in Gandariha village, neighbouring Banhudarhi. Household pujas in Ramkumari's name are already on, some villagers said.

Deity after death on husband's pyre

► FROM PAGE 1

Some bring along musical instruments and sing hymns.

A group of policemen led by an inspector of Jashpura police station, Surendra Singh Yadav, stands guard. "This is not a *sati* temple," Yadav insists. "We are not allowing anyone to set up a temple although some villagers tried to do it."

On the afternoon of May 7, when Jageswar, 78, died after a long illness, his wife was not heard crying aloud. Ramkumari locked herself in her room, stepping out for a while only when her husband's body was taken for cremation at 6 pm.

Strikrishna, Jageswar's brother, said: "We returned from the crematorium at 8.30 pm. *Bhabi* couldn't be found anywhere. We searched for her everywhere, at our friends' homes, near the temple in our house and on the terrace where she used to retire sometimes."

Ramkumari's younger son Rajendra says: "At 9.30 pm, an ominous idea struck us. Could she have gone to the crematorium?"

A neighbour and a relative who went to the burning ground found Ramkumari on the pyre. The fire had almost died and only one leg of the frail woman who was not much known in the village except as the wife of an accountant remained unburnt.

The family thinks Ramkumari must have added wood to her husband's pyre and lit it afresh before climbing on to it because by the time they returned from the ground after Jageswar's last rites, the fire had been reduced to a flicker. Later, they found she had left her slippers and her old sari behind in her room. According to the *sati* custom, widows dress up in new clothes and walk barefoot to the pyre.

No one saw Ramkumari go, although Rajendra's wife and several rel-

atives and neighbours were present in the house.

Banhudarhi is home to about 60 families, most of them Brahmmins, like the Tiwaris. The villagers, barring a few, are farmers. The Tiwaris are respected because both of Jageswar and Ramkumari's sons have jobs. Rajendra, in his early forties, is a primary school teacher and lives in the family home while his elder brother is a senior clerk in a PSU in Delhi. Jageswar himself was an accountant in a government office in Banda, the district bordering Madhya Pradesh in which the village falls.

Neighbouring villages like Gandaraha, Amraha Marjita have invisible caste walls that divide people, but *sati* binds them all. The custom has deep roots in Bundelkhand, a region straddling two states that was once identified with the brave Jhansi *ki* Rani and is now infamous as dacoit country.

News of Ramkumari's immolation

trickled out only after May 19 when the *shradh* was held. A probe was ordered after Samajwadi Party's Jamuna Prasad Bose visited the site and drew the attention of the police.

Senior superintendent of police Jackie Ahmed said: "It is true that Ramkumari went to the crematorium on the very night when her husband had been burnt, set up wood on the same pyre and lit it before entering the flames."

However, Ahmed claimed there was no sign of provocation or glorification of *sati*, the two offences for which action can be taken under the Sati (Prevention) Act. He denied that villagers were worshipping the *chabutara*.

Sources said the police had initially tried to hush up the case. "On the night of May 7, we had informed the Jashpura police station of what happened," Rajendra claimed. But the inspector warned the family against leaking the news, saying all of them would be jailed.

Pyre death sparks rush of worshippers

Blind faith in *sati*

TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Banda (Uttar Pradesh), May 25: Ramkumari died on her husband's pyre earlier this month. No one is certain whether it was *sati* or suicide.

But Banhudarhi, a village near Allahabad, has found its new deity in the 70-year-old woman.

The hamlet with brick houses, electricity and neat roads just 150 km from Uttar

Pradesh's second city could become the site of the latest *sati* temple in Bundelkhand, strewn with such shrines.

Although there is no temple yet, worshippers are trickling in religiously in groups of 50 to 60 every day, braving the scorching sun. They come bearing flowers and incense sticks, even musical instruments. The pro-



Ramkumari

cessions stop in a field a kilometre from Banhudarhi — the burning ground where Ramkumari climbed onto her husband's pyre on the night on May 7 and killed herself.

It is not known if she committed *sati*. "We are still trying to probe if this really was *sati* or suicide," said Banda district magistrate Dhiraj Sahu. There are even whispers of a land dispute leading to her death.

But villagers of Banhudarhi and the neighbourhood have christened as "*sati sthal*" the 4ft x 5ft *chabutara* (platform) built as a memorial to Ramkumari and her husband Jageswar Tiwari. They stand before it, hands folded, offer flowers and light candles and incense before shouting *Sati Devi ki jai* and melting away.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ►

26 MAY 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

Anjali in hospital for suicide test

B.R. SRIKANTH

Bangalore, May 24: Flying Officer Anjali Gupta, who had accused three seniors of sexual harassment and is facing court martial on charges of financial irregularities, was taken to hospital today for psychiatric tests amid protests by family members.

The prosecution, represented by Wing Commander R.K. Dubey, told the military court that Anjali has been admitted to Air Force Command Hospital here and the tests would last 10 days. In the afternoon, the presiding officer, Group Captain V. Ganesh, adjourned general court martial proceedings till Thursday.

Anjali's family suspects the tests are a ruse to prolong her detention and even label

her mentally unsound.

"They (the IAF) are doing something to harm her in every sense and to save their skin. How come they are forcing her to face the court martial if she is not mentally fit?" asked Jitender Garg, her brother-in-law.

Garg said Anjali had no inkling of the tests till her escorts told her this morning.

In an official statement, the air force said the flying officer was released from close arrest (for the first time since April 8) and referred to the Command Hospital.

A panel of medical specialists, service psychiatrists and a lady psychiatrist from NIMHANS, Bangalore, will examine her to rule out "suicidal tendencies".

"Flying Officer Anjali Gu-

pta has been making repeated requests to the GCM for release from close arrest. As informed earlier, she is placed in air force custody (close arrest) to prevent her from harming herself. This is apprehended as she had, in her letter to the Karnataka State Commission for Women, stated that she is on the verge of taking her life...."

But Garg said Anjali had asked for release from close arrest only to appoint a civil lawyer of her choice.

"She had said in her letter to the Karnataka State Commission for Women that she will be forced to take the extreme step as nobody in the IAF or the local police department want to hear her complaint. Now, that statement is being used to detain her," her brother-in-law said.

বধু নিগ্রহের পাল্টা স্বামী-পীড়নে স্ত্রী-জাগরণ দেখছেন না কেউ

মিলন দত্ত ও অরুণাঙ্ক ভট্টাচার্য

স্ত্রীর গায়ে হাত তোলার দায়ে মামুদপুরে প্রমীলা-বাহিনীর হাতে এক গ্রামবাসীর লাঞ্চিত হওয়ার ঘটনার মধ্যে কি এ রাজ্যে স্ত্রীশক্তি জাগরণের কোনও ইঙ্গিত রয়েছে?

মহাশ্বেতা দেবী মনে করেন, “ওই একটা ঘটনা থেকে স্ত্রীশক্তির জাগরণের ইঙ্গিত খোঁজার চেষ্টা না-করাই ভাল। তবে স্বামীর হাতে মার খাওয়া একটা মেয়ে যে নালিশ জানানোর মতো জায়গা খুঁজে পাচ্ছে, এটা কি কম কথা? প্রত্যন্ত গ্রামে দেখেছি, মেয়েদের নির্যাতন সহ্যে হুঁশু করে বসে। নালিশ জানানোর পরিকাঠামোই নেই।”

নির্যাতিত মেয়ের নালিশ জানানোর মতো একটা জায়গা যদি সমাজে তৈরি হয়, সেটাকেও একটা বড় প্রাপ্তি বলে মনে করছেন মহাশ্বেতা দেবী। যে-পরিকাঠামোর কথা মহাশ্বেতা দেবী বলছেন, তা ঘটনাটিকে মামুদপুরে তৈরি হয়েছে, সংরক্ষণের সুবাদে ওই গ্রাম পঞ্চায়তের প্রধান

মহিলা হওয়ার ফলেই। বর্তমান প্রধান পুতুল সি পি এম লোকাল কমিটির সদস্য ও প্রভাবশালী নেতা নগেন ভট্টাচার্যের স্ত্রী কাজল ভট্টাচার্য অসুস্থ হয়ে অঞ্চল-প্রধানের পদ ছাড়ার পরে। কাজলদেবী দীর্ঘদিন গণতান্ত্রিক মহিলা সমিতির জোনাল কমিটির সহ-সম্পাদিকা ছিলেন। তিনিও মনে করেন, পঞ্চায়ত স্তরে সংরক্ষণ বা ক্ষমতায়নের কৃত্রিম অনুশীলনের এত দিন পরেও মেয়েরা পুরুষ-শাসন থেকে বেরোতে পারেনি।

সমস্যার সমাধান হবে না বলেই মনে করেন মহাশ্বেতা দেবী। তাঁর কথায়, “ওই মেয়েটি মহিলা সমিতির কাছে সমাধান চেয়েছিল। ওরা কিন্তু সমস্যাটাকে আরও পাকিয়ে তুলেছে। আজকের দিনে আর তুমি এটা করতে পারো না। কান মলামলি বা ওঠবোসের মধ্যে না-গিয়ে আলোচনায় সমাধান খোঁজা উচিত।” তিনি মনে করেন, এ-সবের ফলে পুরুষেরা যদি মেয়েদের গায়ে হাত তুলতে ভয় পায়, সেটাও খারাপ নয়।

তবে এইটুকু ‘স্তল’র দায়িত্বও আর নিতে রাজি নন সে-দিনের ঘটনার নেত্রী গণতান্ত্রিক মহিলা সমিতির সম্পাদক সুমিতা গোস্বামী।

সংবাদমাধ্যমের কাছে মুখ খুলে দলের ‘আবমূর্তি’ খোঁয়ে এখন সুমিতাদেবী বলছেন, “যা হওয়ার খারাপ করায় সি পি এম নেতাদের কাছে ধমক হয়ে গিয়েছে। আর কিছু বলব না।” ধমক খেয়ে তিনি এতটাই বিরত যে, সে-দিন সুলতার স্বামী গোপাল পাত্রকে কান ধরে ওঠবোস করিয়ে তারা ঠিক করেছেন কি না, তা নিয়েও ওই নেত্রী ধন্দে পড়েছেন। তিনি এক বার বলেন, “মনে হচ্ছে, ডুলই হয়েছে।” পরক্ষণেই বলেন, “আমরা ওদের সংসারে শান্তি ফেরাতে চেয়েছিলাম। ওরা যদি এর পরে মিলেমিশে থাকতে পারে, তা হলে বোঝা যাবে, ঠিক করেছিলাম।”

সে-দিনের ঘটনায় যিনি সব চেয়ে বেশি উদ্যোগী ছিলেন, সেই পঞ্চায়ত-প্রধান পুতুল ঘোষের দেখা মেলেনি এ দিন। সি পি এম নেতা নগেনবাবুই বলে দিলেন, “পুতুল আর খবরের

কগজের সঙ্গে কেনও কথা বলবে না।” গ্রামে সাধারণত যেমন হয়, এই ঘটনাটো দ্রুত রাজনৈতিক মাত্রা পেয়ে যাচ্ছে। তৃণমূলের শক্ত ঘাঁটি সূভাষপল্লিতে ঢুকে পুরনো কংগ্রেস পরিবারের এক সদস্য গোপাল পাত্রকে স্ত্রী-নির্যাতনের সাজা দিয়ে ওই গ্রামে পা রাখার চেষ্টা করেছিলেন সি পি এমের নেতারা। কিন্তু তাঁরা বুঝতে পারেননি, এই ঘটনাকে আঁকড়ে ধরে হঠাৎ অসময়ে জোট বাঁধতে পারেন গ্রামের কংগ্রেস, তৃণমূল, বি জে পি-সমর্থকেরা। ওই ঘটনাকে সামনে রেখে তাঁরা সি পি এমের বিরুদ্ধে ‘প্রতিরোধ’ গড়ে তোলার চেষ্টা করছেন।

গোপাল পাত্র অপমানিত হয়ে নিকদেপ, স্ত্রী সুলতা অসুস্থ হয়ে পড়েছেন। তিনি মেয়ে শুকনো মুখে ঘুরে বেড়াচ্ছে। রান্না হয়নি বাড়িতে। একটা পরিবারকে উচ্ছ্বলের দিকে ঠেলে দিয়ে দুই পক্ষ রাজনৈতিক ক্ষমতায় শান দিচ্ছে। গোপালবাবুকে খুঁজে এনে সুলতার অগোছালো সংসারটাকে একটু সাজিয়ে দেওয়ার সময় নেই কারও।

Men at Work

Survey shows harassment of women on the rise

The new age Indian woman has come into her own. She makes her presence felt in the workplace, makes informed economic choices, can hold her own in any setting. But a survey by the FICCI Ladies Organisation has found that women in all the metropolises, with the exception of Hyderabad, continue to experience various degrees of sexual harassment and financial discrimination and that large numbers of them feel insecure and unsafe. The survey reveals a disquieting trend that economic emancipation has not yet ensured physical and emotional security for women. 'Eve-teasing', a peculiarly Indian euphemism for lewd taunting, was one indignity visited on women on the streets; jewellery and handbag snatching was another. But harassment by male colleagues at work was a disturbingly growing phenomenon. Men long used to being in a majority in any profession may be feeling unsettled and may be using their power at the workplace to make life difficult for women, either by discriminating against them financially or professionally or through sexually intimidating behaviour. It would appear that men continue to find it difficult to accept a woman colleague on equal terms or as a boss.

Today, men have to compete with highly-qualified women for jobs. In certain high-tech professions, there is a gradual shift in favour of women who are considered more disciplined and reliable than men. This upsets existing professional and office hierarchies and men have yet to get used to this. What is worrying about the survey is that cities which have so far been considered liberal, like Mumbai, have apparently turned woman-unfriendly. Why is this so? Maybe the sight of women living life on their own terms is causing resentment. Hyderabad has come out tops but this is possibly because women are not present there in significant numbers in the workforce. The reason that the harassment is increasingly featuring in the public domain is that women are no longer willing to accept the traditional social order and are speaking out. They refuse to be subservient to social structures and obscure their individuality. Today's educated and articulate woman does not accept male superiority. The male reaction is probably motivated by an inability to accept reality and come to terms with the modern Indian woman. While empowerment across the board for women is still a distant dream, the pace at which women are catching up with men is impressive. Men will have to comprehend the changing circumstances and modify their attitudes and behaviour at places of work. The trend, after all, is clear — there will be more, not less, women in the workplace as subordinates, peers and managers. Men should prepare themselves to celebrate that reality.

26 APR 2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Gender equality still a distant dream

A recent survey by the World Economic Forum finds that full economic and political empowerment remains a dream for millions of women even in the Western world.

Hasan Suroor

IMAGES OF high-profile women running multi-million dollar business empires, calling the shots in politics or taking over traditional male bastions are as misleading in measuring women's status as the depressing stories of their plight and oppression.

The real situation, judging from a new world survey, has more shades of grey than either the women's glossies or the feminist campaigns would have us believe. Indeed, in some areas, women in Third World countries such as India are said to be better off than those in the more advanced nations.

Progress in Nordic states

The survey, published by the Geneva-based World Economic Forum — better known for its annual business bash in Davos — shows that full economic and political empowerment remains a distant dream for millions of women in much of the western world, let alone developing countries. Of the 58 countries covered by the survey, only a handful of European nations — mostly the Nordic states — seem to have made real progress in lowering the glass ceiling, though it still exists even in these countries.

The report says that "no country has yet managed to eliminate the gender gap" but the Nordic states — Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark and Finland — have "succeeded best" in narrowing it.

They are seen to provide a "workable model" for the rest of the world to follow. Other "female-friendly" countries include Britain, Germany, New Zealand, Australia and, significantly, several East European countries where women still benefit from the support system built during the Communist era.

U.S.' poor record

America, with its restrictive maternity rights regime and poor state child welfare system, does not even figure in the top 10 woman-friendly countries. Even Britain, which makes it to the top 10, fares badly in a range of areas, lagging behind even India in terms of economic opportunity.

The most glaring gender inequality in Britain relates to wages where women still earn far less than men for the same work — and this despite an Equal Pay Act passed 30 years ago. This is confirmed by official figures which show that the average income of women in Britain is almost half that of men.

How does India rank in the WEF survey? Despite scoring high in economic opportunity, India is at the bottom of the heap by most criteria — above only Pakistan, Korea, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt.

It is placed at the 55rd position — embarrassingly behind economically less developed countries such as Bangladesh and a host of Latin American and African nations which have done much better in narrowing

the gender gap.

"The Indian rhetoric is clearly not matched by the achievement on the ground," commented a British Indian woman's rights activist.

Call for strategy review

Although WEF chief economist Augusto Lopez-Claros has said the survey is "not intended as a tool for embarrassing nations, but as a benchmark for improvement," it has already provoked calls for a review of strategies to close the gender gap.

Cherie Blair, wife of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, has expressed concern over the continuing inequalities faced by women and called for positive discrimination.

In remarks that would find resonance in India, she said she "unequivocally" supported quotas for women in parliamentary elections as a means of "political empowerment."

Saadia Zahidi, a co-author of the WEF survey, says there is a link between how a country treated its women and that country's ability to compete globally. The report underlines the "clear economic incentive" behind empowering women, she points out.

"Countries that do not fully take advantage of one half of the talent in their population are misallocating their human resources and undermining their competitive potential," she said in an interview to

mark the launch of the report.

Its findings are based on "hard data" from leading international organisations, and the countries have been ranked on the basis of five main criteria laid down by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) — economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health and well-being.

"Measuring the magnitude of the problem is a first step — we hope that governments and NGOs alike can use the rankings in our study to identify issue-areas and to learn from the experiences of nations that have been more successful in narrowing the gender gap," Ms. Zahidi said.

The WEF stressed that improving educational prospects for women should be the main priority for countries around the world, especially in developing countries. It described opening up education for girls as the "most important catalyst for change in society" and said that progress in other areas such as falling adolescent pregnancy rates and better income opportunities would automatically follow educational empowerment of women.

This is the first time the WEF has attempted such a survey and commentators said it reflected a recognition by the international business community that women's status was an area of critical importance for development.

20 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

Cop rapes teenage girl in police chowky

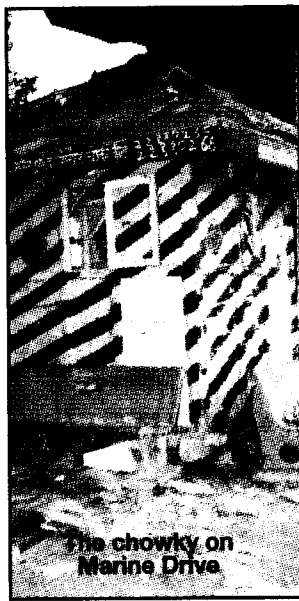
Constable Who Waylaid Collegian On Marine Drive Remanded In Police Custody

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: A shamed police force and government went into a disciplinary overdrive on Friday, ensuring constable Sunil More's remand in police custody and suspending and transferring two of his immediate superiors, a day after he raped a college-goer—thrice—inside a police chowky on Marine Drive.

The victim, a collegian from Chembur, had reportedly come to town to inquire about an academic course and had later gone for a stroll down Marine Drive with two boys from her college. The three were walking down the waterfront promenade when they reached the point below the flyover where the chowky is located. More was alone in the chowky.

Security officers from the housing society closest to the chowky told TOI that More was cruising down Marine Drive on a motorbike, probably belonging to a beat constable, when he spotted the victim. After watching her and her two friends for some time, he summoned the three to the chowky. Witnesses say he detained the girl while



shooing her friends away. He then locked the doors of the chowky and allegedly raped her at about 4.30 pm.

After passers-by heard the victim screaming, they rushed to her help. An angry mob forced open the chowky and beat up More. He was later handed over to the police.

Deputy chief minister and home minister R R Patil promised that the punish-

ment would be strong enough to deter other criminals lurking in the force "anywhere in Maharashtra."

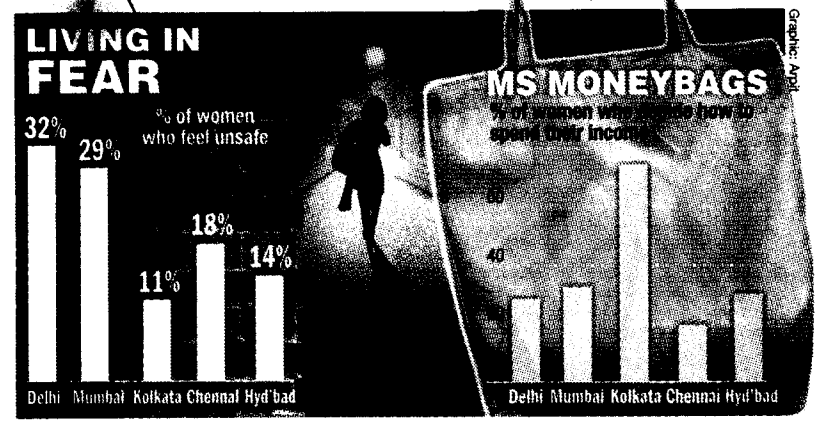
"This is a tragic incident and action will be taken against the constable and his supervising officers if they are found to have failed in their responsibility," Patil said at the spot of the crime, where he was accompanied by police commissioner A N Roy. "He is guilty of two crimes. One, he reported drunk for duty, and then committed this most heinous of crimes," he added, wondering: "How did he dare to commit such a crime in, among all places, a police chowky?" Patil promised to help the victim and her family "in every possible way."

Patil, now in the centre of the banned dance-bar controversy, also appeared worried about the damage the incident might have on tourism to the city. Marine Drive remained one of the must-sees for tourists to Mumbai. "We are going to have a large number of women constables not only here but all places where there are a large number of female visitors," he promised.

23 APR 2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Women in Mumbai, Delhi feel unsafe



By Neha Tyagi/TNN

New Delhi: The rising number of women in the workforce may seem to indicate that women's lib has arrived. But the ground reality is that every third woman in Mumbai and Delhi feels unsafe, eve-teasing tops Kolkata's problem and Chennai scores poorly on sexual and financial discrimination at work.

While 97% of women surveyed in Kolkata said they had to deal with sexual harassment, Hyderabad emerged as the only exception with the city's women saying they enjoyed a high level of security on the roads and at work.

These are some of the findings of a study conducted by FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO), comparing the situations faced by working women in five metros of Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Chennai. The survey's findings do raise the question that if things are far from satisfactory in metros, just how bad is the situation for women in rural areas.

More than 30% of women in Delhi feel that the city is unsafe for them. Two out of every five women rate the public security system as inefficient. Eve-teasing in the city tops the fear list of a working woman. Landlords

harass women and staying alone is considered risky. Quality of street lighting is also an area of concern.

Mumbai is considered the most expensive metro city and women here feel insecure and worried about chain snatching, pick-pocketing and crowds in trains. However, the city leads in terms of job prospects.

Women in Kolkata suffer a similar fate with their main concern being eve-teasing. Women in the West Bengal capital are the highest users of public transport, with more than 90% of working women opting for it. It also tops in the use of cars by women to reach work place. Kolkata women seemed to be in control of the money they earn with more than 70% of them being the decision makers about how they spent their earnings. They also top the list of working out of personal choice.

The survey revealed Chennai as the lowest on levels of work satisfaction. The women there also complained of financial discrimination and longer hours of work as the prime concern. They also rate the city as expensive to live in. Hyderabad, steals the show on all fronts from safety to work satisfaction. The city scores the highest on safety grounds and is considered the easiest to live in.

THOUSANDS SET TO LOSE LIVELIHOOD IF GIRLS LOSE JOB

Bar ban to cripple Mumbai suburb

CHANDRIMA S. BHATTACHARYA

Mumbai, April 16: If the dance bars close down, an entire locality in Mumbai will look very different.

Malwani, a shabby suburb in Malad in north Mumbai, is home to the largest ghetto of dance bar girls in the city. It houses 6,000 of the 75,000 women in the profession.

Malwani is dirty and smells of clogged drains, like any other extremely poor, forgotten end of the city. Except for the rows of interesting shops that line two sides of the main road in the stretch between gate number 5 and 7 where the bar girls live.

If the girls lost their jobs, these shops, their owners and workers, who number a few thousands, would also lose their livelihoods, and Malwani would become any other place.

But the first to lose out will be the landlords.

Malwani has attracted dance bar girls over the last two decades. They live here and work in various parts of the city. "Malwani, a marshland by the sea, was originally a place where criminals were sent off to after *tari paar*," says Prabha Desai of Sanmitra Trust, an NGO that works in Malwani with the bar women.

"It was an undeveloped, unsafe, though cheap place," she adds. "But since bar girls find it difficult to stay in residential areas, always being thrown out of housing societies for their profession, or their lifestyle, or their boyfriends, or the perception that they may be a bad influence on the neighbourhood's



Bar girls at a demonstration in Mumbai. File picture

boys, they have come to stay in Malwani over the last two decades, since the dance bar business took off," says Desai.

There are advantages — there are no middle-class eyebrows raised at them, and they live in rooms or slums very close to the main road.

That is why in Malwani one of the biggest businesses is renting out rooms — and landlords and landladies, often with links with the underworld, will be among the first ones to be hit if the bars close

down and the girls start moving away.

There are three main areas in Malwani where the bar girls live. There is segregation by region. The Rajasthani girls, about 1,200 in number, crowd one lane and Dilliwalis and girls from north India, numbering about 500-600 — both the groups are in demand for their fair skin and "good figure" at the bars — stay in another. The third group of Bengalis, of about 2,000 women, occupy rooms in a ground

with individual plots.

"The girls pay Rs 200 per day per head for a room," says Desai. "They would pay a little less before the recent slum demolition. But after the demolition, a number of girls had to shift. The landlords are charging them more now," she says.

If the ban on bars puts an end to exploitative rents, it will also put an end to some aesthetic, if commercial, pursuits.

For here, there is the ubiquitous fruit-juicewallah and the sandwichwallah and the

grocery, but they are far outnumbered by beauty parlours and tailoring shops.

Every second establishment is a beauty parlour — a cramped room that is called Aishwarya Beauty Parlour, or Dulhan, or Dimple — or a tailor's shop, or a shop selling clothes and lingerie.

But the people most affected, Desai says, will be the girls themselves. "If dance bars are closed down forcibly, it will immediately result in underground prostitution," she says.

Women's groups express support for bar girls

HD-4
79

“Ban would only push this activity underground”

Special Correspondent

MUMBAI: The beleaguered women who dance in Maharashtra's dance bars now have an unexpected set of allies. Several women's groups have come out in their support.

Flavia Agnes, women's activist and lawyer, who has been fighting a case on behalf of bar girls since last year, said, “Dancing and singing are legitimate professions, not new to women.” Banning such bars, she held, would be violative of the right of these women to earn a livelihood as ensured under Article 21 of the Constitution as well as the right to carry on a legitimate profession under Article 19.

Ms. Agnes took the issue to the Bombay High Court last year when she found that after police raided some bars, they took the women to the police station late at night. This is prohibited under the law. No woman police was present when the dancers were taken there. And several women complained of molestation and harassment by the policemen.

The police had claimed that they raided the bars on the ground of obscenity. Ms. Agnes pointed out the girls dance to film music using the same dance movements as stars do in films in what are called “item numbers.” Why, she asked, was one allowed

and the other considered obscene? “The Government is deliberately appealing to the middle class mentality,” she said.

‘Why licences given?’

Varsha Kale of the Womanist Party of India, who has enrolled many of the 75,000 bar girls into a registered trade union, the Bharatiya Bar Girls Association, questioned the role of the Government in the proliferation of dance bars. She pointed out that after 1996, their numbers had grown rapidly. “Why were licences given out so freely?” she asked. Today, there are an estimated 1,250 dance bars in Maharashtra and most of them have been established post-1996.

Ms. Agnes emphasised that banning dance bars would only push this activity underground.

This would lead to much greater exploitation of the women: there would be no regulation. Just as prohibition had not stopped the sale and consumption of alcohol, she said, banning such bars would not eliminate them.

In a statement the women's groups said: “The girls who dance in the bars are trying to survive and support their families. Contrary to the notion that they make a fortune each night, most live in slums and tenements, like millions of others in a time when jobs are simply not available for children of poor families.”

NHRC's directive

Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The National Human Rights Commission has sought the comments and response in four weeks from the Chief Secretary of the Maharashtra Government on its reported decision to close dance bars in the State.

The Commission took cognisance of a complaint from the Bhartiya Bargirls

Union, alleging that the Maharashtra Government's decision would deprive 75,000 bar girls of their source of livelihood. It further alleged that the Government had taken a unilateral and sudden decision without taking the responsibility of their rehabilitation on the ground that most of them had come from other States and not from Maharashtra.

17 APR 2005

THE HINDU

Bar girls victimised, says Poornima Advani

"Non-Maharashtrians discriminated against; many rendered jobless"

Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Poornima Advani, former chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW) has sought the intervention of the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and the Maharashtra Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, in safeguarding the human rights of thousands of bar girls rendered jobless due to the closure of dance bars in Maharashtra.

The victimisation of young girls working in Maharashtra as well their discrimination as 'Maharashtrians' and 'others' in the rehabilitation plan was being brought to their attention for suitable intervention and directions, Ms. Advani said in her letter addressed to Mr. Singh and Mr. Deshmukh.

The Maharashtra Government, to harness more revenue, started issuing licences for adult musical and dance performances within liquor bars. Now with the bar on dances, Ms. Advani feared, a large number of these girls are in danger of falling prey to sex tourists if steps for their rehabilitation are not undertaken.

The Maharashtra Government with the help of the Centre must ensure that these girls are rehabilitated — irrespective of the State from which they hailed provided they are citizens of the country. Citizens of other countries could be deported, she said, recommending the setting up of a committee to advise the Government on the rehabilitation and other packages.

NCW to send team

The NCW will send a team to Maharashtra shortly to look into the matter. It will meet the Chief Minister and ascertain the reasons for the sudden closure of the dance bars.

"This decision was taken after a delegation of bar girls under the banner of the



WHY BAR US?: Bar girls of Mumbai staging a protest on Wednesday against the State Government's decision to ban over 30 dance bars in the metropolis. — PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

Bhartiya Bar Girls Union, sought the commission's intervention in the matter," the NCW member, Nafisa Hussain, said here. In their petition, the girls said that in a single stroke, the decision had deprived 75,000 of them and three lakh male bar workers of their livelihood.

"If rehabilitation was not proper, these girls would be forced into prostitution to earn a living," Varsha Kale, honorary president of the union said.

A similar petition was also submitted to the National Human Rights Commission.

12 APR 2006

THE HINDU

WOMEN WORKERS AND NIGHT DUTY

THE UNION CABINET'S decision to amend the Factories Act to enable women to work night shifts has met with a mixed reaction. The Government has not spelt out the rationale behind the decision but with the demands of equality and the growing involvement of women in industry on the one hand and the needs of a modern economy on the other, the traditional restraints on night work by women have come under pressure. The protective framework for women workers has been laid down by Convention 89 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), adopted in 1948 and supplemented by a Protocol in 1990. The basic convention prohibited night shift in manufacturing, mining, construction, and similar establishments. At the same time, it granted exemption in the case of women occupying "responsible positions of a managerial or technical nature"; industries "where the raw material is likely to deteriorate rapidly unless worked at night"; health and welfare services; and force *majeure* cases.

The subsequent 1990 Protocol, which was ratified by India in November 2003, relaxed the prohibition of night work for women in factories, but with important stipulations. It allows national authorities to permit women to work night shifts in specific classes of industries or individual units after an agreement is reached between the employers and unions. In the absence of such an agreement, the authorities are allowed to introduce night shifts for women af-

ter ensuring that the employer puts in place necessary safeguards for their safety and health. It is this protocol that New Delhi is apparently relying on to amend the Factories Act but it is not clear if a bipartite agreement at the industry or unit level will be required as a precondition.

It is important that women workers are provided opportunities to work at night in establishments suited to their skills, and removing the ban could be a significant step towards empowering women. Inexplicably, so important a reform has not been debated widely or examined at the tripartite Indian Labour Conference. Two other caveats need to be entered. First, the overall needs of the economy are not quite obvious and it is unclear in which industries specifically women will be in demand to work night shifts. It will be unfortunate if a change in the law were to lead to the proliferation of sweatshops employing women in night shifts, whether in garments or consumer electronics or in other areas. More important, the record of States in enforcing the existing safeguards for women workers, such as the provision of crèches for children or maternity benefits, is far from inspiring. Allowing women to work at night will need additional safeguards relating to their physical security, transport, health, and occupational safety. It is imperative that these do not exist just on paper. While opening up new economic opportunities for women workers, the Government should strengthen, not dilute in any way the special protective role of factory legislation.

13 APR 2005

THE HINDU

Curse on course, despite slash

RASHEED KIDWAI

Bhopal, May 17: A week after the brutal attack on Shakuntala Verma, a mob yesterday chased away a Madhya Pradesh government official in Kharagaon district who tried to prevent child marriages from being solemnised in a village.

Tehsildar M.L. Verma was threatened and abused when he reached Bistan, about 300 km from state capital Bhopal, where over 40 couples were tying the knot at a community function.

Verma said he found two girls below consenting age. But when he tried to stop them from being married off, he was surrounded by members of the Kullni *samaaj*, an influential backward class grouping.

"I was told that I was not required at the pious occasion. When I insisted, I was abused and threatened. In the absence of an adequate police force, I had little option but to flee the scene," he said.

Mangla Chandore, supervisor of the state-run women and child welfare department, confirmed the incident but said she did not stay at the spot very long. "The mob's vibes were not very friendly."

The tehsildar, however, did not give up. He rushed to the office of Kharagaon superintendent of police Meenakshi Sharma, who sent a police force to the village. Later, district collector S.K. Paul said the community leaders were "persuaded" not to marry off underage girls.



Shakuntala: Shifting stance

A villager said these marriages were to have been solemnised on May 11, on the auspicious Akshaya Tritiya, but were rescheduled for May 16.

In Indore, Shakuntala, who was brutally assaulted for opposing child marriages in Dhar district, today said she had not "fully recognised" the prime

accused who was arrested on Sunday.

"The police have shown me various photographs, but I have not fully recognised the arrested person as I had not seen him before," the woman and child development official said from the hospital where she has been admitted.

For the first time since the attack on May 10, Shakuntala appeared unclear about the motive behind the assault in which one of her arms was nearly chopped off.

The crusader against child marriage said her opposition to the social evil "may or may not have been responsible". She said she had been touring a number of villages as part of her job. "Maybe, some persons were affected because

of it. This could be the reason behind the incident," she added.

Asked whether her campaign against child marriage could be the reason, she said: "It could be child marriage also."

So far, Shakuntala and her family had been saying her crusade was the only reason for the gruesome attack.

The state's women and child welfare secretary, S.R. Mohanty, told **The Telegraph** a direct link between the attack on Shakuntala and child marriage was not important.

"We are committed to two things. First, we will do everything to eradicate a social evil like child marriage. Second, we are committed to punishing anyone guilty of the dastardly attack on her," he said.

MAY 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

Kuwait women get right to vote

Kuwait, May 16 (Reuters): Kuwait's parliament passed a law today granting women the right to vote and run in elections for the first time, after pressure from the pro-western Gulf Arab state's government.

"We made it. This is history," prominent activist Roula al-Dashti said. "Our target is

the parliamentary polls in 2007. I'm starting my campaign from today."

Outside parliament, young women and men danced and cheered, while passing drivers hooted horns in support.

Parliament speaker Jassim al-Khorafi said the legislation had been passed by a ma-

jority of the all-male parliament. There were 35 in favour, 23 against and one abstention on a vote that had met fierce resistance from Islamists, conservative tribal MPs and others.

The US has been pressing its allies in West Asia to bring in political reform, saying a lack of freedom and democracy had fostered Islamic militancy. The Kuwait government wanted the bill passed before a likely trip by the prime minister to Washington next month.

A similar decree for women's political rights issued by Emir Sheikh Jaber al-

Ahmad al-Sabah was narrowly defeated in 1999 by Islamist and conservative lawmakers who wield enormous influence in the assembly.

Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah said Kuwait now had the right to appoint women to the cabinet.

"This is a celebration for democracy even though it is 45 years late," said Jassim al-Gitami, a former MP and head of the Kuwaiti Human Rights Association. Women activists said it was too late for women to vote and run for municipal elections set for June 2, after parliament earlier this month delayed a vote on the issue.

Islamists, in agreeing to the law today, stipulated that there must be separate polling stations for men and women.

Kuwaiti women, traditionally more liberal and educated than their Gulf Arab counterparts but long lagging in political rights, had been pressing for years for a greater say.

In 2002, Oman granted all citizens aged 21 and above the right to vote and women to run in elections to its advisory Shura Council. Qatar adopted a new constitution in 2004 which allows its nationals, including women, to elect 30 members of its 45-member parliament.

TWO FACES OF PAKISTAN

Women's sport ban protesters flogged

Lahore: A leading Pakistani women's rights activist on Sunday accused police of beating her and a group of supporters after they tried to hold a run to protest a ban on females participating in some sports.

Asma Jehangir, the former chief of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, and about 35 other people were detained on Saturday as they prepared for their protest in Lahore.

Police released all the detainees later in the day without charge.

Authorities banned women from competing in foot races after Islamic hard-liners, who regard women's participation in sports as against Islam, attacked runners at a similar event last month.

Jehangir vowed to hold another protest run next weekend. "Our women activists

were pulled by the hair. They were dragged along the road. They were beaten up severely. Their clothes were torn. They are all innocent people," she said. "We are planning to stage another symbolic marathon next Saturday."

Police denied abusing the detainees and said officers had protected the protesters from being attacked by members of an Islamic religious group who had gathered to oppose the run.

"We put them into protective custody. We did not torture them," said Lahore police officer Aftab Cheema.

Among those arrested Saturday was Danyal Ali Hassan of the New York-based Human Right Watch, who had been doing research on human rights in Pakistan. He said he was also beaten by police while in custody. AP



Police personnel wrestle with Jehangir at Saturday's protest

16 MAY 2007

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Protest against rising rape cases

Social activists term Delhi as the 'Rape Capital'

Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: Outraged at the increasing number of rape cases in the Capital, social activists from various organisations have called for a joint protest demonstration on Friday.

Labelling Delhi as the "Rape Capital", social activists from organisations like the Delhi unit of the All-India Democratic Women's Association, Centre of Indian Trade Unions, Students' Federation of India and Democratic Youth Federation of India have placed the blame on Delhi police and Union Government.

Criticising the Home Ministry

for "confining itself to ritual expressions of regret at such crimes", the activists have listed a series of demands that would be raised during that protest demonstration.

The demands include immediate suspension of the "policemen responsible for the criminal delay" in the recent incident involving a Delhi University student.

They have also asked that police stations and officers to be made accountable for such crimes taking place in areas under them.

"Any laxity on their part in dealing with crimes against

women must invite disciplinary action against them," said a press release issued by them.

The demands include that the police must ensure regular patrolling and prompt response to reports of such incidents and all efforts should be made to apprehend the accused at the earliest. They have also asked for the most stringent punishment for the accused.

Finally, they have also said that the Home Ministry must regularly monitor performance of the Delhi police in dealing with crimes against women and ensure the safety of women in the Capital.

15 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

Raje 'supporting' sati, alleges Congress

4(1)-5

D. K. Singh

4/8/2004

'She had prayed at the Rani Sati temple in Jhunjhunnu twice'

Special Correspondent

JAIPUR: After the women's organisations and the activist groups, the Pradesh Congress Committee has now charged the Rajasthan Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje, of taking a pro-sati stance. By keeping a 'stony silence' over various developments related to sati temples and Deorala sati over the past one year, the Chief Minister had been extending indirect support to glorification of sati, the party charged.

The chief spokesperson of the PCC, Chandrashekhar Baid, said in a statement here on Thursday that the latest on the series of actions glorifying sati had been the advertisements inserted by the Government in various newspapers in the State on the launch of the proposed Rani Sati Nagar in the capital. After realising the mistake, the colony's name was changed to Rani Nagar though in the Government re-

ords the name remained unchanged, he said.

Charging the State Government with the violation of the provisions of the Sati Prevention Act 1987 by getting published such an advertisement, Dr. Baid said the Urban Development Minister, Pratapsingh Singhvi should be dismissed for this.

Dr. Baid charged that Ms. Raje had been "glorifying sati" since she took over as president of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the State in 2002. "Ms. Raje had prayed at the Rani Sati temple in Jhunjhunnu during her 'Pari-vartan yatra' prior to the Assembly elections. After winning the elections, during her thanksgiving 'yatra' as the Chief Minister, she again 'glorified' sati at a public meeting held in Jhunjhunnu," he charged.

"The State Government's stand on glorification of sati is clear from the fact that it is not going for an appeal in the High

Court against the acquittal in January 2004 of those charged with glorification of sati in the wake of Roop Kanwar's death in Deorala," Dr. Baid charged. The Government also failed to stop glorification of sati in July 2004 in Jhunjhunnu when it allowed the construction of an entrance for Khemi sati in Jhunjhunnu, he pointed out.

Citing the latest on the sati front in Rajasthan, Dr. Baid said the Government had failed to take any pro-active step to stop a sati planned in Sumel in Pali in March this year. Only after several women organisations made a hue and cry, the Government had acted, he charged.

Dr. Baid termed the Ms. Raje's silence over the matter indicating her 'complicity'. "Ms. Raje owed an explanation to the people as her silence would give the impression that she was supporting the glorification of this decadent and now unlawful practice," he noted.

THE HINDU

Adding insult to injury

Rapist offers marriage to evade punishment

A brutal rapist has added insult to injury by propositioning his victim after he was found guilty and before the additional sessions judge could sentence him. The convict, a ward boy at Delhi hospital, offered to marry his victim, a nurse whom he raped and partially blinded in the struggle, as "no one else would" do so! It is possible to quote cases where the offender has offered to marry his victim during trial and the girl's family has accepted and courts have acquitted the accused. Bhura, the convict in this case waited till the last minute in an obvious attempt to avoid going to jail. The victim has shown exemplary courage throughout the trial extending over a year and a half and in rejecting the marriage proposal in disgust.

Indian law does not permit plea bargaining or deal-making. The rapist's crass attempt to escape punishment did not work and he has properly been sentenced to life imprisonment. But the fact that the judge asked the victim to respond to the convict's offer has shown the insensitivity with which rape cases are dealt with. It is assumed that marital rape cannot happen. Non-consensual sex with a woman is rape whether it is within the legal confines of a marriage or not, and it is time that the legal system and society at large recognises this and treats rape victims with the sensitivity they deserve. The victim suffers sufficient trauma, both physical and emotional at the time the crime is committed, and it takes a lot of courage to face social stigma and come forward to get justice. Let the law not make a mockery of her pain by allowing such mala fide and denigrating pleas. Rapists should not be allowed to use marriage as an excuse to evade punishment. What sort of married life can the victim look forward to from a man who does not respect her and who has treated her so brutally before marriage?

13 MAY

THE STATESMAN

ছেলেরা পণ নেয় মেয়েরা বুঝি দেয় না?

শাস্বতী ঘোষ

বক্তব্য ১: দেখো বাবা, দিদি চাকরি করত না, দিদির সময় পাড়ার ক্যাটারার দিয়েছ ঠিক আছে। আমার কিন্তু সরকারি দফতরে পাকা চাকরি, এ বার কিন্তু নামী ক্যাটারার দিতে হবে।

বক্তব্য ২: মা, ওরা না-হয় কিছু চায় না। কিন্তু আমি এত বড় চাকরি করি, মানানসই জিনিস না দিলে ও-বাড়িতে আমার সম্মানটা থাকবে কোথায়?

এ ধরনের নানা বক্তব্য নিশ্চয়ই প্রত্যেকের অভিজ্ঞতার ঝুলিতেই একটা-দুটো করে আছে। তাই পণ-নিবারণী আইনে যখন পণ দেওয়া এবং নেওয়া দু'টিই সমান অপরাধ বলে চিহ্নিত, তখন সুপ্রিম কোর্ট কেন শুধু পুরুষ সরকারি কর্মীদের বিয়ের সময় পণ নিয়েছেন কি না তা হলফনামা দিয়ে জানানোর নির্দেশ দিল? কেন তা সমান ভাবে নারী সরকারি কর্মীদের ক্ষেত্রেও প্রযোজ্য হবে না?

চাকরি না করলে সে মেয়ের স্বাধীন ইচ্ছা প্রকাশের ক্ষমতা হয়তো থাকে না। কিন্তু যে মেয়ে সরকারি চাকরি করে তাদের ক'জন পণের প্রতিরোধ করেছে? তাদের ক্ষেত্রে তো চাকরিটাই এক ধরনের বিমা। সে সব মেয়েরাও কি এগিয়ে বলেছে— আমিই সবচেয়ে দামি, আমার দাম বাড়ানোর জন্য কোনও দানসামগ্রীর প্রয়োজন নেই?

নিশা শর্মার কথা মনে পড়ে? গুরগাঁও-এর সেই মেয়ে, যিনি বরপক্ষের পণের দাবিতে বিয়ের পিড়ি থেকে উঠে সংবাদ শিরোনামে চলে এসেছিলে? এমন প্রতিবাদ অবশ্যই মনে রাখবার মতো। কিন্তু ইনিও প্রথম থেকে পণের জন্য প্রতিবাদ করেননি। প্রথমে যথাসাধ্য পাত্রপক্ষের দাবি মেটানোর চেষ্টা করেছেন। হুঁ বরের সব ইচ্ছে মিটিয়ে যখন ভাসুরের এয়ার কন্ডিশনারের দাবিটা সম্ভবের সীমানা পেরিয়ে গিয়েছে, তখনই তিনি বিয়ের পিড়ি থেকে উঠে এসেছেন। অর্থাৎ সামর্থ্যের সীমানার মধ্যে থাকলে পণ দিয়ে বিয়ে করতে তাঁদের আদৌ আপত্তি থাকত না। এমন ঘটনা অপরিচিত নয় আমাদের।

এ অভিজ্ঞতাও বিরল নয় যে পাত্রপক্ষ আন্তরিক ভাবেই কিছু চায়নি, মেয়েটিকে ছাড়া। কিন্তু পাত্রীপক্ষ রাজি নন— 'বাবা তো দেবে বলে কত কিছু কিনে রেখেছে, অন্য কেউ হলে তো দিতেই হত', 'খালি হাতে গেলে পাড়ার লোক ভাববে ভিথিরি', 'আমাদের বুঝি ইচ্ছে করে না' ইত্যাদি ইত্যাদি। এমনও শুনেছি, পাত্রপক্ষ কিছু নেবে না বলায় সন্দেহ প্রকাশ করা হয়েছে, কোনও দুরারোগ্য রোগ বা গোলমাল চেপে

বিয়ে দেওয়া হচ্ছে কি না। বলছি না, এ আশঙ্কা অযৌক্তিক। কিন্তু 'উপহার'-এর নামে পণের আদানপ্রদান এতই স্বতঃসিদ্ধ যে কোনও এক পক্ষের বা দু'পক্ষের উপহার দেওয়া-নেওয়া না করার প্রতিজ্ঞা বজায় রাখাও কঠিন।

আগে অভাবনীয় ছিল এ রকম সব বর্গের মধ্যেও পণের আড়ম্বর ছড়িয়ে পড়েছে। আদিবাসী সমাজে কন্যাপণই প্রচলিত ছিল, কিন্তু এখন তারা 'এগোনো'র প্রতীক হিসাবে বরপণের প্রথা গ্রহণ করেছে। নারীশিক্ষা এবং নারী-সমতার পীঠস্থান বলে পরিচিত কেরলে পণের রমরমা এত বেশি যে অনেক বনেদি খ্রিস্টান পরিবারের মেয়েরা টাকা জোগাড় করতে না পেয়ে সম্মাসিনী বা 'নান' হয়ে যাচ্ছেন, বহু মেয়ে অনুচ্চা থাকতে বাধ্য হচ্ছেন। মুসলিম সমাজে দেনমোহর ঠিক কন্যাপণ নয়, বিয়ে ভাঙলে ক্ষতিপূরণ বলা যেতে পারে। সেখানেও বিয়ের সময় বরকে সেলামি ও উপহার দেওয়ার রেওয়াজ তৈরি হয়ে গেছে। পাকিস্তানে বিয়ের আড়ম্বর এবং ভোজ

সুপ্রিম কোর্ট জাতি, বর্ণ, ধর্ম নির্বিশেষে সমস্ত বিয়ের পঞ্জিকরণ (রেজিস্ট্রেশন) আবশ্যিক করার জন্য আইন প্রণয়ন করতে কেন্দ্রকে নির্দেশ দিয়েছে।

এ দেশের আইনের চোখে পণ ও যৌতুকের পার্থক্য হল যে পণ দেওয়া হয় বরকে আর যৌতুক দেওয়া হয় নবদম্পতিকে 'যুত' (যুক্ত) জীবন যাপন করার জন্য। প্রথমটি শাস্তিযোগ্য। দ্বিতীয়টি নয়। কিন্তু এর ফাঁকে সমাজের চোখে যা পণ, আইনের খাতায় তা হয়ে যায় যৌতুক। ফলে উত্তর ভারতে বিবাহযোগ্য আই এ এস, আই পি এস-রা বিয়ের বাজারে পণের নিলাম হেঁকে উপহারের ফাঁক গলে বেরিয়ে যায়। এবং, কম যায় না অন্য সরকারি চাকুরেরাও।

পণ নিবারণী আইনের ধোঁয়াশা কাটাতে ১৯৮১-তে সংসদের উভয় কক্ষের সদস্যদের নিয়ে পর্যালোচনার জন্য এক যৌথ পর্যালোচনা কমিটি তৈরি হয়। সেই কমিটিও সরকারি কর্মচারীদের পণ দাবি করা, দেওয়া বা নেওয়ার বিরুদ্ধে ঘোষণা করতে হবে সুপারিশ করেছিল, পুরুষ কর্মীদের বিশেষ ভাবে চিহ্নিত করেনি। এ ছাড়াও সেই কমিটি বিয়ের আগে বাগদানের উৎসব নিষিদ্ধ করতে বলে, কারণ সেখানে ব্যয়ের সিংহভাগ কন্যাপক্ষকে বহন করতে হয়। কমিটি সব অনুষ্ঠানে নিমন্ত্রিতের সংখ্যা, খাদ্য, বাজনা আলোকসজ্জা নিয়ন্ত্রণের নির্দেশ জারিরও সুপারিশ করে।

পণের সঙ্গে সামাজিক সম্মান যত দিন এক করে দেখা হবে, শুধু আইনি নির্দেশ বিশেষ কিছু করতে পারবে না, কারণ আইন যারা পালন করবে, আইন লঙ্ঘনকারীদের প্রতি তাদের গোপন সহমর্মিতা থাকবে। বিয়ের বাজারে কনে এবং বর সমান জমিতে (লেভেল প্লেয়িং ফিল্ড) নেই, চাহিদা-জোগানের এই বাস্তবতাকে স্বীকার করে নিয়েও প্রশ্ন থাকে, সুপ্রিম কোর্টের নির্দেশের লক্ষ্য কেন শুধু পুরুষ কর্মীরাই হবেন? সরকারি চাকুরে মেয়েরা তো 'বেকার' মেয়েদের তুলনায় কিছুটা সুবিধার অবস্থানে আছেন। তা হলে নারী সরকারি চাকুরেরা পণ দিয়েছেন কি না, যে উপহার পেয়েছেন তা তাঁদের নামে হস্তান্তরিত করা হয়েছে কি না, এ সব নিয়ে হলফনামা জারির নির্দেশ সুপ্রিম কোর্ট কবে দেবে? সব 'উপহার' যদি সত্যিই স্বীকার নামে লেখাপড়া করে দিতে হয়, তা হলে হয়তো বরপক্ষের 'উপহার' নেওয়ার প্রবণতাও কমবে।

শেষে একটা প্রশ্ন। সব নির্দেশের লক্ষ্য সরকারি কর্মীরাই বা হবেন কেন? বেসরকারি নিয়োগকর্তারা যদি তাঁদের কর্মীদের যোগ্যতা নিয়ে হাজারো তথ্য চাইতে পারেন, তা হলে পণ দেওয়া-নেওয়ার তথ্যই বা চাইবেন না কেন?

**আইনের চোখে পণ ও
যৌতুকের পার্থক্য হল
যে পণ দেওয়া হয় বরকে
আর যৌতুক দেওয়া হয়
নবদম্পতিকে 'যুত' (যুক্ত)
জীবন যাপন করার জন্য।
প্রথমটি শাস্তিযোগ্য।
দ্বিতীয়টি নয়।**

শরিয়ত-বিরোধী বলে সম্প্রতি নিষিদ্ধ হয়েছে। মাথায় হাত পড়ে গিয়েছে তাদের, এ সবার রমরমা ব্যবসা চালাচ্ছিল যারা।

পুরুষ সরকারি কর্মী পণ নিয়েছেন কি না তা জানতে, নিয়ে থাকলে পণ নিবারণী আইনের ৬ ধারা অনুযায়ী স্বীকার নামে হস্তান্তরিত করেছেন কি না তা নিশ্চিত করতে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের প্রধান বিচারপতি সহ আরও দুই বিচারপতির ডিভিশন বেঞ্চ ও রাজ্য সরকারকে যথাযথ ব্যবস্থা নিতে নির্দেশ দিয়েছে। সেই সঙ্গে ওই আইনের ৩ ও ৪ ধারা অনুযায়ী কনে এবং বর যে উপহার পেয়েছেন, সেগুলির যথাযথ তালিকা তৈরি করতেও বলেছে। বর্তমানে নিযুক্তদের এই হলফনামা এখনই দাখিল করতে হবে এবং ভবিষ্যতে যাঁরা যোগ দেবেন, বিয়ের সময় অনুরূপ হলফনামা দিতে হবে। এ ছাড়া

দিল্লি-মুম্বইয়ে ধর্ষণ, স্ত্রীলতাহানি, নিরাপত্তা নিয়ে সংশয় বাড়ছে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি ও মুম্বই, ৯ মে: দেশের বড় বড় শহরগুলি মেয়েদের পক্ষে কতটা নিরাপদ।

দিল্লির ক্যান্টনমেন্ট এলাকায় কাল গভীর রাতে এক কলেজ ছাত্রীকে গণধর্ষণ করেছে অজ্ঞাতপরিচয় দুষ্কৃতীরা। কাল রাতেই মুম্বই লাগোয়া ঠানে শহরে ৪২ বছরের এক মহিলার স্ত্রীলতাহানির চেষ্টায় দুই গ্রেফতার করা হয়েছে পুলিশ কনস্টেবলকে। পরপর এই দু'টি ঘটনাই প্রমাণ করে দেয় দেশের মেট্রো শহরগুলিতে মেয়েদের নিরাপত্তার হাল। অনেক ক্ষেত্রেই ধর্ষণের ঘটনায় জড়িয়ে পড়ছেন পুলিশ বা নিরাপত্তাকর্মীরা। ফলে রক্ষকই ভক্ষক হয়ে ওঠার আশঙ্কাও বাড়ছে।

কিন্তু এই সমস্যার মোকাবিলা কী ভাবে করা সম্ভব? জাতীয় মহিলা কমিশনের সভানেত্রী গিরিজা ব্যাসকে এ প্রশ্ন করা হলে তিনি ফোনে বলেন

ধর্ষণের ক্ষেত্রে বর্তমান আইনের পরিবর্তন করা প্রয়োজন। বিশেষত পুলিশ ও প্রশাসনের উদাসীন্যও যে অনেক সময় ধর্ষিতাকে মুখ বন্ধ রাখতে বাধ্য করে তা-ও স্বীকার করেছেন তিনি। প্রয়োজনে প্রতিটি থানায় মহিলাদের অভিযোগ নেওয়ার জন্য একটি বিশেষ সেল খোলারও কথা বলেছেন তিনি।

তিন দিন আগেই দিল্লির যমুনাশ্রমের এলাকায় ২২ বছরের এক তরুণীকে গণধর্ষণ করে পাঁচ জন। তার সপ্তাহ তিনেক আগে মুম্বইয়ের মেরিন ড্রাইভ থানার ভিতরেই এক সপ্তদশী কিশোরীকে ধর্ষণ করে এক মদ্যপ কনস্টেবল। তড়িঘড়ি অভিযুক্ত কনস্টেবল সুনীল মোরেকে বরখাস্ত করে মুম্বই পুলিশ জনরোষকে সামাল দেওয়ার চেষ্টাও করে।

রবিবার ভোর রাতে দিল্লি

ক্যান্টনমেন্ট এলাকায় এক ছাত্রীর গাড়ি দাঁড় করিয়ে তাঁকে আর একটি গাড়িতে তুলে নেয় ধর্ষণকারীরা। আজ দিল্লি পুলিশ সূত্রে জানানো হয়েছে, ধর্ষিতা ছাত্রী অভিযুক্ত তিন জনকে শাস্ত করেছেন। ধর্ষণের পরে ক্ষতবিক্ষত অবস্থায় বাড়ির কাছেই তাঁকে ফেলে দিয়ে যায় অভিযুক্তেরা। উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের একটি রাজ্যের বাসিন্দা ওই মেয়েটি দিল্লির সতানিকেতন এলাকায় পেয়িং গেস্ট থাকতেন।

মেয়েদের নিরাপত্তার ব্যাপারে দিল্লির সুনাম আগেই নষ্ট হয়েছে। কিন্তু মুম্বই মেয়েদের জন্য নিরাপদ— মেরিন ড্রাইভের ঘটনা সেই বিশ্বাসে চিড় ধরিয়েছে। রাতবিরেতে কাজ সেরে বাড়ি ফেরার সময় মেয়েদের এত দিন ভরসা ছিল মহিলা কামরায় সশস্ত্র পুলিশ! কিন্তু সেই বিশ্বাসের ভিত টলিয়ে দিয়েছে সুনীল মোরে।

10 MAY 2005

ANADABAZAR PAKISTAN

Rights brigade picks holes in *nikaahnama*

CHANDRIMA S. BHATTACHARVA

Mumbai, May 9: Tearing into shreds the model *nikaahnama* released last week by the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, several women's and human rights organisations slammed it for being blatantly anti-women and reactionary.

At a news conference called by the Muslim Women's Rights Network, Majlis, India Centre for Human Rights and Law and Forum Against Oppression of Women, the speakers pointed out why the *nikaahnama* (marriage contract), touted as "revolutionary" by the board, was not acceptable.

"We had hoped that the personal law board would protect women's rights with the *nikaahnama*," said Noorjehan of the Muslim Women's Rights

Network. "However, this would not only be a retrograde step undermining the rights of Muslim women, but would also further ghettoise the community."

Citing examples from the *nikaahnama*, she said it was an act of misogyny — something the law board has always been guilty of. The activists also rejected the law board and its authority, saying it did not represent Indian Muslims.

The *nikaahnama* contains the following recommendations for women, they said. "*Jahan tak mumkin ho shauhar ki raaht ka lihaaz rakhna*" (As far as possible, the wife should be considerate about the need of the husband for "relief")

"*Jaazib baaton mein iski farmabardari karna*" (The wife should be obedient to

the husband)

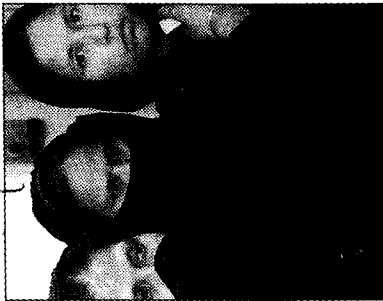
"*Kahin aana jaana ho to shauhar ki ijazat se jaana*" (The wife should take the permission of the husband before stepping out)

"*Apni izzat aur aabru ka poori tarah hifazat karna*" (She should be very cautious about her honour and respectability)

"*Hazbe zaroorat walidaiyon se mulaqat ka mauqa dena*" (When the need arises, the wife should be allowed to meet her parents and relatives)

"Another negative feature of the *nikaahnama* is that the board encourages a couple to turn to Muslim authorities for arbitration on their marriage, as opposed to the secular, judicial system of the country," Noorjehan said, as

Musqaan, another activist,



No relief

tore a copy of the *nikaahnama* into bits.

But it was most under attack for avoiding the triple *talaq* and not giving women the right to seek divorce.

Several members of the community, including women

voice, criticised the board strongly for being evasive on triple *talaq*. "It is un-Quranic and 21 Islamic countries in the world have either banned it or have made court intervention compulsory in marriage arbitration," he said.

He added that individual members on the board saw the necessity of real reform, but could not push it through because of sectarian politics within.

Shameem, a bead-worker from Santa Cruz, broke into sobs as she talked about her 12-year-old marriage to an unemployed man who could not maintain her or their two children but would not let her step out of the house. However, she could not seek divorce as Islamic law did not allow that.

The organisations are pressing for *talaq-e-tafviz*, which

is the woman's right to divorce, if her husband has granted her the power, but the board is not encouraging on that.

Hasina Khan of Awaaz-e-Niswan and Noorjehan said the *nikaahnama* was also pointless because it was not made mandatory by the board, nor was the board the representative voice of Muslims in the country.

"There is a common misconception that the board is the law-making body for Muslims in the country and its word is the rule of law. The other misconception is that they are representative of the Muslim voice, a notion reinforced by political parties and the media," Khan said.

"*Hum nikaahnama aur board ko nahin manie*," Musqaan said.

But Kamal said it was con-

trictory to reject the authority of the board while protesting against it.

"The board should ban triple *talaq* as law. It has the power to make laws. It recently passed the law that ensures the share of a daughter in agricultural property," he said.

Traditionalists, however, continued to defend the model *nikaahnama* on ground that the step should be seen in the context of social conditions and prevailing socio-economic indicators of Muslims in the country.

Urdu writer and Muslim board member Uzma Naheed termed the *nikaahnama* a "milestone" in the empowerment of the community.

Shia cleric Maulana Kalbe Sadiq echoed the author, saying much of the criticism was due to "gross ignorance".

U.N. official lauds India

'Tremendous progress in women's development'

Staff Correspondent

Women
NEW DELHI: "India has made tremendous progress in the field of women's development, if reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions and promoting the concept of gender budgeting are any indication," the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) executive director, Noeleen Heyzer, has said.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, Ms. Heyzer said it was heartening to know that 22 States and 18 Departments had been asked to incorporate gender perspective in budgeting.

She singled out as memorable her work with Indian Railways employees through a special

HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention programme at Vijayawada junction, Andhra Pradesh.

The programme was launched three years ago for the 1.8 million railway employees and about a million people who use this junction.

"We seem to have broken the stigma and the labour unions now want us to accelerate our work," she said.

According to her, the Railways has initiated a policy of administering free treatment to HIV/AIDS employees or by supplying cheap drugs.

Families of the railway employees are involved in the campaign in a big way.

"Outside the junction, the programme has helped in creating hundreds of young men and

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women leaders in schools and colleges who now have an open dialogue on the issue which was taboo a few years ago," Ms. Heyzer said.

She said that a three-day U.N. regional conference on "Development Effectiveness Through Gender Mainstreaming" beginning Tuesday would seek to assess progress towards gender equality and rural poverty reduction, based on case studies and analysis of experiences of rural women in South Asian countries.

It will also try to identify policy options, which the Governments can consider in mainstreaming gender in development programmes for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals.

10 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

Govt wants Women's Bill passed: Patil

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 8. — Union home minister Mr Shivraj Patil today reiterated that the Centre is committed to passing the women's reservation Bill. He also said that the government will bring in more Bills to support women's empowerment.

Speaking at the Saarc conference on women parliamentarians and NGOs, Mr Patil said the government was "working to build a consensus among all political parties for the purpose of getting the women's Bill passed in Parliament". He said the democratic system would only be strengthened if there

was greater representation of women at the highest levels of decision-making.

Minister of state for women and child development Ms Kanti Singh said the government was talking to political parties so that the Bill could be introduced in the next parliamentary session. She said a Bill against domestic violence on women was being prepared and such a legislation would give women a way out of the harassment meted out to them in their households. She said amendments to other Acts like the Hindu Marriage Act and Prevention of Immoral Trafficking of Women Act were being prepared.

MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Sexual harassment cases on the rise

UP, Haryana top list, Lakshadweep safest

HO-3 9/15 women

NEW DELHI: Women in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana are increasingly becoming victims of sexual harassment, if the increase in the number of cases registered in this regard is anything to go by.

According to latest official figures, the number of cases of sexual harassment reported in Haryana jumped by more than three times between 2001 and 2003, up from 401 to 1,302.

In Uttar Pradesh, 4,970 such cases were registered in 2003, nearly twice as many recorded in 2001 (2,575).

However, there was a sharp decline in the number of rape cases in the state, according to the figures tabled in Parliament.

While 1,958 rape cases were registered in 2001, the figure came down to 1,415 and 911 in the two successive years.

Overall too, crime against women registered in Uttar Pradesh nearly halved in the three

years, falling from 20,227 to 12,840.

Tamil Nadu also showed a significant fall in such cases, down from 10,111 in 2001 to 8,888 in 2003.

In the national capital Delhi, however, there was a sharp increase in cases of crime against women, especially of cruelty by husband or his relatives.

While 2,291 cases were registered in 2001, the number went up to 3,282 two years later -- up 41 per cent. Cases of cruelty by husband or his relatives showed a 777 per cent increase, up from 138 in 2001 to 1,211 in 2003.

According to the figures, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, besides Uttar Pradesh, had reported more than 10,000 cases of crimes against women in 2003.

Andhra Pradesh had the dubious distinction of recording the most cases for a single state or Union territory -- 18,382,

which was 13 per cent of the 1,40,601 such cases recorded across the country.

However, cases under Immoral Trafficking Protection Act (ITPA) in the state decreased from 1,332 to 349 between 2001 and 2003.

The Union territory of Lakshadweep appeared to be the safest for women with just four cases of crimes against them recorded in 2003.

Among the states, the honour went to Nagaland with just 25 cases.

In fact, the Union territories and north-eastern states, other than Assam, seemed to be havens of safety for women with none of them recording more than 150 cases in 2003.

There was not a single case of dowry death or sexual harassment in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim, Daman and Diu and Lakshadweep. -- PTI

09 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

Shankar Raghuraman

Conspiracy Of Silence

Rape is not just a big city problem, it often has nothing to do with lust either and the victims certainly don't 'invite' it. *Sunday Times* explodes some myths

It's a crime in which the accused is innocent till proven guilty, but the victim is guilty from the moment it is reported. That attitude is what underlines the problem of rape in India and the statistics that characterise it. What's reported is bad enough. Official data shows that two women are raped somewhere in India every hour. In fact, one in every five is not even a woman, but a child.

The reality, all women's groups aver, is much, much worse. As Flavia Agnes, lawyer and secretary of Majlis, a Mumbai-based group, puts it: "What you see is just the tip of the iceberg." But how massive is the iceberg? A survey done in Punjab a few years ago came up with the shocking finding that for every case reported, 68 go unreported. The exact number may be disputed, but the fact that only a tiny fraction of rapes actually comes to light is universally acknowledged.

As long as victims are treated as guilty by society, that reality cannot change. CPM politburo member Brin-

da Karat points out that accusations about "dressing provocatively" are not the only ones rape victims have to face. Questions are also raised about what they were doing at the scene of the crime at the given time. Innuendo about the victim having had clandestine relations with the accused is commonplace too. In general, the notion that the victims have somehow "invited" rape is depressingly widespread.

It is not surprising, therefore, that most people see rape as largely a modern urban evil. Nothing could be further from the truth. Of the 15,856 rape cases reported in India in 2003, just 1,336 — or less than 9% — came from the 35 cities with a population of more

than a million according to the 2001 census. Over 90% of the cases were in small towns and villages, where dress-codes would pass the most exacting standards of cultural policemen. If we take into account the fact that rural rape is even more under-reported than the urban problem, the share of cases in the countryside could be even higher.

That is not to understate the problem in the cities. Both Karat and Agnes agree that domestic help and migrant labourers are particularly vulnerable to rape and least likely to report it. "The more desperate the job situation, the more vulnerable they are," says Karat. That most such cases involve employers doesn't help.

The problem of child rape is also noticeably more acute in cities. Less than one in five cases nationally involved girls below the age of 18 in 2003, but the proportion for the million-plus cities was as high as 43.4%. The reality may be worse. Kavita Srivastava, an activist closely involved with two centres in Jaipur for victims of sexual violence, certainly thinks so. "Most parents of sexually abused children who come to us for help seek advice, but refuse to get the case registered," she says.

What is seldom recognised is that rape often is not about lust. "Assertion of dominance and the concept of teaching them a lesson is often the reason," Srivastava points out. She cites the example of Bhanwari Devi, a Dalit *sathin* who was raped by upper-caste villagers for challenging moribund customs like child marriage.

Karat agrees. "Women are taken to symbolise the *izzat* of the community and raping them is seen as the ultimate humiliation that can be heaped on one community by another. Far from according them respect, this strange notion of *izzat* makes them more prone to sexual abuse." If a boy from one community elopes with a girl from another, men from the girl's *biradari* "avenge" the insult by raping a woman from the boy's family. Rape thus becomes intrinsic to communal and caste clashes.

And how does the criminal justice system deal with the crime? Activists are unanimous: The record is pathetic. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data shows that over 18,100 people were tried for rape in 2003 but only 4,645 were convicted. That's a conviction rate of just over 25%. But, says Agnes, the real figure may be closer to 5%. How's that? First, the NCRB figures pertain only to cases brought to trial, while many are dropped ostensibly for lack of evidence even before the trial stage. Further, many will go in appeal to a higher court and ultimately get off. "Something like 95% of those convicted at the sessions court level appeal in a higher court. On the other hand, only in the rarest of cases does the state challenge an acquittal," points

out Agnes. What explains the low conviction rate? The mindset of the police, sections of the judiciary and the law itself, the activists will tell you.

Delhi police commissioner K K Paul argues that with 95% of rapes involving people known to the victim, prevention is extremely difficult. Kanwaljeet Deol, who headed the Delhi Police's crime against women cell for many years, agrees, but feels the police's ability to provide confidence to the victims through quick and thorough investigation is crucial. Paul says the rise in reported cases reflects increasing confidence in the police.

Yet, in 2002, there were 147 policemen facing charges of custodial rape. Of the 132 that were tried during the year, only four were convicted. Of the 15 cases left pending for 2003, none were convicted. Those figures do little to enhance confidence about the police's attitude to rape.

This attitude becomes particularly important because, as Agnes points out, "if the initial investigation including the medical examination is not properly done, proving the charge

Almost half the victims of rape in million-plus cities are minors

beyond reasonable doubt becomes extremely difficult." Srivastava laments the fact that the process is unkind to the victim. For instance, the absence of injury is taken as evidence against rape, ignoring the fact that rape may often involve coerced consent.

The law itself restricts the definition of rape to penile penetration of the vagina. Forced oral or anal sex is not included. These and procedural lacunae have been repeatedly raised by women's organisations and a public interest litigation by Sakshi led to the Law Commission recommending some changes (not entirely to the satisfaction of women's groups), but the Sexual Assault Bill that was to have resulted from the process remains stillborn.

Beneath it all lies a conspiracy of silence that envelops all of us. As Karat puts it: "More women are killed or injured in sexual assault than through terrorism. Yet, how often have you seen the issue debated in Parliament or figuring on political agendas?"

• With inputs from Megha Suri

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2 RAPES TAKE PLACE EVERY HOUR IN INDIA

1 IN 5 VICTIMS IS A CHILD

19 OUT OF 20 RAPE ACCUSED WALK FREE

IN 2002, 102 POLICEMEN WERE TRIED FOR CUSTODIAL RAPE; ONLY 4 WERE CONVICTED

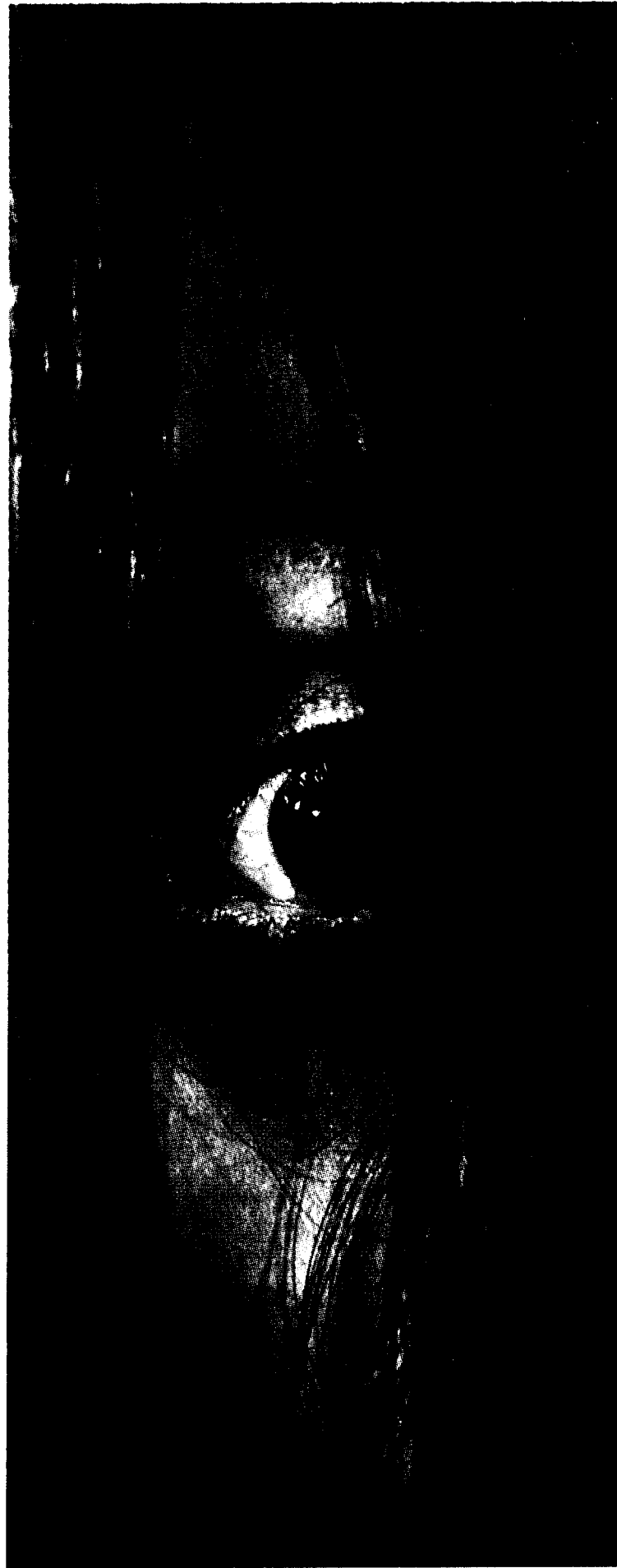


PHOTO: NEERAJ PAUL

Aamchi Mumbai all shook up

Natasha Natu & Rukmini Shrinivasan

April 26: A 22-year-old housewife was gangraped at Kanjur Marg over a family feud.

April 29: A 13-year-old mentally challenged girl in Chembur was raped by an unidentified youth while her mother was away on work.

May 3: A toddler was raped by a 37-year-old teacher who saw her playing outside her house. Only a week earlier, another toddler was raped by her neighbour at Wadala Truck Terminus.

Even as Mumbai struggles to come to terms with the rape of a teenager by a policeman on Marine Drive, statistics tell a stunning tale. In the first quarter of the year, crimes against women have shot up by an average of 22%, with a majority of them being rapes of minor girls (rise of 32%). All of which lends weight to what women in Mumbai are already feeling — that the city is no longer the safe space for women that it was.

While the police attribute it to the increase in recording of offences, activists say a low conviction rate emboldens criminals to commit more crimes. "The crime rate has risen since there has been an actual increase in crimes against women. The offenders know they can get away with the help of money, power or political

pull," says Sandhya Gokhale of the Forum Against Oppression of Women. "Besides, the humiliation one faces while attempting to get justice in court could itself be a deterrent for victims."

Says a counsellor from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, "Only last week, I asked a 13-year-old girl to complain to the cops against her father after he beat her up black and blue, in an inebriated state. She was bleeding and had to be admitted to the hospital. But the cops sent her back home saying it would be an unnecessary hassle."

Joint commissioner (crime) Meera Borwankar says things are changing: "Many more women complainants are now coming up to me personally. Women are getting more confident and this has resulted in a spurt of such crimes getting reported."

But women in Mumbai say their faith in the city's safety is slowly getting eroded. "When I moved to Mumbai from Delhi, I was told I could travel in trains at 1 am if I wanted," says graphic designer Samiksha Sharma. "This was true for a while, then there were some muggings and acid attacks in trains. And then this police rape case. I don't know if I want a cop or not in the compartment anymore, but I know I'm no longer completely safe."

The Assaults That Outraged Us

MUMBAI, APRIL 21, 2005: A 17-year-old college student was taking a stroll down Marine Drive with two male friends. They were spotted by beat constable Sunil More who summoned them to the police chowki. After scaring the boys away, he allegedly took the girl inside, locked the door and raped her. The incident shocked the city; Mumbai police called it "most shameful" and "an individual act of aberration".

DELHI, OCT 14, 2003: It remains one of the Capital's infamously unresolved cases. A 36-year-old Swiss diplomat was abducted — and raped — in her own car, near Siri Fort Auditorium. The woman had just come out after watching a movie and was unlocking her car when two youths snatched the keys and forced her inside. While one of the men drove the car around South Delhi, the other raped her.

AHMEDABAD, DEC 31, 2003: "This episode has tainted the fair name of my family and one cannot stop the public from making dirty comments..." wrote Hetal Joshi (name changed) in her suicide note. The 24-year-old was gangraped by her lover and four others at a city hotel on New Year's eve. A week later, she committed suicide. The family blamed local police for insensitive handling of the case.

LUCKNOW, MAY 2, 2005: "They burnt the skin all over my body with a cigarette lighter," said Zahira (name changed), recounting her horrific experience. The 13-year-old maid servant was on her way home when she was abducted by three youths in a car. She was tortured, gangraped and dumped by the roadside, unconscious. Three suspects were detained later but have since been let off.

BANGALORE, APRIL 24, 2005: A 28-year-old labourer was gangraped by seven men on the campus of Bangalore University. The woman and her sons, aged 8 and 10, were offered a lift in a taxi by four men. They were taken to a secluded spot where the woman was raped, while the children were confined in the car. The men then called three more 'friends' who took over. Four suspects have been arrested.

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'DELHI DOESN'T TREAT WOMEN WITH RESPECT'



Arani Sinha
MA (Political Science), JNU, Delhi

I belong to Ranchi and have been to all the four metros, but Delhi is the most unsafe. Even a simple thing like walking or crossing the road is fraught with danger. You could have men following you in a car or gesticulating at you. In buses you have them rubbing against you. This city does not treat women with respect. I'm scared to be out after 8 pm. When I came here, my friends advised me to keep safety-pins for security! What you really need is to be on your guard.

'WHEN MY DAUGHTERS COME HOME, I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER'



Renu Tahim
Mother of two daughters, Delhi

I do worry a lot. I begin to worry even if the girls are late by half-an-hour. But of course we have to let them go — to college, for work, to meet friends. Nidhi, my younger daughter, goes to college in an auto so I'm more worried about her than about Neha who now drives to work. But she is not safe either. How can any mother feel secure when even policemen can turn rapists? So every evening, when my girls come back home, I say a silent little prayer thanking God.

VOICES

'FOR MISCREANTS, IT'S ALL ABOUT EASY FUN'



Charmayne Swain
Executive secretary to the President, Spirits Division, UB Group, Bangalore

Earlier, even at 10 pm I could go home through dark and deserted roads and still feel safe. Travelling alone in Bangalore is becoming quite worrying nowadays. Today, miscreants feel there is easy fun to be had and harass women commuting alone late at night. There are those who try to frighten a woman by driving slowly alongside and making lewd comments, honking or jeering. But, if you are not perturbed, they leave... In any case, security must be beefed up.

'COMMUTING EVEN DURING THE DAY IS A PROBLEM'



Ritushree Chaturvedi
PG Student, Lucknow

Lucknow is not safe for women anymore. There have been quite a few incidents of molestation and eve-teasing lately and commuting even during the day is a major problem. One dare not go out alone after dark. Even areas like Hazratganj, Kapoorthala and Aminabad are not safe enough for a girl to move around freely. What makes things worse is the apathy of the authorities who look for excuses to protect the culprits. This attitude only emboldens such people.

'LOCK YOUR CAR DOORS, AVOID SECLUDED ROUTES'



Kavita Dange
Insurance Executive, Pune

Barring one-off incidents, Pune remains by and large a safe city for women. They just need to keep their wits about them. I do not take any special precautions, except keeping my car doors locked while driving in the evening, and taking crowded routes instead of secluded ones. College girls may get stared at and followed around a bit. But that's it. Many girls here are looking around for pepper spray. I'm told it's a common self-defence tool in the North.

ধর্ষণ প্রসঙ্গ সংসদে

নয়া দিল্লি, ৬ জুন কিছুর বিনিময়ে শান্তি মকুব করে দেওয়া যায়, এই গোত্রের অপরাধের মধ্যে ধর্ষণ পড়ে না। আজ সংসদে সিপিএম সাংসদ বরকলা রাধাকৃষ্ণ এই মন্তব্য করে বলেন, এ ধরনের আবেদন আদালতের গ্রাহ্য করা উচিত নয়। আর এক সিপিএম সাংসদ হাম্মান মোল্লার মতে, ধর্ষিতাকে বিয়ে করতে চাইলেই যদি ধর্ষককে মাফ করে দেওয়া হয়, তা হলে ভবিষ্যতে ধর্ষণের ঘটনা আরও বাড়বে। ধর্ষিতাকে বিয়ে করতে চেয়েছে, এমন এক ধর্ষককে মঙ্গলবার মাফ করেছে মুম্বইয়ের এক আদালত। ক্ষুর রাধাকৃষ্ণ বলেন, “এটা আদালতের বিবেচ্য বিষয় নয়। সাক্ষ্যপ্রমাণের ভিত্তিতেই রায় দেওয়া উচিত।” দিন কয়েক আগে দিল্লিতে একটি মামলায় বিয়ের প্রস্তাব ধর্ষিতা ফিরিয়ে দেওয়ার পরে সেই ধর্ষকের যাবজ্জীবন দণ্ড হয়। — পি টি আই

07 MAY 2005

ANADABAZAR PATNKA

Jail tolls for rapist, not wedding bells

OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 4: A ward boy who raped and partly blinded a nurse in a Delhi hospital and two years later offered to marry her, just before the sentence against him was to be read out, has been handed life imprisonment.

The victim shrugged off the marriage proposal as a "bogus offer" made to escape punishment and demanded that 24-year-old Bhura be hanged.

Bhura was today sentenced to life imprisonment each under Section 376 of the IPC for rape and Section 326 for causing grievous injury. He was sent to jail for a year for causing illegal confinement. All the sentences will run concurrently. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 10,000. If he fails to pay up, the rapist will have to undergo three more years of simple imprisonment.

The judge who had deferred his verdict yesterday, after Bhura filed an application offering to marry the victim "because no one else would", today said the proposal was made with a "mala fide intention to evade the law".

After convicting Bhura for the brutal rape of the nurse, then 19, during which he had gouged out her right eye and wounded the left, additional sessions judge J.M. Malik was about to announce the sentence yesterday when Bhura's counsel said he wanted to marry the victim.



A lawyer with the victim after the hearing. (PTI)

Examining the application, the judge asked the victim and her parents to appear before the court today to file their reply. The court also reserved the sentence for a day.

The nurse was on night duty at the private Shanti Mukund Hospital in east Delhi in September 2003 when she was assaulted.

Looking after a comatose patient, she awoke in the middle of the night to find the convict trying to force himself on her. When she resisted, Bhura plunged his fingers into her eyes, gouging out her right eye and wounding the left. He then dragged her to an adjacent bathroom, raped her and locked

her in. She lay unconscious and bled through the night.

When she was found, Shanti Mukund Hospital did not treat her and referred her instead to Guru Tegh Bahadur hospital, where doctors did not attend to her for three days.

As a result of the delay, the victim lost sight in her right eye. She had to undergo four major facial operations and psychiatric treatment for depression.

The victim, who appeared in court with her parents, said in an affidavit: "The convict has committed a horrendous crime which should not be repeated. After he was found guilty, he is trying to escape punishment with the bogus offer... he should be hanged."

The court's move to reserve the sentencing for a day after the marriage offer sparked an outcry from women's groups which said the punishment should have been handed immediately.

"It is totally outrageous and insulting and will set a bad precedent," said activist Brinda Karat.

Nirmala Sitaraman, a member of the National Commission for Women, said a rapist should not be allowed to make such an offer to a victim. "It is not for him to make marriage offers. The marriage offer, coming after such a gruesome rape, is atrocious."

Bhura's counsel said he would appeal against the ruling in the high court.

Laws change, not attitude to women

Islamabad, May 4 (Reuters): Changing laws is the easy part, changing attitudes is something else.

Shameful stories in recent days of horrific rapes in Pakistan and India, murders in Afghanistan and an impoverished Bangladeshi mother offering to sell an eye have all underscored how far South Asia has to go to give down-trodden womenfolk justice.

Delegates from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were meeting in Islamabad this week for a conference to review how efforts over the past decade to promote women's agenda was faring in a region rife with stories of rapes, acid attacks, ho-

nour and dowry killings and human trafficking.

"There's a lot of law writing, standard setting, programmes being planned, but is any of this making a difference on the ground situation?" Radhika Coomaraswamy, director of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo, said.

"The biggest problem in South Asia, we find, is that people are using culture and religion to deny women's rights," she said, adding that this was regardless of whether the reactionaries were Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist. She believed that South Asian men felt threatened by social and cultural changes, partly spread by globalisation and mass media, and women

were bearing the brunt of their fears.

A UN Development Fund for Women report prepared for the Islamabad meeting noted violence against women in South Asia was on the rise, based on cases reported to the police. The data may be raw, but even then so many cases go unreported that it renders the size of the problem almost invisible, according to Coomaraswamy.

Late last month in Bangladesh, 26-year-old Shefali Begum offered to sell one of her eyes in desperation to earn enough money to feed her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter.

In Afghanistan, bodies of three women were found on the roadside on Monday. They

had been raped and strangled. Their killers left a note warning other women not to work with aid organisations.

And in India today, rights groups were outraged when a court allowed a man convicted of raping and partly blinding a young nurse to offer to marry his victim.

"Men feel women are going out of their control," said Coomaraswamy, adding: "They try to control them through violence."

For the past week Pakistani newspapers have highlighted the case of 17-year-old Nazish Asghar, who threatened self-immolation unless the government ensured there would be no protection for the men, including police officers, she has accused of rape.

The student said she was abducted and gang-raped for over 37 days, and then raped by police after being rescued.

Nilofar Bakhtiar, special adviser on women's affairs to Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, said women are becoming more confident in reporting such crimes to the police, but many still believe that remaining silent is the safer course of action.

While Pakistan recently introduced legislation to outlaw honour killings, it has still to review Islamic *hudud* laws governing rape. Bakhtiar hopes there will be changes soon. "When a woman goes to the police station to report a rape case, if she does not have four (male) witnesses... she is put behind bars for adultery."



Shefali: Desperate bid (Reuters)

Manmohan's assurance to AIDWA on Women's Reservation Bill

AIDWA reminds him of the promise given in the CMP

Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, on Wednesday assured a women's delegation that the Women's Reservation Bill would be tabled in Parliament in the next session as negotiations were on with other political parties to arrive at a consensus on the issue.

Dr. Singh told the All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) that he supported the Bill and felt that it should be passed at the earliest but some political parties had reservations over it, according to the AIDWA general secretary, Sudha Sundararaman. The Home

Minister is holding the negotiations with other political parties, the delegation was told.

Mock parliament

The 10-member delegation called on the Prime Minister after women from across the country participated in a mock women's parliament here. The session reflected attitudes of various political parties towards the Bill, at the end of which the Bill was passed.

Disappointing

Reminding Dr. Singh of the solemn assurance given in the National Common Minimum Programme that the Govern-

ment would pass the Bill, the memorandum said that it was disappointing that the Bill had not been listed for discussion in the current session.

"While we do appreciate the difficulties that a coalition Government may face in passing legislation that is not totally acceptable to all its partners, this cannot be a justification for the non-implementation of solemn assurances," the memorandum said.

AIDWA president Subhashini Ali told the Prime Minister that thousands of their members from all over the country had assembled to press for the passage of the Bill.

They represented millions of women whose patience was now being exhausted by the refusal of successive governments to initiate even a serious discussion on the Bill, let alone ensure its passage.

"We appeal to you to make a clean break with this attitude which smacks of not only gender insensitivity but insensitivity to the process of making democracy more inclusive and vibrant. We would request you to place the Bill for a thorough discussion in Parliament and to ensure that a vote is taken on it. If this is done with sincerity, the enactment of the Bill will become a reality," the memorandum said.

Shanti Mukund rape case convict says he wants to marry victim

'I will not marry him, I cannot marry him...' she retorts

NEW DELHI: In a dramatic development in a Sessions court here on Tuesday, minutes before the court was to pronounce the quantum of punishment to be handed down to him, the convict in the sensational Shanti Mukund Hospital rape case moved an application expressing a desire to marry the rape victim.

Examining the application of Bhura, the ward boy who in the year 2003 brutally raped the 22-year-old nurse in the hospital premises and seriously wounded her eyes, Additional Sessions Judge J. M. Malik, asked the victim and her parents to appear before it on Wednesday to file their reply.

The court also reserved for Wednesday its pronouncement of the quantum of sentence to be handed down to Bhura.

'I will not marry him'

Within hours of Tuesday's developments in the court, however, the nurse refused to marry her tormentor. "I will not marry him. I cannot marry him," the nurse told reporters when asked about her reaction to the ward boy's proposal in the court.

"He should be given the severest punishment ... he should be hanged so that such a horrendous act is not repeated," the 22-year-old said.

The nurse, who was brutally raped and blinded in one eye by Bhura in the hospital in December 2003, would give her version officially in the court on Wednesday.

'Reformed man'

In his application moved on

Tuesday morning, Bhura pleaded with the court to take a lenient view of the case against him as he was now a "reformed man" and said since no one else would be ready to marry the young victim due to the stigma she carried, he would like to tie the knot with her.

The nurse was on duty at the hospital in East Delhi looking after a comatose patient on the night of December 7-8, 2003.

She suddenly woke up in the middle of the night to find the ward boy attempting to force himself on her. When she tried

to shrug him off, Bhura plunged his fingers into her eyes, gouging out her right eye and wounding the left.

He then dragged her to an adjacent bathroom, raped her, and locked her in.

The court had framed charges against the accused on January 19 this year. The prosecution examined 21 witnesses to prove its case, leading to the conviction of the accused. - PTL.

UNI adds: In his application moved through amicus curae Mukesh Ahuja on Tuesday, Bhura said: "In order to save the life

of the victim as well as both the families, the convict from the core of his heart without prejudice to the merit of the case is ready to marry her." He said he would bear all the expenses of the marriage.

Upon this, the judge asked the Investigating Officer to arrange for the appearance of the family in court on Wednesday and deferred the pronouncement of sentence till then.

The Judge said the quantum of punishment might be reduced if the victim agrees to marry the convict.

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04 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

04 MAY 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

'Muslim women should have right to divorce'

Victims of triple talaq say model nikahnama OK, but strict laws needed

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 3

THE All-India Muslim Personal Law Board's (AIMPLB) much talked-about model *nikahnama* may have made news, but not in Behrampada, a Muslim colony in Mumbai.

In the narrow, sunshined starved bylanes of this *basti* in Bandra (East), mention *talaq* and the stories tumble out — of men divorcing their wives by uttering

the word thrice, sometimes for bizarre reasons like there was less salt in the *salan* (curry).

On Sunday, the AIMPLB advised that triple *talaq* should be "avoided". But Najmunissa — the 28-year-old is fighting a bitter battle with her ex-husband after he pronounced *talaq* during an argument with her family — will tell you that only a strict law will work.

"*Usne dhoke se kya* (he cheated us)," says Najmunissa, who makes a living giving tuition. "He called my family members saying he wanted to meet. They got into an argument. Enraged, he just said *talaq* thrice and ended it."

During her year-long marriage, Najmunissa claims that



Najmunissa says her divorce is invalid. "If anyone disagrees, let him/her pay for my maintenance". Express

she faced harassment for dowry — she has dragged her husband to court. A year after her divorce, she is yet to receive her *mehr* of Rs 5,581.

But the Std XII dropout does not believe her divorce is valid. "Is this some kind of joke? How can he say *talaq* thrice and believe it is valid?"

Najmunissa, who claims she's an *aatima* (a *madarsa* graduate educated in Islamic teachings), argues that Islam never advocates this form of *talaq*.

"Our religion asks for *talaq* in three sittings with a period in between when the couple can try and sort out differences," she explained.

While Najmunissa watched the AIMPLB's announcement

on TV, a couple of lanes away, Saira Sheikh (name changed) was not even aware the Muslim body existed.

"Middle-class women know of the AIMPLB from newspapers or the TV. But poorer women don't know anything," said Noorjehan Safia Niaz, co-director of Women's Research Action Group. "The Board members have not made any attempt to reach out to women at grassroots levels."

Saira, 30, who runs a telephone booth, was not even present for her divorce proceedings. "My ex-husband called my family members to a masjid and pronounced *talaq*. And it was accepted," she said. "This form of *talaq* is not right."

Women miss Kuwait vote

Kuwait, May 3 (Reuters): Kuwaiti women will not be able to take part in local elections this year after a suffrage bill was delayed in parliament, but similar polls in 2009 could yet be opened to them, parliament's speaker said today.

"Women will not participate in this (year's elections) but if the law is approved, women would take part in the coming polls," Jassem al-Kharafi said. A bill to grant women the right to vote or run in municipal polls for the first time failed to pass in parliament yesterday, but was not defeated, after many Islamist and conservative MPs abstained.

Kharafi said parliament had decided today to delay a further vote on the bill for two weeks, meaning that even if it is approved, it is unlikely to be soon enough to allow women to participate in the 2005 polls.

Among the 60 deputies and ministers present at yesterday's session, 29 voted in support, two against and 29 abstained. The abstentions mean the required quorum of 33 MPs was not achieved because an abstaining MP is counted as absent.

Some MPs privately said the abstention was a delaying tactic by the bill's opponents. Others may have abstained because a vote against the bill would upset the pro-western government, while a "yes" vote risks angering Islamist or conservative tribal supporters who are against giving women more rights.

Parliament approved the legislation in a first vote two weeks ago, but many Islamists, tribal and other MPs opposed to female suffrage were then absent. Kuwaiti women are traditionally more liberal and educated than their Gulf Arab counterparts but lag behind some of them in political rights.

04 MAY 2005

LEGISLATION

IAF launches two-pronged inquiry

Shillong, May 2

THE INDIAN Air Force is conducting two separate inquiries into flying officer Anjali Gupta's allegation of sexual harassment and the irregularities she was charged with, Air Chief Marshal S.P. Tyagi, said here on Monday.

Tyagi said that he had first received Gupta's letter on sexual harassment on April 7 and immediately ordered an inquiry headed by an Air Vice-Marshal.

However, the officer herself was 'chargesheeted' for various offences including 'insubordination, indiscipline and financial irregularities'. "We should not link the two issues," he said. As the Chief of Air Staff, he said, his job was to protect a woman officer from any harassment, but also to ensure that tough action was taken against any indiscipline. Citing a past incident

of the IAF dismissing an officer on charges of harassment, Tyagi said that the force had never tolerated any indiscipline.

Asked when the probe report would be submitted, Tyagi said that the trial was on and open to the media. The air chief did not agree with a questioner that the Anjali episode would discourage other women to join the IAF. "Our inquiries are fair, transparent and just which will bring out the truth," he said. The IAF is proud of its 600 women officers who are doing an excellent job, he says.

Asked why women were not allowed to fly jet aircraft, the air chief said that it was a process of evolution, though he personally favoured them being given the chance. Most of the foreign countries so far did not allow its women to fly jet aircraft, he said.

Meanwhile, in Bangalore the

she reported ill.

The four-member inquiry team including two women, headed by Air Vice Marshal V.R. Iyer, were going through relevant documents to look into the charges by Anjali at the Aircraft and Systems Testing Establishment (ASTE), where she works as an education officer.

"They (CoI) are not the team to find who is guilty. It is a judicial process and they will submit a report to the convening authority (Training Command Chief), IAF spokesman V.M. Raghunath told reporters here. He said the statements of the three officers, one of whom was a former Commandant of ASTE, and Gupta will be recorded by the four-member team.

In the court martial, the prosecutor, replying to the objections by defending officer on the charges against Gupta, said there was no procedural lapses in framing the

charges and the Air Force Act had been framed for instilling discipline, while asserting that Anjali was at fault when she claimed allowance for a car while possessing scooter. "Why did she give the scooter number while projecting it as a car?" asked prosecutor Wg Cdr R D Dubey and charged that if it was not checked, "she could go on to do other major frauds."

Taking serious objections to the defence officer Wg Cdr Bhupesh dismissing the charges as "trivial and baseless," Dubey said officers of the IAF should lead by example within and outside the force.

He said the charge of conduct unbecoming of an officer, if proved under the Air Force Act, could lead to imprisonment of up to 14 years and added Anjali's throwing the breakfast prepared for a fellow officer was one such act of conduct.

PTI

Sexual harassment



Air chief S.P. Tyagi

Court of Inquiry (CoI) into sexual harassment charges levelled by Anjali Gupta against her three superior officers, today began assessing documentary evidence on the charges, while the court martial against Gupta on separate charges was adjourned for tomorrow after

03 MAY 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

NIGHT SHIFTS

women

Empowerment For Women Or Making Them More Vulnerable?

women

5/26
26/9

By FAIZAN MUSTAFA

The recent decision of the Union Cabinet to amend the Factories Act to enable women to work night shifts is nothing more than a symbolic gesture and must be urgently reviewed as, rather than empowering women, it will make them further vulnerable. We are still finding it difficult to give effect to the apex court's directions in the celebrated Vishakha case about the protection of women's rights at the work place.

The time is still not ripe for such a change in India and, therefore, we should not rush to implement the 1990 Protocol of the International Labour Organisation which was ratified by us in 2003 permitting night work for women. The Union government must do something more concrete for achieving the constitutional goal of gender justice.

Depressing figures

"In a country where men have no sensitivity, let no unfortunate women be born there, Oh women, what sin have you committed that you should be born in India!" wrote Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in disgust while analysing society's attitude towards women in India. Things have not changed much for the fair sex in modern and fast developing India. The figures are too depressing to note. A woman is raped every 47 minutes in India, another is kidnapped or abducted every 44 minutes while a third is subjected to cruelty by her husband or relatives and nearly 19 dowry deaths take place every day. In the past two decades reported rape cases have increased nearly 400 per cent. Women are not safe even in the national capital of India. Worse are cases of child rape. An average of two such cases are reported every day. Similarly shocking is the rising trend of incest in the country.

While women constitute less than one-tenth of the wage-based labour force, they also suffer because of discriminatory conditions of work. Generally, wages for women are as much as one-third less than that of men for the same nature of work. Where wages are comparable, women workers are often the last to be hired and the first to be fired. Sexual harassment is virtually an unwritten clause in the terms of service of women workers at all levels and there is normally no redress.

The percentage of women has risen in non-agriculture employment in recent years. One main reason for this phenomenon is preference for women em-

ployees who are considered "less troublesome" and are available for low wages. Most of the women workers are in the informal sector. They live in abject poverty, work long hours at sub-minimum wages, and suffer from occupational diseases like body ache, anaemia, dizziness, respiratory problems and gynaecological disorders. According to a study which covered agriculture workers in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, women involved in cotton

many industries. Women are perceived as surplus during all such exercises of retrenchment or voluntary retirement schemes. While the working man is perceived as the breadwinner, the working woman is someone who works for intellectual or personal satisfaction. She can afford to "lose" the job and this is more so in middle and upper middle class strata of society.

The member-states of the United Nations adopted the dec-

abuse, dowry harassment, female infanticide are some of the most glaring examples of gender based violence, yet there is no effective legislation to eliminate them. Whether the government pays heed to these issues remains to be seen? On the other hand, Criminal Law expressly exempts marital rape from the purview of penal laws. Thus the husband has an absolute right to have a free go at his wife whose consent is irrelevant in our law. Believe it or not, the Madhya Pradesh government has fixed "rates" of compensation for those unfortunate women who undergo the agony of rape. The state home minister informed the assembly that a woman would get Rs 10,000 if raped once and Rs 20,000 if twice and so on. What a shame! Even Uma Bharati as chief minister did not find time or muster courage to undo this inhuman and humiliating policy.

No meaning

Moreover the most cherished constitutional right to equality under Article 14 of the Constitution does not accept women as an entity in their own right. Women are to be treated equally with men and not vice-versa. As a result they are entitled to only such things which men are entitled to. Their own choice, emotions, experiences have no meaning. Third generation feminists are not demanding what is known as "sameness doctrine", i.e., women be treated similar to men. They are rather advocating that men and women are different but these differences should be celebrated. Women should be treated differently from men but with honour and dignity.

Men should be equal partners in fight against injustices to women. We need radical changes in the law of rape. Whatever violates the integrity of women's body should be considered rape. The definition of child rape must be extended to use of objects, instruments etc. Similarly, evidence law must be drastically amended so that the past character of the victim has no bearing on the evidentiary value of her testimony.

Changes in property laws, particularly agricultural property laws from which women have been excluded, are crying need of the hour. The divorcee's right to share matrimonial property need to be protected. The right to shelter for all single women of any category — unmarried, deserted, divorcee or widow must get priority in our housing schemes. Finally the UPA government must quickly get the 33 per cent reservation Bill passed if it is really sincere about women's empowerment.



plucking in Punjab, tobacco processing activities in Gujarat, brass-work in Tamil Nadu, stone quarries in Gujarat and prawn peelers in Kerala, about 80 per cent of the workers in agriculture and informal sector comprise women.

Malnutrition among women workers heavily reduces their efficiency. About 60 per cent of women in the country are anaemic. Dizziness accounts for a majority, i.e. 75 per cent of the ailments of women working in tobacco processing. Pain in the abdomen, headaches, vomiting and skin problems of the feet are other major problems.

Treated as surplus

The noise level in brass units is 110 decibels, thrice that of the recommended level of 35 decibels set by the World Health Organisation, and this has resulted in several complaints of ear pain and mental tension. Aside from the health hazards, women workers also face sexual oppression, rape, forced prostitution, sexual harassment. Women workers in stone crushing are reportedly beaten up at the work site with no resistance from others.

Women in the unorganised sector are not covered under schemes like provident fund or maternity leave. Moreover, mechanisation, an offshoot of globalisation and liberalisation, has resulted in retrenchment in

laration on the "Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" in 1967, which was translated into legal form in the 1979 convention. India, however, ratified the convention only in December 1992. When India signed the convention, it registered its reservation on two important Articles. One of these imposes an obligation on the government to modify and alter the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of men and women with a view to eliminating sex-role stereotypes and notions of the superiority of men and inferiority of women. The second Article, dealing with marriage and family laws, calls for measures to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of men and women on family relations, particularly in marriages, are equal. As a result these Articles have no applicability in India.

While India takes cognisance of violations of women's rights in public and private areas, there is no manifestation of India's commitment to them in the daily lives of women in both urban and rural areas. There are certain areas which have been treated by the government as being the areas of a woman's private life, where no human right is relevant. This distinction is unnatural. It can hardly be disputed that the violence against women takes place at home.

Marital rape, child sexual

The author is Registrar of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh

Women empowerment only on paper, says Speaker

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

TAKING a dig at governments for keeping well-meaning policies confined to policy-papers, the Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee said that nationally and internationally developmental policies to empower women needs to be "urgently implemented".

"This will help women realise their full potential and ensure equal contribution from them in national development," he said while addressing the 112th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Manila.

A staunch advocate of 33

per cent reservation bill for women candidates in the Indian Parliament, Chatterjee said he was also of the view that all policies and programmes should not remain on paper "but implemented effectively and wherever needed, corrective actions taken".

Asserting that gender justice warrants "extra-emphasis on the close inter-linkage among political, economic and social presentations", he said domestic and international policies should address country-specific issues, without compromising on the eventual goal which was a gender sensitive society.

Chatterjee warned that no debate on the global, political, economic and social situation would be meaningful unless it addressed the issues relating to women who constitute half of the world population.

He said it was lamentable that women's rights still remains a yet-to-be-achieved goal. "It is matter of concern that even 30 years after we celebrated International Women's Year, and through the four world conference on woman, a major section of women are politically, economically and socially still underprivileged in comparison to their male counterparts," he said.

05 APR 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

Women night shift awaits safety belt

MONOBINA GUPTA

New Delhi, March 30: The government has not thought through the safeguards it said it would put in place while it announced yesterday that women would be allowed to work nights with an amendment to the Factories Act of 1948.

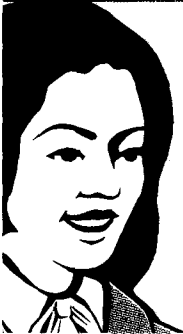
It now appears that the safeguards would be worked out after talks with trade unions before the actual amendment is made.

When information and broadcasting minister S. Jaipal Reddy unveiled the cabinet decision to remove the bar on women working night shifts (10 pm to 6 am), he had sought to allay fears of sexual harassment with the promise of safeguards.

A CPM-affiliated women's organisation and a trade union owing allegiance to the same party had opposed the decision on two counts — one fearing that employers would force women to work at night and two that the chances of their being subjected to sexual abuse would escalate.

PROTECTION POINTS

Safeguards suggested by unions and women's organisations



- Transportation
- Creche
- Toilets and drinking water
- Cluster of women workers
- Reliable security guards
- Medical facilities

"We can work out the specific safeguards later. Women's organisations and trade unions are free to come up with their suggestions which can be incorporated into the act," said a labour ministry official.

Women's organisations and trade unions have already informally suggested some safeguards (see chart).

"The amendment will first be discussed in Parliament and may even have to be sent to a select committee in case there is too much opposition," the official said.

The second national labour commission, which is the government's guiding

light for labour law reforms, said the ban on women working night shifts must be removed. But it, too, echoed the concerns of the trade unions.

It said: "The number of women workers on a shift should not be less than five. The management should provide satisfactory arrangements for their transport, safety and rest before or after shift hours."

However, the proposed amendment only talks about general safeguards. "It will be subject to safeguards for the occupational safety and health as well as the protection of dignity, honour and safety of women workers. It will pro-

vide for safe transportation from the factory premises to the nearest point of their residence."

CITU leader W.R. Wardharajan said: "The Indian situation is not conducive to women working night shifts."

CPM central committee member and women's leader Brinda Karat had expressed the fear that "the amendment makes it mandatory for women to be on night shift. But it should be a matter of choice".

The labour ministry explained that each establishment would have to decide if it wanted to allow women workers on night shifts.

"It will be a decision taken at the local level depending on the conditions that prevail in a particular factory," it said.

The ministry stressed that factory owners would have to comply with the safeguards once they were listed or be penalised with a maximum of two years in jail or a Rs 1 lakh fine.

Labour leaders point out how laws are violated even now in spite of punitive provisions.

Nalco chief faces sack for sexual harassment

Rajnish Sharma
New Delhi, March 30

IN THE first-ever incident of its kind, the Centre has decided to sack the chairman and managing director of National Aluminium Company (Nalco), C. Venkataramana, after an independent inquiry committee found the high-profile bureaucrat guilty of sexual harassment. Highly-placed government sources said Venkataramana's termination had been cleared by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) and a formal announcement would follow shortly.

Though this is not unheard of in companies abroad — remember the celebrated Phaneesh Murthy case — such a move does not have a parallel in the country.

The case first hit the headlines in February last year when a senior Nalco executive complained that Venkataramana had tried to sexually harass her. The incident took place in Mumbai, when the woman met the Nalco chief to press for her promotion which had been pending for several years. Venkataramana invited the woman to a Mumbai hotel where he offered her drinks and later tried to molest her. However, she managed to escape him.

Following the furore over the incident, Nalco hurriedly conducted an internal probe that gave a clean chit to Venkataramana. However, the Centre took serious note of the charges and constituted an independent committee, that the Supreme Court had dictated in cases of sexual harassment, to probe the incident. Venkataramana was asked to proceed on leave initially but he subsequently joined the PSU.

Government sources said action would also be initiated against Nalco's regional manager in Mumbai, Virender Singh, who had apparently persuaded his colleague to go and meet Venkataramana in the hotel. "Action against Singh can be initiated by the Nalco management. But in case of the CMD it had to be approved by the ACC. Even the Union ministry of mines has recommended the dismissal of Venkataramana," a senior official said. It has also been suggested that Venkataramana be given three months' salary and asked to quit immediately.

Sources said the Centre was keen to check incidents of sexual harassment in work places. The sacking of the Nalco chief, officials feel, will motivate more and more women to come forward with their complaints.

Spycam tapes woman in nude

The Jadavpur police on Wednesday arrested two youths for videotaping a schoolteacher in the nude inside her bathroom and bedroom. "A large number of VCDs were seized from their house at Santoshpur," H.K. Kusumakar, additional SP of South 24-Parganas, told HT. He said the duo had installed a spycam in the ventilator of the teacher's bathroom.

Details in Kolkata Live

Women gain right to work at night

State News Service

NEW DELHI, March 29.
— The Cabinet today approved re-introduction of the Factories Act (amendment) Bill to provide flexibility in the matter of employment of woman at night.

As per the amendment, no woman shall be required or allowed to work in any factory except between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. provided the management makes adequate safeguards in the factory and transportation arrangements from the factory premises to the nearest point of their residence.

The employer will also have to ensure occupational and health safety and adequate protection of their dignity, honour and safety.

The Cabinet also approved promulgation of VAT in Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and repeal of the existing tax laws. The Manipur University Bill, 2005, was also approved by the Cabinet for introduction in the Budget session.

**Nights are not scary...
for some: Kolkata Plus I**

আবার শিশু বিক্রি ওড়িশায়

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, ভুবনেশ্বর, ২৬ মার্চ: ফের শিশু বিক্রি। এ বারও সেই আদিবাসী জেলায়। আদিবাসী অধ্যুষিত জেলা সুন্দরগড় টাউন পুরসভার অধীন সারগিপালি অঞ্চলের সবিতা মুন্ডা (৩০) পেটের জ্বালায় ও 'প্রথম পুত্রের চিকিৎসার জন্য তাঁর নবজাতক শিশু পুত্রকে বিক্রি করেছেন মাত্র ৪০০ টাকায়, এক সম্ভ্রনহীন দম্পতির কাছে। প্রতি বারের মতো এ বারও অবশ্য প্রশাসনের পক্ষ থেকে বিষয়টি অস্বীকার করা হয়েছে। সুন্দরগড়ের জেলাশাসক এস কে বশিষ্ঠ আজ বলেন, ওই নবজাতকের বিক্রির অভিযোগ সঠিক নয়।

দারিদ্র, ক্ষুধা ও অর্থাভাবে শিশু বিক্রির ঘটনা ওড়িশাতে নতুন নয়। এর আগেও বহুবার এ রকম ঘটনা ঘটেছে। কিন্তু প্রতিবারই প্রশাসনের পক্ষ থেকে অভিযোগ অস্বীকার করা হয়েছে।

সুন্দরগড় টাউন পুরসভার অধীন খামারিপড়ার মোহনলাল শেঠ সবিতার ১৫ দিনের শিশু পুত্রকে ৪০০ টাকায় কিনেছেন কি না, তা কিন্তু সরাসরি বলছেন না। তবে এ দিন তিনি বলেন, তিনি খুশি। 'ভগবান এই শিশুকে তাঁদের কাছে পাঠিয়েছেন।' তাঁর স্ত্রী সুলেখার সঙ্গে ১৮ বছর আগে বিয়ে হয়। কিন্তু সম্ভ্রন হয়নি। তাই সবিতার শিশু পুত্রটি তাঁদের জীবনে খুশির জোয়ার বইয়ে দিয়েছে।

সবিতা কিন্তু জানালেন যে, তাঁর বড় ছেলে মঙলুর চিকিৎসা করতে পারছেন না। তার উপর খিদের জ্বালা। তাই সদ্যোজাতকে তুলে দেন মোহনলালের হাতে। সবিতা টাকা নেওয়ার কথা সরাসরি না বললেও ইঙ্গিতে বলেন, বড় ছেলের চিকিৎসার জন্য প্রচুর অর্থের প্রয়োজন ছিল। তা ছাড়া নিজেদের তাঁর অর্থ সঙ্কটও

রয়েছে। খেতে পান না প্রায়ই। এই অবস্থায় সদ্যোজাতের মুখে অন্ন জোগাবেন কী করে? তাই তাঁর কাছেও শেঠ-দম্পতিকেও যেন ভগবানই পাঠিয়ে দিয়েছেন।

সুন্দরগড়ের জেলাশাসক বশিষ্ঠের বক্তব্য, এই ঘটনা বিক্রি নয়, শিশু দত্তক নেওয়ার ঘটনা।

বিশ্বেশ্বরশে হত ২। এ দিকে আজ ভোরে রাউরকেলা শহরঞ্চলে ট্যাঙরপালি থানার মাটিয়াডিহা এলাকার এক আদিবাসীর বাড়িতে প্রচণ্ড বিশ্ফোরণ ঘটে। বিশ্ফোরণে ঘটনাস্থলেই দু'জনের মৃত্যু হয়। আহত হন এক জন। মৃত দু'জনের নাম চন্দ্রমোহন সোরেন (১৯) ও তাঁর শ্যালক বিজুরাম বিসরা (১৭)। পুলিশ জানিয়েছে, ঘটনার তদন্ত হচ্ছে। কি করে এই বিশ্ফোরণ ঘটল, তা এখনও জানা যায়নি।

সুনামি-শিবিরেও নিগ্রহ মেয়েদের

বান্দা আচে, ২৬ মার্চ: ত্রাণশিবির নয়, নরফের আশ্রয়। ভূকম্প আর সুনামিতে সবচেয়ে বেশি ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত ইন্দোনেশিয়ার বান্দা আচের মেয়েদের কাছে অন্তত অভিজ্ঞতাটাই এমনই। তাঁরা হারিয়েছেন ঘরসংসার, হারিয়েছেন প্রিয়জন। এখন প্রতিনিয়ত হারাতে হচ্ছে আত্মমর্যাদার অধিকার। অবাধে তাঁদের উপর চলছে যৌন নিগ্রহ আর ধর্ষণ। অন্যথায় জোর করে বিয়ে। শুধু বান্দা আচে নয়। ভারত, শ্রীলঙ্কার মতো দেশেও অবস্থাটা খুব আলাদা নয়।

কারণটা অনেকাংশে প্রাকৃতিক। একটি আন্তর্জাতিক স্বেচ্ছাসেবী সংস্থার

সমীক্ষা বলছে, সুনামিতে মেয়েদের মৃত্যু হয়েছে অনেক বেশি। গ্রামাঞ্চলে পুরুষের চেয়ে মেয়েরা মারা গিয়েছেন চার গুণ বেশি। কোনও কোনও গ্রামে ৮০ শতাংশ নারী নিশ্চিহ্ন। ফলে নারী-পুরুষের সংখ্যাগত ভারসাম্যটাও গিয়েছে হারিয়ে। আচেতে কর্মরত মহিলা সমাজসেবীরা জানাচ্ছেন, অধিকাংশ শিবিরেই নারী-পুরুষের আলাদা থাকার ব্যবস্থা নেই। ফলে যে মেয়েদের সঙ্গে স্বামী বা কোনও পুরুষ আত্মীয় নেই, তাঁদের নিরাপত্তা বিয়িত হচ্ছে। সম্প্রদায়ের প্রধানদের সাফাই, উভয়ের সম্মতিক্রমেই যৌন সংসর্গ

ঘটছে। কিন্তু মেয়েদের সঙ্গে কথা বললে বেরিয়ে আসছে অন্য ছবি। স্বেচ্ছাসেবী সংস্থাটি মনে করছে, নারী-পুরুষের প্রকৃতিক ভারসাম্য পুনর্গঠনের বিষয়টি আলাদা করে ভাবা দরকার। পরিবারে মহিলাদের সংখ্যা কমায়, যে ক'জন রয়েছেন, তাঁদের উপরে কাজের এবং সম্ভ্রনধারণের চাপ বাড়বে বলে ভয় পাচ্ছেন মেয়েরা। তিন মাস আগে এই দিনটিতেই শ্রীলঙ্কার পেরিয়ালে মারণ-জলস্রোত দুমড়ে দিয়েছিল গোটা একটা যাত্রিবাহী টেন। সেখানে আজ আড়াই হাজার বাতি জ্বালিয়ে 'দিনটি স্মরণ করবেন বৌদ্ধ সম্মাসীরা।-রয়টার্স

Bill on panel to protect child rights gets Cabinet nod

By Our Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 24. The Union Cabinet today approved introduction of the Commission for the Protection of Child Rights Bill, 2005, in the current session of Parliament. This fulfils India's obligation as a signatory to the U.N. Convention on Child Rights.

Announcing this after the Union Cabinet met here, the Information and Broadcasting Minister, S. Jaipal Reddy, said the Commission for the Protection of Child Rights would be the statutory mechanism to oversee and review the implementation of the National Policy for Children. It will also recommend remedial action in cases of violation of child rights. This would result in improving the survival rates, health, nutri-

tion, and education of children, particularly girls, and equip them to be economically productive adults who could contribute to the nation, he said.

Also, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the proposal for extension of the World Bank-assisted Integrated Child Development Services Project in Andhra Pradesh as part of the Andhra Pradesh Economic Restructuring (APER) Programme.

The CCEA also authorised the Department of Women and Child Development to re-allocate the savings, if any, in any component of the Project to some other component such as civil works, procurement of goods and equipment, including weighing scales, medicines, play materials and comput-

ers, depending on the requirements.

It was also decided to enhance the project outlay from Rs. 392.75 crores to Rs. 431.81 crores, which also increases the Centre's contribution to Rs. 86.36 crore from Rs. 79.25 crores.

These decisions would help to improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age group of 0-6 years, reduce mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropout rate, leading to an overall development of children.

Besides, it will enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education.

THE HINDU 25 MAR 2005

Women in distress

Code for film industry will not help

It is one thing for the National Commission for Women to be so deeply disturbed by the incident involving an actor caught by a hidden camera seeking sexual favours from someone posing as an aspiring star that it wants corrective action. It becomes contentious when the commission seeks a code to regulate the affairs of the film industry. Bollywood is plagued by problems ranging from video piracy to links with the underworld. Several starlets are known to have become pawns in the hands of dreaded outlaws. In the circumstances, the government will find it difficult to evolve a code covering a specific evil. The problem of exploitation of women deserves to be tackled at another level. It may be difficult to enforce a law on the evils that afflict the film industry. Harassment of women at the workplace covers an area that is larger than Bollywood. If the problem has to be tackled effectively, the commission may have to take a broader look — not confine itself to incidents that receive strong media attention.

There are cruel examples of oppression of the weaker sex who are far less resourceful and courageous than the journalist who lured an actor into a compromising situation. Women in the countryside are less equipped to deal with social oppressors and an administration that is uncaring and sometimes equally exploitative. West Bengal's minister for the welfare of backward classes, Upen Kisku, complained to the chief minister about a police vehicle running over a tribal woman after her house was raided and her son arrested on theft charges. Do all stories of police misdemeanour against defenceless women, especially in villages, get the same attention? Girija Vyas, chairperson of the National Commission for Women, is assured attention when she refers to the actor who has acquired a screen image of the villain. It is less certain whether the commission can confront more powerful arms of the administration as in Purulia where the police have the opportunity to tamper with evidence. A selective code cannot be a substitute for creating an awareness that will help prevent such crimes.

Women on top... of the world!

Sudeshna Sarkar in Kathmandu

March 21. — In the 1960s, women burnt their bras to press for emancipation. This summer, they are tightening their sports bras to prove they are every bit as good as men in an area regarded as male-dominated. A record number of women mountaineers are heading for Mt Everest, the highest point on earth, in a testament to how far the erstwhile second sex has come up, literally.

Tabloids in Kathmandu are already planning special issues with banner headlines all decided: "Women's rally on Mt Everest" is one. And it promises to be exactly that in May with nearly 40 women launching a pioneer attack on the 8,848-metre high peak from the southern side in Nepal as well as the northern route through Tibet.

Among the individual climbers eyeing a new record is Ms Sushmita Maskey, 24, who hails from Nepal's Newar community, plains-people who were the original residents of Kathmandu and unlike the mountaineering Sherpa tribe, better known for their trade acumen than a head for heights. Ms Maskey aims to become the first Newari woman to reach the peak as part of a three-member team, Peace Everest Expedition



2005. Then there is 20-year-old Ms Danielle Fisher, who wants to become the youngest American woman to reach the top and will have to battle nature as well as a personal

First Muslim girl atop Mt Everest?

Perhaps the most remarkable tribute to the emancipation of women comes in the shape of an all-woman Mt Everest summit team from traditional Iran, where the veil is still obligatory. Out of 69 volunteers, 14 finalists have been selected for the Iranian National Women's Mountaineering Team after gruelling tests. There would be still more whittling at a camp in end-March to choose the final seven or eight women. The expedition is reportedly the brainchild of Ms Faezeh Hashemi, vice-president of Iran's National Olympic Committee and daughter of former Iranian President Mr Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Mr Rafsanjani was instrumental in kick-starting the Muslim Women's Games, held every four years, in 1993 and later took up cudgels for Muslim women who wanted to play football. The private sector is also chipping in to help put the first Muslim woman atop Mt Everest by raising the \$400,000 needed to fund the expedition. — SNS & PTI

handicap to reach the summit. Ms Fisher, who will be attempting the summit as part of the Alpine Ascents Expedition, suffers from

Attention Deficit Disorder, for which she has been taking medication since the age of six. Also eyeing a record is Ms Lynne Stark, who, if she succeeds, will become the first woman from Northern Ireland to reach the summit. Besides the individual climbers, there are at least three all-women teams. A 10-member joint team of Japanese and Chinese climbers will attempt to reach Mt Everest for a scientific study of how high altitude affects the human body. The Japanese side, led by Ms Shiori Hashimoto, associate professor at Tokyo Women's Medical University, has five members, three of whom are medical personnel. There is also a woman's team from the Indian Army, whose expedition was flagged off from New Delhi last week. The 10-member team includes climbers from the hills of India as well as the plains of West Bengal and Orissa and will be accompanied by 18 male colleagues. The climbers, chosen from 140 volunteers, have trained in ice craft, snow craft and rock craft as well as at the Siachen glacier in sub-zero temperatures in January.

Things have indeed come a long way since Japanese climber Mis Junko Tabei reached Mt Everest in May 1975, becoming the first woman to join the elite club of those who have made it to the top of the world.

Woman held at *sati* temple

Press Trust of India

JAIPUR, March 20. — A woman who allegedly tried to immolate herself at the spot where a *sati* was performed about a century ago was arrested today after a clash between the police and villagers in Rajasthan's Pali district, police said.

The 42-year-old woman, Basanti Devi Vaishnav, who reached the dais of the Sati temple at Sumel village in Pali to offer 'puja archna' in the presence of thousands of villagers, was being brought to Beawar under police protection.

It was not yet confirmed whether Vaishnav only offered prayers to observe the 100-year myth of Sati in Sumel village or actually tried to immolate herself.

As the police prevented Vaishnav's attempt to glorify the ritual and tried to disperse the crowd, the villagers pelted stones at them. They had to use mild cane charge in retaliation, the

sources said.

Villagers belonging to the Gurjar, Rawat and Mehra communities had organised a *satsang* and *bhajan kirtan* to observe the century-old incident — which falls every year on *phalgun dasami* — at the Sati temple, police said.

Additional police contingents, including two companies of the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary had been deployed since yesterday to maintain law and order in the area. IGP (Jodhpur range) Mr Kalyan Mal Pali superintendent of police Mr Hari Ram Meena were camping at the village, police said adding that poor telephone connectivity in Sunel village was causing a communication problem.

There was a rumour that another woman may try to immolate herself at the temple, the sources added. Police said 16 people have been arrested in connection with the incident that occurred this morning. It was not clear whether the woman was a widow or not.

THE STATESMAN

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শিশুপণ্য নিরাপদ কতটা, খোঁজ নিচ্ছেন কেন্দ্রীয় স্বাস্থ্যমন্ত্রী

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি ও মুম্বই, ১৭ মার্চ: মার্কিন বহুজাতিক 'জনসন অ্যান্ড জনসন'-এর শিশু পরিচর্যার পণ্যে ক্ষতিকারক রাসায়নিক আছে কি না, মহারাষ্ট্র সরকারের কাছে তা জানতে চাইলেন কেন্দ্রীয় স্বাস্থ্যমন্ত্রী অম্বুমনি রামদাস। ওই সংস্থার শিশু পরিচর্যা-পণ্যে শিশুদের উপযোগী বিশেষ কোনও গুণাবলি তো নেইই, বরং রয়েছে ক্যান্সার সহায়ক উপাদান— বুধবার মহারাষ্ট্র ফুড অ্যান্ড ড্রাগ অ্যাডমিনিস্ট্রেশন (এফ ডি এ) এই অভিযোগ আনার পরের দিন কেন্দ্রীয় স্বাস্থ্যমন্ত্রী বলেন, ওই অভিযোগ সত্যি প্রমাণিত হলে উপযুক্ত ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হবে। তবে সংস্থার তরফে ওই বিষয়ে মুখ খোলা হয়নি।

পণ্যে শিশুদের পক্ষে ক্ষতিকারক উপাদান আছে, বুধবার এই অভিযোগ করে বিজ্ঞাপন থেকে সংস্থার কর্তাদের 'শিশু' শব্দটি বাদ দিতে বলেছিল মহারাষ্ট্র এফ ডি এ। সংস্থাকে দেওয়া ওই নোটিসে বলা হয়েছিল, যে হেতু তাদের পণ্যে শিশুদের উপযোগী বিশেষ কোনও গুণ নেই, তাই সংস্থার বিজ্ঞাপন বিভ্রান্তিকর। তাই এই পণ্য শিশুদের উপযোগী বলে প্রচার করা যাবে না। বৃহস্পতিবার ওই নোটিস প্রসঙ্গে জনসন অ্যান্ড জনসন কর্তৃপক্ষ বলেছেন, পণ্য তৈরির ক্ষেত্রে গোটা বিশ্বে তাঁরা যে গুণমান মেনে চলেন এ দেশেও তা বজায় রাখা হয়। এবং সব পণ্যই এফ ডি এ কর্তৃক অনুমোদিত। মহারাষ্ট্র এফ ডি এ-র পাঠানো নোটিসের উত্তর যথা সময়ে পাঠিয়ে দেওয়া হবে বলে সংস্থার তরফে এক প্রেস বিবৃতিতে জানানো হয়েছে।

এফ ডি এ-র কমিশনার এন রামকৃষ্ণন আজ আবার বলেন,

জনসনের ভিটামিন ডি বেবি-অয়েল, জনসন বেবি-লোশন, জনসন বেবি হেয়ার-অয়েল, জনসন বেবি মিল্ক সাবান-সহ মোট ন'টি পণ্য নিয়ে সংস্থাটি যে-বিজ্ঞাপন করেছে, তা বিভ্রান্তিকর। কেন্দ্রীয় স্বাস্থ্য ও সমাজকল্যাণ মন্ত্রকের সচিবকেও সব জানিয়ে এই দিন চিঠি পাঠিয়েছেন রামকৃষ্ণন। পাশাপাশি, রামকৃষ্ণন এবং এফ ডি এ-র যুগ্ম কমিশনার এইচ ডি শালুক্কি রাজ্যের সংশ্লিষ্ট দফতরের মন্ত্রী মনোহর নায়েকের সঙ্গে বৈঠক করেন।

রামকৃষ্ণন বলেন, গত কয়েক সপ্তাহ ধরেই 'জনসন অ্যান্ড জনসন' শিশুদের গায়ে মাখার তেল, লোশন, সাবান ইত্যাদির বিজ্ঞাপনে লিখাছিল যে, এটি প্রাকৃতিক তেল দিয়ে তৈরি। কিন্তু ওই সব পণ্য এফ ডি এ গবেষণাগারে পরীক্ষা করার পরে তাঁরা জানতে পারেন আদতে তা নেই। এমনকী এই পণ্যগুলি 'ব্যুরো অব ইন্ডিয়ান স্ট্যান্ডার্ডস'-এর মান অনুযায়ীও নয়। ওই পণ্য পেটেন্ট-ভুক্ত নয়, এবং শিশুদের ব্যবহারযোগ্য বলেও নথিভুক্ত নয়। রামকৃষ্ণনের মতে, তা দেশের আইন-বিরুদ্ধও বটে। তবে ওই সব পণ্য ব্যবহারে পার্শ্বপ্রতিক্রিয়া হয় কিনা, সে বিষয়ে কিছু জানায়নি এফ ডি এ।

১২০ বছরের পুরনো ওই মার্কিন বহুজাতিক সংস্থার বিরুদ্ধে যে-অভিযোগ উঠেছে, তা যদি শেষ পর্যন্ত প্রমাণিত হয়, তা হলে সংস্থার ব্যবসার প্রভূত ক্ষতি হতে পারে। শিশু-পরিচর্যার বাজারে সংস্থাটি দীর্ঘদিন ধরে একাধিপত্য বজায় রেখেছে। আধুনিক বিশ্বে এই বাজার তৈরির কৃতিত্ব বহুলাংশেই দেওয়া হয় এই সংস্থাটিকে। কিন্তু মহারাষ্ট্র এফ ডি এ তাকে বড় চ্যালেঞ্জের মুখে ফেলে দিল।

Fresh move to stop *Sati*

Surajit Dasgupta
in New Delhi

March 15. — As planned, Parliament is supposed to discuss a new Bill aimed at preventing *Sati* (the practice of) as the provisions so far have neither prevented the crime, nor has it been quite effective in prosecuting the perpetrators.

Till 14 December 1987 with the introduction of the Commission of Sati (Preventive) Bill, the provisions against commission of *Sati* were:

■ A Law enacted by Lord William Bentinck in 1882, under which, "...all persons convicted of aiding and abetting in the sacrifice of a Hindu widow by burning and burying her alive, whether... it be voluntary... or not shall be deemed guilty of culpable homicide and shall be liable to punishment by fine or imprisonment or both."

■ The Indian Penal Code enacted in 1860 did not define *Sati* as a separate offence. *Sati* was tried under section 306, which states: "If any person commits suicide, whoever abets the commission of such suicide shall be punished with imprisonment up to a maximum of 10 years and shall also be liable to fine." Apart from this, whoever attempted *Sati* was tried under Section 309 1 (Attempt to commit suicide).

■ A forcible or coerced *Sati* was tried as a murder/culpable homicide under Sections 299 and 300 respectively.

■ As for persons who participated in *Sati* rites, each of them was liable to be punished under Section 149 of the IPC, as being members of an unlawful assembly. In other words, the IPC, which applies to the whole country was more or less adequate to

deal with those incidents that compelled a widow to undergo *Sati*.

However, despite these provisions, the extraordinary callousness with which the Rajasthan government reacted to the barbarous act of Roop Kanwar's cold blooded murder, makes it appear to be politically motivated.

The new proposed Bill will try to address the loopholes, make the account of any witness under cover (who fears ostracism from society) cognisable in court. Sources said it is very likely that the in-laws be prosecuted under prima facie observations of the police. The district administrations will be made more accountable. They admitted that a backlash from certain outfits especially in Rajasthan is expected, adding however, "No political party can afford to speak in favour of the evil practice (*Sati*)."

Scribe offers to marry Mai

Associated Press
Lahore, March 13

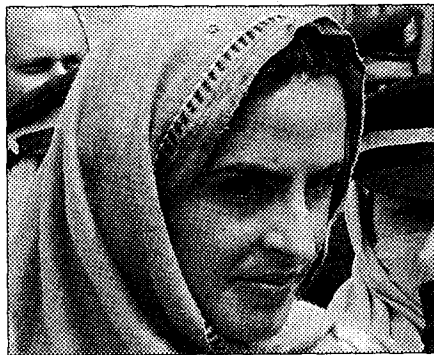
A JOURNALIST in eastern Pakistan said on Sunday that he would propose marriage to a rape victim who attracted international media attention after she went public with her ordeal.

Rana Mohammed Arshad, 30, who works for a Lahore-based Urdu language newspaper, said that, in keeping with local traditions, he, his mother and one of his brothers would travel to Mukhtar Mai's village to propose to her.

Mai drew international attention when she spoke about her rape in 2002 by several men in Meerwala, a village in the eastern Punjab province of which Lahore is the capital.

She was ordered raped by a council of village elders after her brother was accused of having sex with another woman.

"It's a serious offer. The woman has faced the world's biggest agony. I want to



Mukhtar Mai

share it with her", Arshad said.

Arshad, who works as a sub-editor for the *Insaf* (Justice) daily in Lahore, also issued statements to several newspapers publicising his offer for 33-year-old Mai's hand. Mai works as a teacher at a school in her home village.

In August of 2002, a court convicted six men over Mai's rape, but, earlier this month, an appeals court overturned the conviction of five of them and commuted one man's sentence to life-imprisonment, citing lack of evidence. However, on Friday, Pakistan's top Islamic court reinstated the convictions, citing lack of jurisdiction by the appeals court.

Sonia hopeful of early solution to women's reservation issue

By Our Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 8. The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today said talks with various political parties were on to arrive at a consensus on the Women's Reservation Bill, and hoped for an early solution to the issue.

Speaking after presenting awards to women belonging to weaker sections of society to mark the International Women's Day, Ms. Gandhi said she favoured reservation for women in Assemblies and Parliament on the pattern of Panchayati Raj institutions where more than 10 lakh women had been elected across the country. "No nation can progress if women lag behind and I sincerely believe that they should get 33 per cent reservation in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha."

Suggesting that granting 'pattas' or ownership rights to women could be one way of empowering them, Ms. Gandhi called for more gender-sensitive laws and strict implementation of laws related to women. "Uplift of women should not concern only women. It is the responsibility of society as a whole," Ms. Gandhi said.

Gender-sensitive budget

Calling for a nationwide ini-

tiative to end discrimination against women, Ms. Gandhi said political parties, non-governmental organisations and social and civil groups would participate in this effort. A gender-sensitive budget was presented for the first time this year and allocation for women and child development increased considerably, she pointed out.

On job security, Ms. Gandhi said that while trade unions had been working overtime for the rights of workers in the organised sector, it was time to shift focus on the unorganised sector that engaged women in large numbers but without any job security.

She asked the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to end manual scavenging at the earliest and described female foeticide as a blot on society.

In a special gesture, Ms. Gandhi walked down from the podium to present an award to Sharda Devi, a physically handicapped woman. Kumari Sharda was among the 25 honoured by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

The women are beneficiaries of various schemes run by the Ministry to mainstream the Scheduled Castes, Minorities,

Other Backward Classes and the physically handicapped.

Economic weakness

The Union Social Justice and Empowerment Minister, Meira Kumar, said one of the causes of social inequality was economic weakness, which could be redressed by giving impetus to entrepreneurship among the targeted groups thereby making them self-reliant.

The Ministry had created a few specialised Finance and Development Corporations for the purpose, she said.

Those honoured included Sumitra Aswal, Asha Lata, Prema Kumari, Uma Devi, Padma, Mahendari, Suvarna B. Ugale, Bismilla, Pooja Kapoor, Champa Ben, Laxmi, Satya Devi, Bhagwati Bai, Asha Devi, Sakeena, Pushpa Gupta, Nirmnala Bai, Reena Rani, Khatija Begum, Hosne Ara Begum, Shalini Singh, Sona Devi, Uma Negi, Shamshad Bano, and Kumari Sharda.

Among those present were the Prime Minister's wife, Gursharan Kaur; the Delhi Chief Minister, Sheila Dixit; Sheila Gujral, wife of the former Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral, several women Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament.

women **E.U. gender equality institute on the anvil** *FD-14* *9/3*

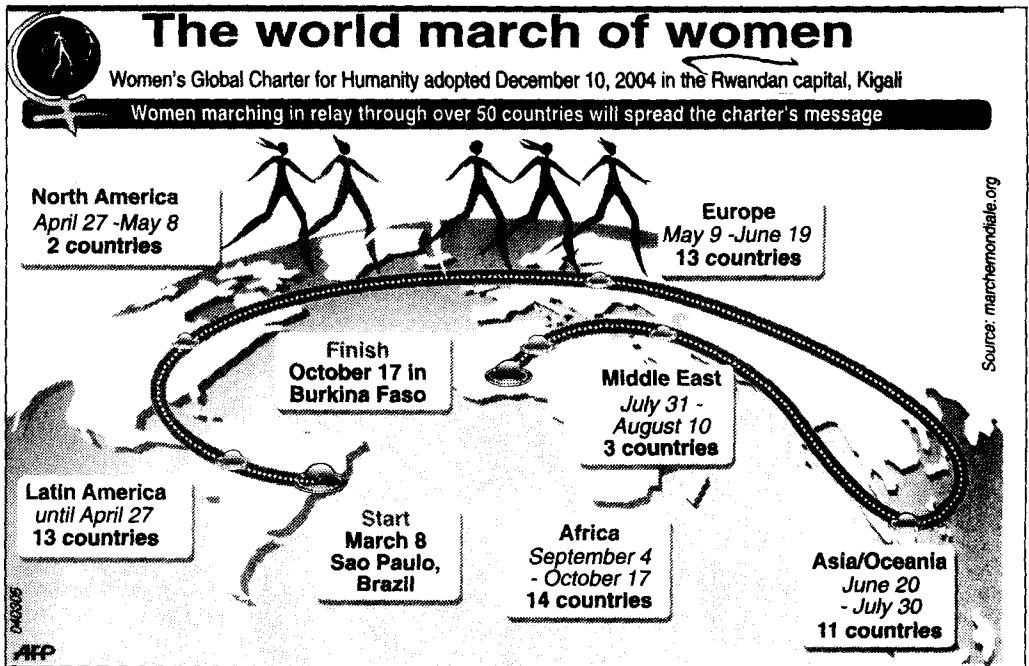
BRUSSELS, MARCH 8. The European Commission marked the International Women's Day on Tuesday by unveiling plans for a European Union gender equality institute.

The institute, which should be up and running by 2007, would be a "centre of excellence" to focus policy research into equality between men and women, said the E.U. executive.

"What better way to celebrate (Women's Day) than to propose the creation of a specific agency dedicated to equality for women and men?" asked Vladimir Spidla, E.U. Commissioner for jobs, social affairs and equal opportunities.

Justifying the need for such a centre, he cited as an example the pay gap between men and women which now stands at 15 per cent.

"Gender equality is a fundamental right ... and a priority policy of the Union," he said. "We know that, though progress has been made, more needs to be done." The institute, which will among other things organise meetings between policy-makers, will have an initial budget of 52.5 million euros for



2007-2013. Women's groups are to stage a mass send off on in Sao Paulo to a world tour for a charter for equal rights that will go to 53 countries and end in Africa in October. The Women's Global Charter for Humanity

was adopted by women's rights groups in Kigali, the Rwandan capital, in December. The tour will end in Ouagadougou, the Burkina Faso capital, which was chosen because of its poverty and low level of protections

for women. The charter proposes "to build another world where exploitation, oppression, intolerance and exclusion no longer exist, and where integrity, diversity and the rights of all are respected." — AFP

FRIDAY, MARCH 4, 2005

LTTE AND CHILD SOLDIERS

FEW FORMS OF child abuse are more abhorrent than the practice of training and sending children into armed combat. Yet the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has got away with the forcible recruitment of child soldiers, some of them as young as nine or ten years of age, and perhaps weighing only slightly more than the weapons they are forced to carry. In all the major military offensives by the LTTE against the Sri Lankan armed forces through the 1990s, children constituted a significant part of the group's strike force. Despite repeated censure by human rights organisations, the LTTE continues to conscript under-aged boys and girls into its fighting force. This is in indictable violation of agreements that the organisation signed with the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), Olara Otunnu, in 1998, and with the United Nations Children's Fund in 2003, that it would not recruit those below the age of 18. A report by Mr. Otunnu, presented by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the Security Council where it was discussed recently, documents the fact that during 2004 alone the LTTE recruited or re-recruited 1,000 children. The report notes that girls accounted for a high percentage of these recruits. The organisation clearly has an insatiable appetite for children.

Thus far, the LTTE has acted with impunity in the knowledge that no one can force it to stop recruiting children. It is in this respect that the latest CAAC report is important. For the first time, it discusses the need for a mechanism that will monitor and report violations of children's rights, including the recruitment of children, and ensure compliance. The report, a comprehensive compilation of situations in which armed groups use and abuse children, notes that the existence of strong international norms has not halted atrocities against children. It urges the international community to "redirect its energies"

to ensuring adherence to these norms. Sensibly leaving the primary responsibility for protecting children to national governments, the document recommends that where governments, weakened by years of conflict, are unable to do so, the U.N. Security Council, the General Assembly, the International Criminal Court, the Commission on Human Rights and regional organisations should supplement the efforts of national mechanisms. Noteworthy among the compliance enforcing measures it commends to the Security Council for adoption are the imposition of travel restrictions on leaders of the offending groups, their exclusion from any governance structures, and restrictions on the flow of financial resources. If the Security Council acts "expeditiously" on the report's recommendations as it has promised, the LTTE, which claims to be the sole representative of the Tamils of North-East Sri Lanka, will be hit hard.

The LTTE evidently still believes it can fend off the international outrage over child soldiers by making vague and vacuous commitments. Nothing else explains its communication to Mr. Otunnu the day before the Security Council discussion on his report, expressing a "readiness to enter into a dialogue" on the issue. But the Special Representative, no longer as trusting of the organisation as he was six years ago, has asked the LTTE leadership "to embark immediately on tangible actions, leading to a time-bound action plan to end, once and for all, the practices of recruitment, abductions and use of children as soldiers." This is the most fitting response to a group that first denied ever recruiting children, then spread the fiction that boys and girls joined it voluntarily, later demobilised a few hundred child soldiers, only to re-recruit them. The LTTE must not be allowed any longer to get away with an abominable practice that the civilised world cannot tolerate.

THE HINDU

04 MAR 2005

Gender-budgeting evokes positive response

By Our Staff Correspondent

W/O-17

NEW DELHI, FEB. 28. The introduction for the first time of the concept of "gender-budgeting" in the budget proposals today, evoked a positive reaction from women's groups. Many felt that more needed to be done.

Highlighting the "gender sensitivities" of the budget, the Union Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, said that it was only a beginning and that, in course of time, all departments would be required to present gender-budgets as well as make benefit-incidence analysis.

The All-India Democratic Women's Association has said that the exercise in presentation of gender disaggregated data was a welcome first step but did not constitute a gender-sensitive budget. "The Finance Minister did not take the next logical step of addressing the deep discrimination suffered by women, revealed by the data, particularly poor women in the allocation of funds for women-specific schemes," the

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AIDWA vice-president, Brinda Karat, said in a statement here.

Shockingly, the data says that in this budget only eight per cent of the total budgetary support is for women's schemes or for the women's component in general schemes. Of the Rs. 25,000 crores of additional funds only one-sixth would be for women, Ms. Karat said. "It is true that there are some welcome increased allocations for health and education and for development of rural infrastructure which should also benefit women, and which may not form part of the calculations, but it is still a far cry from a gender-just budget," she said. It would be necessary for the Government to reformulate many of its programmes and schemes, to increase funds and to give a much bigger share of the funds to enable women to take their rightful place in the economy, she added.

The NCW chairperson, Girija Vyas, was happy that gender-budgeting had formally been introduced.

মোয়ে দত্তক নেওয়ার প্রবণতা বেশি পশ্চিমবঙ্গে

সৌভদ্র চট্টোপাধ্যায় • নয়াদিল্লি

২৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি: নিজের সন্তানের বেলায় পুত্র, কিন্তু দত্তকের সময়ে প্রাধান্য পাবে মেয়েরা। ভারতের শিশু লিঙ্গ অনুপাতে এ এক উজ্জ্বল উলটপুরান। আর তা সত্ত্বেও হলে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের মতো গুটিকয়েক রাজ্যের জন্যই।

গত কয়েক বছর ধরে দেশজুড়ে দত্তক নেওয়ার যে ছবি, তা পাল্টে দিচ্ছে কেবল, তামিল নাড়ু, মহারাষ্ট্র ও পশ্চিমবঙ্গ। উত্তর ভারতের বড় রাজ্যগুলিতে কন্যা দত্তক নেওয়ার মানসিকতা এখনও প্রায় তৈরিই হয়নি। কিন্তু পশ্চিমবঙ্গের মতো রাজ্যগুলির 'জোট' দত্তক কন্যাকে গ্রহণ করছে ভারবাসী আর স্নেহ দিয়ে। ফলে বদলে যাচ্ছে এ দেশের দত্তক পুত্র-দত্তক কন্যার অনুপাত।

কেন এমন হচ্ছে? জগতরলাল নেহরু বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে সমাজতত্ত্বের

প্রবেশের এমিরিটাস যোগীন্দ্র সিংহের কথায়, "পঞ্জাব বা রাজস্থানের মতো উত্তর ভারতের রাজ্যগুলির তুলনায় দক্ষিণ ও পূর্ব ভারতের রাজ্যগুলি মহিলাদের অনেক বেশি সম্মান দেয়। ফলে দত্তক নেওয়ার ক্ষেত্রেও সেই মনোভাব প্রাধান্য পায়।" যোগীন্দ্রের মতে, উত্তরের তুলনায় দক্ষিণ ভারত বা পূর্ব ভারতের শহরগুলো

জীবনযাত্রার মান উপরে, শিক্ষা বেশি। বেশির ভাগ দত্তক শহরের মানুষই নেন বলে সেখানে পুত্র-কন্যার বিভেদ মাথাচাড়া দেয় না। প্রায় একই কথা বললেন দত্তকের শীর্ষ সংস্থা 'সেন্ট্রাল অ্যাডপশন রিসোর্স এজেন্সি' (কারা)-র সচিব রেণুকা চিদম্বরম। তাঁর ব্যাখ্যা, বাবা মা-র প্রতি মেয়ের টান বেশি বলে ধারণা আজকের অভিভাবকদের।

মেয়েরা ছেলের থেকে কোনও অংশেই কম নয়, এই বোধটাও দ্রুত বাড়ছে। বৃদ্ধ বয়সে বাবা-মাকে মেয়েরাও দেখভাল করতে পারে।

'কারা'র হিসাব, দেশের ভিতরে গত তিন বছরে ৫৬৭০টি শিশুকে দত্তক নেওয়া হয়েছে। এর মধ্যে ৩২৮৫টি কন্যা। গত বছরে পশ্চিমবঙ্গে মোট দত্তক ছিল ৪০৩জন। এর মধ্যে কন্যা ২৪০ জন। অর্থাৎ, মোট দত্তকের মধ্যে প্রায় ৬০ শতাংশই মেয়ে। কারার সচিব রেণুকা চিদম্বরম বলছেন, "শীঘ্রই সব রাজ্য যুরে দত্তক সংগঠনগুলির কাজ দেখা হবে। আমি পশ্চিমবঙ্গে গিয়ে কাজ দেখতে আগ্রহী। ওরা খুব ভাল কাজ করছে।" গত তিন বছরে বিদেশে ৩২৯৭টি ভারতীয় শিশুকে দত্তকের ছাড়পত্র দেওয়া হয়। তার মধ্যে ৭১ শতাংশ, অর্থাৎ ২৩৩১টিই কন্যা।

'কারা'-র বার্ষিক অধিবেশনে রাজ্যের পক্ষ থেকে কয়েকটি সমস্যার কথাও বলা হয়েছে। সমাজকল্যাণ বিভাগের অধিকর্তা কান্তপ্রসাদ সিংহ বলেছেন, "কারা-র নিয়ম আছে, অভিভাবকের মোট বয়স ৯০ হতে

হবে। এই নিয়ম তুলে দেওয়া হোক। যথাসম্ভব কম বয়সে সন্তান দত্তক নেওয়ার উপরে জোর দেওয়া হোক। এ ছাড়া, বিদেশে বাচ্চা গলে অন্তত দু'বছর তার তদারকি করা প্রয়োজন।" কেন্দ্রীয় কর্তারা অবশ্য জোর দিচ্ছেন দত্তক নেওয়ার বিভিন্ন নিয়ম আরও সহজ করতে। মীরা কুমার বলছেন, "নিয়মের জটিলতার জন্য অনেক পেরি হয়ে যায়। এটা আমাদের

পাল্টাতে হবে।" দত্তক নেওয়ার হলে কর ছাড়, বা সন্তান বাছাইয়ের ক্ষেত্রে আরও সুবিধা দেওয়া যায় কি না, তা নিয়েও ভাবছেন বিভাগীয় কর্তারা। সমাজবিজ্ঞানীদের একাংশের কিন্তু অন্য মত। তাঁরা বলেন, দত্তক কন্যা নিলে তাকে সম্পত্তির ভাগ দিতে হত না। কিন্তু দত্তক পুত্র সেই অধিকার পায়। সেই কারণেই ছেলের তুলনায় মেয়ের চাহিদা বেশি। গত ডিসেম্বরে সংসদে পাশ হওয়া একটি বিল

অবশ্য পুত্র ও কন্যাদের সম্পত্তিতে

সমানাধিকারের কথা বলা হয়েছে। ফলে আপাত্তি কয়েক বছরে দত্তকের রীতি কতটা পাল্টায়, তাও দেখার।

কন্যা দত্তক নেওয়ার ঝোঁক যাতে না-কমে, তার জন্য সম্ভাব্য অভিভাবকদের উৎসাহ বাড়াতে বিভিন্ন পদক্ষেপের কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে বলে জানান কেন্দ্রীয় সমাজকল্যাণ মন্ত্রী মীরা কুমার। কন্যা-দত্তক সংখ্যা বাড়ছে মানেই যে সমাজে মেয়েদের অবস্থান

পাল্টাচ্ছে, তা অবশ্য মানতে রাজি নন পশ্চিমবঙ্গ মহিলা কমিশনের চেয়ারপার্সন যশোধরা বাগচী। তাঁর মতে, দত্তকের জন্য যে এত মেয়ে পাওয়া যায়, তার কারণ সমাজে মেয়েরা এখনও অবাঞ্ছিত। বহু পরিবার কন্যা সন্তানকে গ্রহণ করে না বলেই সংস্থাগুলিতে মেয়ের সংখ্যা বেড়ে যাচ্ছে। তবে দত্তক নেওয়ার ক্ষেত্রে নিসর্ব্বেষ্মা যদি সত্যিই কমে, তা হলে তা একে ইতিবাচক সামাজিক

প্রবণতা, সে কথা মানেন তিনিও।

Daughter slaughter

Child sex ratios are worsening

Unwanted and unborn, they die in the womb. In less 'visionary' times they were killed after birth. In the era of amniocentesis and ultrasound, the imagery is less grim than drowning a baby girl in a pot of milk. No less devious, no less serious. Mushrooming ultrasound centres and nursing homes in the national capital are where a new argot is becoming the dirge of sexual dimorphism, with female foeticide running across our ethos and progressive pretensions about gender equality. Social thinkers should chew the cud. Few want a second girl child. But why the affluent? This piece of sociology boggles the mind when one gets the gender picture in a prosperous region of the capital, south Delhi, which hides a very low child-sex ratio - 762 girls to 1,000 boys, with Fatehgarh in Punjab boasting the lowest: 75 girls to 100 boys.

This regressive practice has intensified among educated affluent communities in all metros, with the capital taking the lead. It shows an unacceptable situation in which females are edged out of existence by phallic powers. The economic burden associated with daughters does not fully account for the trend. The expecting mother, under social and family pressure to deliver a male child often submits to, and even opts for, pre-natal sex determination and decides to let go of her unborn daughter. Technology has gone against her, giving up knowledge of the sex before birth. Two decades of 'Save the Girl Child' has possibly weakened the weaker sex, even further. Gender equality campaigns, enforcement of Preconception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of sex selection) Act or monitoring of registrars of births and deaths in states only touch the surface.

খোরপোষ
পাবেন মুসলিম
মহিলারাও

স্বামীর কাছ থেকে অন্তর্ভুক্তিকারী
খোরপোষ পাওয়ার অধিকারী
সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায়ের মহিলারাও।
ইলাহাবাদ হাইকোর্ট শুক্রবার এই রায়
দিয়ে বলেছে, হিন্দু আইন অনুসারে
বিবাহবিচ্ছিন্ন মহিলারা খোরপোষ
পান আর সংবিধান অনুযায়ী ধর্ম
বর্ণের ভিত্তিতে বৈষম্য করা যায় না।
তাই সংবিধান অনুসারেই মুসলিম
মহিলারাও খোরপোষ পাবেন।
গাজিপুরের এক বিবাহবিচ্ছিন্ন
দম্পতির ক্ষেত্রে স্থানীয় আদালত স্ত্রী
ফতিমাকে অন্তর্ভুক্তিকারী খোরপোষ
দেওয়ার নির্দেশ দিয়েছিল। কিন্তু স্বামী
বলেন, শরিয়তে অন্তর্ভুক্তী খোরপোষ
দেওয়ার কথা বলা নেই। ফতিমা
হাইকোর্টের দ্বারস্থ হয়েছিলেন।

06 FEB 2005

Sexual harassment on the rise

By Our Staff Reporter

CHENNAI, FEB. 2. There has been a 2.7 per cent increase in crimes against women in Tamil Nadu in 2004, going by statistics tabled at a seminar here on Tuesday.

While sexual harassment recorded an increase with 1,081 cases reported in 2004, against 881 in the previous year, cases reported under the Dowry Prohibition Act were 294 as against 175 cases the previous year, said K. Radhakrishnan, Inspector-General of Police and Joint Director of Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption.

Inaugurating the seminar on "Crimes Against Women", he said the female sex ratio had been dwindling over the years. He pointed out that cities like Chandigarh with a high literacy level reported a discrepancy in

the female-male ratio. In Tamil Nadu, there are 987 females per 1,000 males as per the 2001 census. Chennai has 957 females per 1,000 males.

Quoting from legal cases, the police official said women should learn about the various laws against sexual harassment and eve-teasing in Tamil Nadu. It was a surprise to many to learn that even a driver or conductor of a bus who fails to inform police about an incident of harassment can face up to three years of imprisonment.

Mr. Radhakrishnan pointed out that an all-encompassing Act was lacking to deal with cases of rape, dowry deaths and domestic violence. Another serious crime that lacked an Act in India was sexual harassment at the workplace. However, Tamil Nadu had enacted the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harass-

ment of Women Act, 2002.

S. Mohan, former Supreme Court judge, narrated an incident of custodial violence against a woman and insisted that karate must be made compulsory in educational institutions for girls.

Working women were easy prey for miscreants. Such crimes would not end unless women raised their voice against them, he said.

A short film on sexual exploitation of women was screened. The film depicted a young girl being allowed to be exploited due to poverty but ended on a positive note with the girl turning into a child counsellor.

The Indian Society of Criminology, Institute of Criminological Research Education and Services and M.O.P.Vaishnav College jointly hosted the seminar.

ইমামের আপত্তি অগ্রাহ্য, প্রকাশ্যে ঈদের নমাজ মেয়েদের

অপূর্ব চট্টোপাধ্যায় • মুরারই

ইমামদের আপত্তি অগ্রাহ্য করে প্রকাশ্যে ঈদের নমাজ পড়লেন মুরারইয়ের প্রত্যন্ত গ্রামের ৭০ জন মহিলা। সেই সঙ্গে জানিয়ে দিলেন, অদূর ভবিষ্যতে তাঁরা মসজিদে গিয়েও নমাজ পড়বেন।

শুক্রবার রামপুরহাটের মুরারই সজিহাটের কাছে একটি মাঠে প্যাডেল বোম্ব ঈদের নমাজ পড়েন তাঁরা। পুরুষতন্ত্রের বিরুদ্ধে এই জেহাদ সংগঠিত করতে গ্রামের ওই মহিলারা ভিসেম্বর মাসেই গড়ে তুলেছিলেন 'মহিলা ঈদ কমিটি'। গনিডাজপাড়া গ্রামের মসজিদে তাঁদের নমাজ পড়তে চাওয়ার আর্জি প্রত্যাখ্যাত হলে মহিলারা প্রকাশ্যে জমায়ত হয়ে নমাজ পড়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নেন। কমিটির সম্পাদিকা, স্থানীয় প্রাথমিক বিদ্যালয়ের শিক্ষিকা হায়দর মুমতাজ বলেন, "মুরারইয়ের সব ক'টি মসজিদের ইমামের কাছে নমাজ পড়ার অনুমতি চেয়েছিলোম। তাঁরা সাফ জানিয়ে দেন, এই কাজ শরিয়ত বিরোধী। মুফতিদের কাছে আমরা এই ফতোয়ার প্রতিবিধান চাইব।" মুসলিমদের কেনও গোষ্ঠীর মাধ্যমে কিছুটা শিথিলতা থাকলেও সাধারণ ভাবে মেয়েদের মসজিদে প্রবেশাধিকার নেই।

কমিটির সভাপতি, স্থানীয় শিশু শিক্ষাকেন্দ্রের সুপারভাইজার ফজিলেতুন্নেসা বিবি বলেন, "মস্কায় লক্ষ মানুষের ভিড়েও মহিলাদের

পৃথক ভাবে নমাজ পড়তে দেওয়া হয়। তবে আমরা পড়তে পারব না কেন?"

ভাদীশ্বর গ্রামের একটি মসজিদের ইমাম আব্দুল হাই বলেন, "কিন্তু আমাদের পূর্বপুরুষেরা মহিলাদের প্রকাশ্যে নমাজ পড়তে শরিয়ত বিরোধী বলে মনে করেন। তাই এর বিরোধিতা করেছি।" তবে ওই মহিলারা জানিয়েছেন, তাঁদের পরিবার তাঁদের পাশে রয়েছে।

মুরারইয়ের প্রাক্তন বিধায়ক বজলে আহমেদের কন্যা হায়দর মুমতাজ বলেন, "পুরুষেরা যদি হাজার জনের সঙ্গে প্রকাশ্যে নমাজ পড়তে পারেন, আমাদের কেন ঘরে



মুরারইয়ের গ্রামের সেই মহিলারা। — সবসাপ্তাহী ইসলাম

বন্দি হয়ে নমাজ পড়তে হবে? আমাদের অনেকেই কর্মক্ষেত্রে যুক্ত, তাতে দোষ নেই, প্রকাশ্যে বর্ণপালন করতে গেলেই চোখরাঙানি সহ্য করতে হবে! কেন আমরা সকলের সঙ্গে ঈদের

আলম ভাগ করে নিতে পারব না?" তাঁর বোন হায়দর নরিমানও এ দিন নমাজে অংশ নিয়েছিলেন।

সকাল ১০টা নাগাদ মহিলাদের নমাজ শুরু হয়। মুরারই গৌরাঙ্গিনী বালিকা বিদ্যালয়ের প্রাক্তন প্রধান শিক্ষিকা, হজ করে আসা সামসুল্লাহা বিবি তাঁদের নমাজ পড়ান। তাঁকে সহায়তা করেন ডুমুরপুর গ্রাম

পঞ্চায়েত এলাকার বাহাদুরপুরের ফৌজিয়া ও কিরদৌস।

নমাজের ওই জমায়তে রামপুরহাট কলেজের উদ্ভিদবিদ্যার প্রথম বর্ষের ছাত্রী রাজিয়া সুলতানার পাশাপাশি ছিলেন গৃহবধু হায়দর তানিয়া বা নাজরিন বেগমেরাও। এমনকী কলকাতা থেকে এসেছিলেন রাষ্ট্রীয়ত ব্যাকের কর্মী জেসমিন সুলতানা বা সুয়েদ্রনাথ কলেজের সাম্মানিক ভূগোলের ছাত্রী মৌলুদা খাতুনেরা। তাঁদের দাবি, শাস্ত্রীয় বিধান মেনেই তাঁরা নমাজ পড়তেন।

ইমামেরা বাধা দিলেও মহিলাদের এই উদ্যোগকে স্বাগত জানিয়েছেন এলাকার বহু মানুষ। প্রবীণ এস ইউ সি নেতা বজলে আহমেদ বলেন, "মহিলারা মহাকাশে যাচ্ছেন, আর ধর্মপালনের ক্ষেত্রে পুরুষের তৈরি নিষেধের গতিতে আটকে থাকবেন?" স্থানীয় ব্যবসায়ী আবু তাহেরের কথায়, "পুরুষদের আপত্তিতে মহিলারা মসজিদে নমাজ পড়তে পারবেন না, এটা ঠিক নয়।" রাজা মহিলা কমিশনের সদস্য মিরাতুন নাহার বলেন, "হাদিসেই রয়েছে ঈদের জমায়তে দাঁড়িয়েও শেষেরা নমাজ পড়তে পারে। মেয়েদের প্রকাশ্যে নমাজ পড়া শরিয়ত বিরোধীও নয়। পুরুষতান্ত্রিক সমাজে পুরুষ সর্বক্ষেত্রে যে প্রাধান্য কামের করেছে মেয়েদের প্রকাশ্যে নমাজ পড়ার নিষেধাজ্ঞা তারই জন্য।" প্রকাশ্যে নমাজ পড়ার এই উদ্যোগ আসলে মুসলিম মহিলাদের অধিকার সচেতনতারই প্রকাশ বলে মনে করেন তিনি।

Women get quota in J&K civic polls

15/1/05
Srinagar: The J&K government has reserved 33.33% seats for women in the civic elections being conducted in the state after 22 years. They can contest from general seats as well.

The seats reserved include Dalgate, Jawahir Nagar, Natipora, Rawalpora, Allochi Bagh, Qamerwai, Bemina (East), Karan Nagar, Nawab Bazar, Ganpathyar, K K Moulla, Khawaja Bazar, Tarabal, Hassanabad, Kawadara, Nowshera, Umer Colony, Ahmad Nagar, Tailbal, New Theed, Bemina (Khumani Chow), Humhamā and Khanmoh.

In another development, security forces have been put on a high alert following militants' threat to sabotage the forthcoming civic polls. TNN

ওষ্ঠরঞ্জনী বিতর্ক

পুঁরাতন বিতর্ক নানা দেশকালে নূতন করিয়া জাগিয়া উঠে। বিতর্কের বিষয় ও প্রেক্ষাপট ব্যাপ্ততর হইলে পুনরাবৃত্তিতে মানবসমাজই লাভবান হয়। সম্প্রতি বিদ্যালয়-শিক্ষিকাদের ওষ্ঠরঞ্জনী পরিবার অধিকার-অনধিকার লইয়া যে বিতর্ক উত্থাপিত হইয়াছে তাহার পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে স্মরণীয়, সেই ১৯৩১ খ্রিস্টাব্দে বার্টোল্ড রাসেল 'হু মে ইউজ লিপস্টিক?' শিরোনামে একটি ক্ষুদ্রায়তন নিবন্ধ রচনা করিয়াছিলেন। রাসেলের জিজ্ঞাস্য ছিল, কোন মহিলারা ওষ্ঠরঞ্জনী ব্যবহারের অধিকারী নহেন? ধর্মপ্রচারকারিণী, সেবিকাবন্দ ও শিক্ষকাগণের ওষ্ঠরঞ্জিত পরিবার সামাজিক অধিকার রহিয়াছে কি না তাহা লইয়া রাসেল পর্যালোচনা করিয়াছেন। স্বভাবসিদ্ধ রসিকতায় তিনি লিখিয়াছেন, উঠতি বয়সীরা সুখে কাল যাপন করিতে চাহে কিন্তু শিক্ষাঅধিকর্তাবন্দ ছাত্র-ছাত্রীগণকে কঠিন ন্যায়-নীতিই শিখাইতে আগ্রহী। এই ন্যায়-নীতি যে আপাতদৃষ্টিতে অপ্রীতিকর, তাহা প্রমাণ করিতে শিক্ষাবিদগণ বদ্ধপরিকর। অতঃপর শিক্ষাপ্রচারকগণ নিরানন্দময় পুণ্যবান পুণ্যবতীদেরই শিক্ষক-শিক্ষিকা রূপে নিযুক্ত করিতে চাহেন। বলাই বাহুল্য, রাসেল কথিত নিরানন্দময় পবিত্রবাদীদের ওষ্ঠযুগল সর্বদা রিক্ত থাকিত। রাসেল অবশ্য বিবর্ণ এই শিক্ষা ব্যবস্থার বিরোধী। অবদমিত বিবর্ণ পবিত্রতার পরিবর্তে উজ্জ্বল, আনন্দময়, সমব্যথাপূর্ণ শিক্ষণ পরিকাঠামোই তাহার কাম্য। যে শিক্ষক-শিক্ষিকাগণ কিশোর-কিশোরীবৃন্দের নৈতিকবোধ গড়িয়া তুলিবেন, তাহারা কেন বর্ণময় আনন্দকে অবদমিতচিত্তে পাপ বলিয়া ঘোষণা করিবেন, ইহাই ছিল রাসেলের জিজ্ঞাসা। বিজাতীয় উদাহরণ যদি অপছন্দ হয়, তাহা হইলে দেশীয় উদাহরণও রহিয়াছে। বঙ্গসমাজে লিপস্টিক-এর ব্যবহার যখন এ কালের ন্যায় স্বাভাবিক ও সর্বাঙ্গিক হইয়া ওঠে নাই তখনই সত্যজিৎ রায় তাহার 'মহানগর'-এ লিপস্টিকবৃত্তান্ত ব্যক্তিস্বাধীনতার অনুযুগে ব্যবহার করিয়াছিলেন। নিম্নমধ্যবিত্ত পরিবারের গৃহবধু সাংসারিক অনটনে পড়িয়া চাকরি গ্রহণ করেন। পণ্য বিপণন সংস্থায় কর্মরতা সেই বাঙালিনির সঙ্গে সখ্য হয় ইঙ্গ-ভারতীয় এক যুবতীর। তাহারই প্রণোদনায় বাঙালিনি বধু প্রসাধন-স্বাধীনতায় বিশ্বাসী হইয়া ওঠে। চক্ষে রোদচশমা ও ওষ্ঠরঞ্জনী তাহার স্বাধীন ব্যক্তিত্বেরই প্রকাশ। নারীর এই প্রসাধন যে পুরুষতান্ত্রিক সমাজে পুরুষকে খুশি করিবার নিমিত্ত নহে, সত্যজিৎ তাহা স্পষ্ট দেখাইয়াছেন। সুতরাং আনন্দময় ব্যক্তিত্ববোধক প্রসাধনীকুশলতা লইয়া ২০০৫ খ্রিস্টাব্দে পুনশ্চ বিতর্ক উত্থাপিত হইলে বিব্রত হইতে হয়।

শিক্ষাব্যবস্থার নানাবিধ সমস্যা লইয়া ভাবনাচিন্তা না করিয়া শিক্ষকাগণের ওষ্ঠরঞ্জনের অধিকার-অনধিকার লইয়া অহেতুক বিতর্ক বাতুলতা মাত্র। আর, সমাজ পরিবেশে ব্যক্তিস্বাধীনতার যে স্পর্শ লাগিয়াছে তাহার ছোঁয়া ছাত্র-ছাত্রী বা শিক্ষক-শিক্ষিকা কেহই বাঁচাইতে পারিবেন না। অতঃপর শ্রেণিকক্ষে শিক্ষিকাদের নীরন্ত ওষ্ঠে প্রবেশ করিতে বাধ্য করিলে অবদমন-সমস্যাই খোঁচাইয়া তোলা হইবে। সামাজিক পরিবর্তনের সহিত বিদ্যায়তনের বিধিনিষেধের সামঞ্জস্যই বিধেয়। ব্যক্তিস্বাধীনতাবিহীন বিবর্ণ অচলায়তনে কাহারও বিকাশ স্বাভাবিক শোভন হয় না।