



Editor's Column

The Parliament has passed the Criminal law (Amendment) Bill, 2013, and made it more stringent in the wake of the horrendous rape of a 23-year girl on 16th December, 2012. The brutal rape had shocked the nation and triggered a country-wide protest by youth, women, civil right groups and social activists, who demanded a strict law to deter heinous crimes against women.

The Bill provides for more stringent punishment for crimes against women, including life term or death penalty for repeat offenders of rape, and also, where the victim is left in a permanent vegetative state. According to the Bill, an offender of gang rape can be sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for a term, which shall not be less than 20 years but which may extend to life, meaning imprisonment for the remaining period of that person's natural life and with fine.

For the first time, the new anti-rape law also imposes penalties for stalking, voyeurism and acid attack. Stalking and voyeurism have been defined as non-bailable offences, if repeated for a second time. Acid attack has been defined as a crime and the Bill grants a victim the right to self-defense, while those found guilty of the crime such as causing permanent or partial damage or deformity or burns

FOCUS Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2013

or maims or disfigures or disables any part of the body of the victim will face a minimum jail term of 10 years but may extend to imprisonment for life and with fine.

The law also seeks to amend the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Indian Evidence Act. The Bill keeps rape as a gender-specific crime, where only a male can be booked for committing such an offence. It keeps the

age of sexual consent at 18 years. The Bill makes it mandatory for all government or private hospitals, primary health centres or any other medical facility to provide first aid and free medical treatment to victims of sexual assault and acid attacks. Refusal to do so will now be a criminal offence. It further adds that the treatment of such victims should start immediately and must not wait till the arrival of the police.

However, all these new laws will not be able to control crimes against women unless there is a change in the mindset of the society and removal of gender bias in the criminal justice system. Therefore, along with these laws, there is also a need for launching reform campaigns that would sensitize police personnel in particular, and people in general, on the concept of equal rights for men and women and inculcate respect for women. Finally, new laws will not help unless we demonstrate how effectively they are enforced. Implementation is the key.

Enquiry Undertaken by NCW

● Member Hemlata Kheria was appointed as Chairman of an enquiry committee with Ms. Mansi Pradhan and Ms. Asima Mahananda as Members to enquire into a media report which reportedly stated that a 25 year old man was arrested from UP for raping a woman from Odisha, who worked in a bar in Gurgaon.

The Committee met the alleged victim and her elder sister at their residence in Munirka and recorded their statement as well as inspected the spot of the incident. Later, the committee discussed the matter with the Additional Commissioner of Police and other police officials at the Sarita Vihar police station. The report has been submitted to the Chairperson.

● The Commission took suo moto cognizance in 17 cases in the month of April, 2013.

Making a difference

Piplantri village Panchayat in southern Rajasthan's Rajsamand district has been saving girl children for the last several years and increasing the green cover in and around it at the same time. Here villagers plant 111 trees every time a girl is born and the community ensures that these trees survive attaining fruition as the girls grow up. Over the last 6 years, the villagers had managed to plant over a quarter million trees including neem, sheesham, mango, amla, among others. If some families are reluctant to accept girl children, such families are identified by village committee and Rs. 21,000 is collected from the village residents and Rs. 10,000 from the girl's father and the total amount is put into a fixed deposit for the girl, with a maturity period of 20 years. The parents are also made to sign an affidavit that they would not marry their daughter before the legal age and send her to school and take care of the trees planted in her name.

NCW sends heartfelt condolences to Ms. Madhu Pal

Naib Subedar Shiv Kumar Pal, a member of the UN Peace Keeping Force, husband of our colleague, Ms. Madhu Pal, was killed in an ambush, at Sudan.

The Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma went to Lucknow to personally convey her and NCW's deepest sympathy to Madhu and her family and assured her of all possible help.



The Chairperson commiserates with Madhu

Programmes attended by Chairperson

❖ NCW Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma was the Chief Guest at the First International Conference on "Empowerment of Women in the Developing World" organized by Women Development Cell, Shivaji College, University of Delhi. Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Sharma stressed the need for collective effort by men and women to work together to bring about a change in perception and attitude in the society at large. She stressed the relevance of women's reservation in local bodies as well as in Parliament and State Assemblies.



Chairperson addressing the conference

❖ Ms. Sharma was the Chief Guest at the 2-day programme to celebrate Mirza Ghalib's death anniversary in New Delhi. A documentary film "Yadgar-e-Ghalib" written and directed by the renowned Kathak dancer Uma Sharma was screened



Ms. Mamta Sharma addressing the audience

followed by a dance programme by Ms. Sharma and her group.

❖ The Chairperson attended as the Chief Guest, a one-day seminar on "Women in Science, Education & Research" organized by Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory at Chandigarh. About 500 women scientists and technologists from Defence Research & Development Organization (DRDO) participated in the seminar and shared their experiences and expertise. The seminar discussed various issues related to women in the field of healthcare, social service, science and education.

❖ The Chairperson delivered a lecture during the National Conference on "Challenges before Minority Women in Indian Society" organized by India World Foundation and supported by NCW in Bangalore. Speaking on the occasion, she specifically mentioned PM's 15-point programmes for the minorities and stressed the need for awareness of such



Shri H.S. Bharadwaj with Chairperson Mamta Sharma and Member Shamina Shafiq (on his right)

programmes and schemes among the minorities. In his inaugural address, Governor Shri H.S. Bharadwaj stressed the need for united efforts by social activists, NGOs and Women Commissions for the cause of women. Member Shamina Shafiq also spoke on the occasion. A booklet titled "Violence Free Home – a woman's right" published in Kannada was distributed free to the participants.

Members' Visits

● Dr. Charu WaliKhanna was the Chief Guest in a seminar on "Globalization vis-à-vis Economic Empowerment of Women in North East India" held at Guwahati in Assam.

Speaking on the occasion, she said that globalization helped free trade, free flow of capital and provided more visibility to women. Enhanced technology and communication, improved transportation have reduced the isolation of women, who are leaving rural areas and finding work in urban centres. Later, she held discussions on gender violence and women-related issues with the Assam State Commission for Women.

Dr. WaliKhanna, chaired the session on "Diaspora and Gender", in New Delhi, and spoke on the problems of Indian women deserted by their NRI husbands.

Dr. WaliKhanna attended a regional conference on "Widows's Policy, Gaps and Inclusion" organized by the Guild of Services in association with NCW in New Delhi.



Member Dr. Charu WaliKhanna, (second from right) at the seminar on 'Globalization vis-a-vis Economic Empowerment of Women in North East India'

The Member visited Raipur in Chattisgarh and held discussions with the State Commission for Women, Chattisgarh. Later, she attended, as the Guest of Honour, an awareness workshop organized by Chattisgarh Hastship Development Board and NGO Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar. She said it was necessary to encourage women artisans as it made them economically empowered.

Dr. WaliKhanna was a panelist in a discussion on "Dissemination of Findings of a Joint United Nations Study on Social Protection Floor for India", organized by ILO and UN Task Team in New Delhi.

● On 18th April, 2013, Member Hemlata Kheria inaugurated a two-day national seminar on "Ending Violence against Women: a national road map", attended by 300 women delegates from different parts of the country at Puri. During

her five-day tour, she visited several impoverished villages of Odisha. Such as Nila Gaon of Satapada block and Satpada Graha, mostly housed by Dalit women, engaged in preparation of salt water dry fish. These women complained of lack of proper marketing facilities and dependence on middlemen. She also visited "Krushnaprasad" panchayat, a cluster of villages,



Member Hemlata Kheria with fisher women.



Scheduled tribe women of Niladriparad/Barbara village.



Ms. Kheria with Scheduled Caste women at Kanheipur village.

which is cut off from outside. It was reported that biodiversity encroachment was disturbing their livelihood. Later, she visited village Kanheipur, from where many cases of violence against women were reported.

She also visited some remote Tribal and Dalit villages of Khurdha district, including "Tundrapur", which is mostly inhabited by Dalit fisher-women, the bread earners of their family. She visited the remotest tribal villages of 'Niladriparad' and "Barabara" Panchayat in Banpur block. The Tribal women

complained about non-receipt of government benefits like widow pension, old age pension and other government schemes. Ms Kheria directed the local officials to look into the matter. She also visited Biradadi village Panchayat and Goradajhari village where she interacted with Dalit women engaged in making cane and bamboo products. These women complained of the presence of middlemen and requested for financial help from the government to upgrade their skill and market their products.

● Member Shamina Shafiq attended a 3D Echo Imaging & Foetal Echocardiography Workshop 2013 organized by Fortis Escorts Heart Institute. She delivered a lecture on female foeticide. Ms. Shafiq also spoke in a national consultation of widowhood, organized by the Guild of Services in New Delhi.

The Member attended a national consultation on Muslim women organised by MARG Foundation in New Delhi. Speaking on the occasion, she said that NCW works for women and does not differentiate between Muslim women or any other group of women. She said that instead of only discussing problems, the need of the hour is to talk about solutions by focusing on education, government schemes and women's rights.



Member Shamina Shafiq (third from left) at the National Consultation on Muslim Women

The Member inaugurated a seminar on MNREGA Rights at Sitapur in UP organized by Vaishno Nari Seva Sansthan.

The Member attended a meeting of the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council in New Delhi. She also attended a one-day seminar on "Central Schemes for Minorities and their Effects" at Indore.

Ms. Shafiq was the guest of honour at the Med Scape India (MSI) awards distribution function held in Juhu, Mumbai. In her address, she appreciated the efforts made by MSI to provide community services, free health services and medical networking.

● On 27th March, 2013, NCW Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma and Member Adv. Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar met women activists and self-help groups and interacted with women engaged in small scale rural cottage industry at Sindhudurg district in Maharashtra. The next day, the Chairperson and the Member addressed an interactive meeting with the NGOs, the police, the Panchayat Samiti, the Dowry Prohibition Committee and officers of WCD of Sindhudurg district to review crimes against women and discuss preventive measures.

The Member visited State Government Girls' hostel at Sawantwadi, in district Sindhudurg. She found the condition of the hostel extremely unsatisfactory and has written a letter to the Minister for Social Justice Department giving her recommendations for improvement of the hostel.



Ms. Mamta Sharma and Member Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar at the interactive meeting

On 29th March, 2013, the Member visited the women prison in Kalamba at Kolhapur. The inmates informed the Member that they did not have any complaints about food, sanitation, healthcare, legal aid, etc. The Member recommended that training programmes and vocational courses should be run for the inmates which would keep them not only occupied but would also provide a source of income as well.

On 12th April, 2013, the Chairperson and Member Prabhavalkar visited Jaipur for an interactive meeting organized by NCW with Departments of the police, WCD and Collectorate to discuss various initiatives taken by the state government for the benefit of women. Women related issues such as gender budgeting, cross border trafficking, police apathy, female foeticide, etc. were discussed.

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