



Editor's Column

Despite the progress the country has made since independence, the killing of a man, woman or a young couple, because they have violated some archaic code of honour takes place even today.

The mysterious death by hanging from a tree of a young couple at Jhajhar on the eve of a sarva mahakhap panchayat meeting that was to pass judgement on their fate for having eloped or the terrible lynching of a young man, when he went to her village in Jind to fetch his wife or the strangulation of a couple by the girl's family at Rohtak district are evidence of the obscurantist and dogmatic attitude of people at large in the villages.

In such cases, the Khap (caste) panchayats pronounce judgement against those, who go against established community customs and rest of the village upholds the strictures, using whatever means necessary.

Calling these incidents a national shame, the Union Home Minister has brought into open a barbaric practice which has gone on far too long in different parts of the country. He said that some "vilest crimes are committed in the name of defending the honour of the family or women", adding that such

incidents are nothing but plain and simple murders.

In many of these cases, the local law enforcement agencies take a tolerant and evasive attitude, especially, in the rural areas and turn a blind eye to the illegal activities perpetrated by the village elders in the name of outmoded beliefs based on caste and gotra. The police and the administration feel more comfortable fitting in with the social norms than following the law of the land.

FOCUS

No Honour in Honour Killings

Clearly, the culprits are emboldened by police inaction and lack of governmental sensitivity to the plight of those, who are wronged by the village elders, who have no qualms about even ordering death of those, who do not conform to the obscurantist principles of caste and gotra with regard to marriage.

It is here that the Home Minister can be more effective. He should ensure that the perpetrators of these hateful murders brought to book and the police and the local govt. are held accountable with each barbaric transgression so that they are compelled to take preventive action.

Some have advocated a separate legislation to deal with 'honour

killings' but that is not necessary. Because honour killings are nothing short of murders and it is enough if they are treated as murders, and investigated and prosecuted accordingly, and the perpetrators are tried and sentenced under the provisions of the Indian Penal Code in fast track courts. Unless the fear of law is drilled into the minds of the law breakers, incidents such as these would continue to recur to our eternal shame.

Women in distress, can dial 100 for a drop home even during daytime

When in distress, women may dial 100 for taxis. As crime against stranded women is increasing, the Delhi Police have decided to provide round-the-clock drop facility to women in distress. The drop facility for women was till now available only at night.

Delhi Police Commissioner has instructed the city cops to ensure that a call made to the PCR by a woman, who is unable to reach her destination, should be attended to promptly during day and night. The personnel in PCR vans have also been instructed to ensure that vehicles driven by women which may develop a technical snag is towed away to a nearby petrol pump.

National Seminar on Scheme for Rape Victims

The National Commission for Women organized a seminar on “Scheme for Rape Victims” aimed at providing relief and rehabilitation in terms of monetary assistance to the rape victims across the country. Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Barkha Singh, Chairperson of the Delhi Commission for Women said that as the Criminal Justice System does not provide immediate relief to the victims of rape, the Delhi Commission for Women has established rape crises centres to help the rape victims to register FIRs, take the victims for medical examination, help in the investigation, and provide assistance to the victims to get compensation.

In her key-note address, NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas said that the



NCW Chairperson and Chairpersons of State Commissions lighting the lamp. Member Secretary S. Chatterjee (left) looks on.



Ms. Barkha Singh, Dr. Girija Vyas, Ms. Wansuk Syiem, Mr. S. Chatterjee at the seminar

rape victims were not only subjected to mental and physical trauma but also confronted with stigma and social ostracism for being victims of such a heinous crime. She said that the rape victims undergo two crises - one when she is raped and second during trial. The scheme is an attempt to enable the victim to live with dignity. She said that a budget of Rs. 68 crore as rehabilitation grant had been set aside for this scheme. She added that relief and rehabilitation included expenses of the legal process, medical treatment, and special care if the victim is pregnant with the accused's child, psychological counselling, education, safe shelter, especially, in cases of incestual rapes and efforts to make the victim mentally strong and economically independent.

The seminar was attended by representatives of state governments,

NGOs, the police, the judiciary, the media and Chairpersons of the State Commissions for Women. Some of the recommendations included :

1. The scheme could be broad-based to include not only rape victims but victims of acid attacks.
2. Setting up of a Criminal Injuries Relief and Rehabilitation Board to provide relief to the rape victims.
3. Under this scheme, the rape victims will get an interim relief to the tune of 2 lakhs.
4. Under the provision of this scheme, the

victims will also get an interim relief of Rs. 20,000/- and Rs. 50,000/- for rehabilitation purposes.

5. Under this scheme, district level bodies will be created to scrutinize the cases and the relief amount will be distributed accordingly.
6. Monetary compensation should be shouldered by the accused while the government can provide other facilities to the victims.
7. Maximum relief should be given in cases of gangrape and the amount of Rs. 2 lakh could be extended to Rs. 5 lakh in special cases.
8. The scheme should also incorporate penal provisions in cases of inaction by the investigative officers and there should be adequate safeguards against misuse of the scheme.



Dr. Girija Vyas addressing the gathering

Making a Difference

Thanks to a bunch of gusty women of Kothal Khurd, a remote village in Haryana, no one drinks in public anymore. The architect of the four-year long movement is the 30-plus Roshani Devi, a Dalit Sarpanch and the only Dalit graduate in Kothal Khurd. She had promised during her election campaign that if she got elected, she would ban consumption of liquor in public places, because majority of women in Kothal Khurd and nearby village faced violence, beating and abuse at the hands of their drunkard husbands for years together. Roshani Devi was elected with more votes than her nine other male opponents combined. This caused a lot of heartburn in the male-dominated village.

Consequently, during the first day as Sarpanch, a few upper caste men abused her and disrupted the meeting refusing to allow her to carry on her duties. Getting no positive help on her complaint from the local station house officer, she met the SP, who directed the SHO to take action.

Sensing that she meant business, the village elders asked her to take back the complaint. She agreed on one condition; they would have to close down all liquor shops in and around the village. Hard negotiations followed but eventually the men capitulated. Within a month, three shops were closed. But men were still getting their drinks from neighbouring villages and bootleggers and still returning drunk.

Then the village women formed groups and patrolled the streets every evening. They abused and even assaulted those found drinking. Gradually, the tide turned; some men stopped drinking altogether; some decided to cut their daily quota and promised to drink only at home.

Since then, in many other villages, women have formed voluntary groups to prevent men from drinking outside their homes. This may be a small beginning but the women of these villages are convinced that soon their efforts will be totally successful.

Women in Selection Committees

The ministry of personnel has made it mandatory to have at least one woman on every selection committee set up to recruit more than 10 persons for Union government positions to ensure no woman candidate is discriminated against.

The ministry of personnel in a circular advised ministries and departments to encourage women to join up the Govt. by aggressively advertising the benefits of working for the government.

Women to guard Indian borders

For the first time in India, women component of a paramilitary force comprising 640-strong batch of women under the BSF that completed 36 weeks' training will be deployed on Border Out Posts (BOPs) for search and frisking of women, who cross over the fencing gates for agricultural purposes in the Punjab.

Women personnel services, if required, will also be utilised on internal security duties and counter insurgency roles being performed by the BSF.

Training of the first batch started on November 10, 2008 and their training level was at par with the male constables except for two events. They have been exposed to physical training, drill, field engineering, camp training, intelligence collection, internal security duties and natural calamity.

NCW seeks report from police

The NCW has taken suo motu cognizance of the incident of a 28-year-old woman being charred to death at her marital home in East Delhi. The Commission has sought an action taken report from the police. The report will be submitted in seven days.

Law panel for addition to law on marriage

The Law Commission of India has recommended that a new section 17A be inserted into the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 to the effect that a married person, whose marriage is governed by the act, cannot marry again even after changing his or her religion unless the first marriage is legally dissolved.

In its latest report to the law ministry, the Commission has said that "married men whose personal law does not allow bigamy have been resorting to the unhealthy and immoral practice of converting to Islam for the sake of contracting a second bigamous marriage".

Army officer's wife's complaint

The National Commission for women has registered the complaint of one of the Army officers' wives, who had raised her voice against harassment in the name of army wives welfare activities.

Rosme Dubey appeared before the NCW and got her complaint registered. She also met the Commission counsellor and narrated the problems faced by her and other army wives on the pretext of welfare. Her representation has been referred to a NCW member for action.

Important Decisions

● Domestic Violence victims get HC relief

In a major relief to battered women, Bombay High Court ruled that a court hearing a domestic violence case need not wait for a report filed by the protection officer before awarding interim compensation. The courts that deal with domestic violence cases can take a decision on the basis of records filed before it.

“If the trial court, which is required to pass an order, keeps on waiting for the report of the protection officer, it would entail delay and the idea of considering the case of a needy person at the interim stage will be actually defeated”, said the court, while upholding the trial court order asking a husband to pay Rs. 1,800 to his wife and child every month as interim maintenance.

● Living together too long is like marriage : SC

The Supreme Court has held that if a man and a woman are residing together for a long time and have been accepted by the society as husband and wife, a presumption of a valid marriage can be drawn.

The Bench said when disputes of valid marriages come into question, courts can draw a presumption on the basis of the conduct between the two parties. In arriving at a finding of fact, the trial judge was entitled to analyse the evidences brought on record by the parties so as to come to a conclusion as to whether all the ingredient of a valid marriage as contained in Section 5 of the Hindu Marriage Act 1955 stand established or not.

● Under-18 girl's consent to have sex invalid, says HC

The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad high court has said that since a girl is not considered mentally and physically fit at 16 to give her consent for sexual intercourse, such a consent cannot be considered as out of free will.

The court's observations came during a hearing of a criminal appeal filed by a rape convict sentenced with seven years of rigorous imprisonment. In the appeal, the convict had pleaded that the girl was 17 at the time of rape. She had given her consent for physical relations.

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Based on the circumstances of the case, the court dismissed the appeal holding that the consent was not voluntary.

Member's Visit

Member Neeva Konwar attended a seminar on 'Empowerment of Women' at Sibsagar in Assam, organized by the National Commission for Women. Inaugurating the seminar, Sri Devanand Konwar, Governor of Bihar and ex-Minister, Assam, said that a country could not progress if half of its population were not empowered. He expressed concern about the slow pace of development in the rural sector since independence and said that women need to be empowered socially, culturally, economically and politically.



Ms. Neeva Konwar addressing the seminar

In her presidential address, Ms. Neeva Konwar asked women to be aware of the laws and schemes for women's empowerment so that they could get benefit from them. The seminar was attended by 500 women from various organizations and self help groups from the State.