



Editor's Column

It is well-known that India is one of the most gender-insensitive countries of the world. In a nation that ranks 114th in the gender development index among 155 countries, incidents of gender insensitivity are common. While women, in general, are given an inferior and subordinate status not only in the family, the society, the educational institutions, in job market, the lot of housewives leaves much to be desired. They are often at the receiving end of the family structure, with no value put to their domestic work.

It is appalling to find that even the Government has similar deep-rooted prejudices against women, specially housewives and the Census of India clubs them as non-productive workers alongwith beggars, prostitutes and prisoners. The listing of home-makers as 'non workers' - in league with prostitutes, beggars and prisoners - was a conscious mockery of the dignity of labour that yields an honest income.

The Supreme Court has rightly castigated the statutory authorities for their "totally insensitive and callous approach towards the dignity of labour as far as women are concerned".

In fact, while hearing a case under the Motor Vehicles Act, the Supreme Court had awarded suitable compensation and put a significant value to the housewife's worth.

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Housewife's Worth

In Kerala, a group of women has floated a body to organise "the voiceless and wageless" women. Its main demand is to introduce wages for women's toil in kitchen and other domestic chores.

According to the group, while managing a household, on an average, a woman works daily at least five hours more than her male counterpart. Besides, her silent work helps men contribute more; his efficiency and production level is perked up accordingly. So, she needs

to be compensated properly. The activists say "if you really count their contribution, it would come close to 50% of the production. Still women are without wage and voice and nobody respects or cares for wage-less contribution".

Though, it may not be possible to calculate the exact economic contribution of homemakers, yet we cannot deny their role in nation building and dismiss it as non-productive as the Census has derisively done so. Both as wives and mothers, they make a price-less contribution to nation-building.

Therefore, in fitness of things, the Supreme Court has called upon the Parliament to rethink the value of housewives, rectify the anomaly of the 2001 Census in the current on-going Census operations and amend the Motor Vehicles Act that puts the worth of a housewife as one third of the spouse. It is time the nation gives housewives their much - deserved due.

Rajasthan launches special scheme for women

The Rajasthan Government has launched a special scheme to promote women's participation in agriculture right from their childhood by offering to them incentives during their school, college and technical education.

The scheme, launched as part of the initiative for women's empowerment, has an outlay of Rs. 2.46 crore for attracting girls to agricultural education.

Incentives would be provided to women for taking up studies in the fields such as horticulture, forestry, dairy, agricultural engineering and food processing.

Women pursuing doctorate in agricultural studies will get an incentive of Rs. 10,000 annually for three years.

1,500 girls learn self-defence skills

A 15-day Self-Defence & Road Safety training programme for girls and women organised by the Delhi Police concluded recently with around 1,500 participants learning basic techniques in self-defence and road safety measures.

The Chairperson of the National Commission for Women, Dr. Girija Vyas was the chief guest on the concluding ceremony. Appreciating the initiatives taken by the Delhi Police, she stressed on the need to organise such programmes in states like UP, Rajasthan and Haryana. She assured that the NCW would take lead in dealing with the increasing number of crimes against women.

Chairperson visits Bhutan



Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Smt. Meira Kumar, Dr. Girija Vyas with the King of Bhutan

Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar went on a four-day visit to Bhutan to address the joint session of the Bhutanese Parliament and launch a friendship group. She was accompanied among others by NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas and Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

Later, the delegation met Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, Prime Minister Jigme Thinley, Assembly Speaker and other senior leaders.



The Indian delegation with Bhutan officials

Profile in Courage

Bulti Bagi, a resident of Durgapur, West Bengal, comes from a poor family of peasants. For her wedding, her family used all their savings and also took a loan from the village moneylender. But they never knew, that the family of the groom would ask for more than the amount agreed upon - Rs. 1 lakh and ninety thousand - during the wedding ceremony. Bulti walked out of marriage after the 'sindoor daan' ceremony when the groom asked for more dowry. He was drunk and wanted all the money to be handed over instantly. Devastated by the dowry demands Bulti rubbed off the 'sindoor' in front of all the guests and refused to go with the groom. Later, the village elders intervened in Bulti's marriage and endorsed that the marriage should be cancelled and the money should be given back to the bride's father.

Her stand against dowry-seeking family is commendable and an inspiration for all young women. The President Smt. Pratibha Patil is keen to meet her and give her words of encouragement and financial help.

She wants to know about her future plans, because life of a woman, whose marriage has been cancelled, becomes very difficult in the rural society. She wants her to study further or do a job if she is qualified enough and be self-reliant.

Women to get equal rights to adopt kids

In a big step forward towards empowering women across religious divide, a parliamentary Standing Committee has unanimously recommended that women be given equal rights in guardianship and adoption of children. The committee is of the view that the amendments proposed in the Personal Laws Amendment Bill 2010 would place the mother on an equal footing with the father with respect to the right of guardianship and the right to adopt.

The bill provides for the mother to be appointed as a guardian along with the father so that the courts do not appoint anyone else in case the father dies.

The second amendment, proposed in the Hindu Adoption Maintenance Act, 1956 (applicable to Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs) aims to remove the hurdles in the way of a married woman to adopt also give a child for adoption.

National Consultation on Amendment to Marriage Laws

The National Commission for Women organized a National Consultation on Amendment to Marriage Laws in association with NGO Majlis in Mumbai. Present among the 90 participants from across the country, were lawyers who had negotiated economic rights for women and academicians and activists, who had worked on division of matrimonial property rights. Smt. Shalini Joshi, former judge of the Family Court, Pune, in her introductory remarks stressed upon how maintenance should be based on entitlement rather than on need.

It was unanimously agreed that Irretrievable Breakdown of Marriage (IBM) should not be introduced unless economic security for women could be built into the provision. The deliberations and discussions revolved around :-

(i) Impact of IBM on women.



At the consultation (from left) Smt. Shalini Joshi, NCW Member-Secretary Zohra Chatterjee

(ii) In the absence of a law, in what situation women would manage to get lumpsum economic settlements and what could be constituted as fair and reasonable settlement at the time of divorce?

Speaking on the occasion, NCW Member-Secretary Ms. Zohra

Chatterji elaborated that while considering such an amendment, it was essential to go into the whole issue of women's right to matrimonial property and also provide safeguards if irretrievable breakdown of marriage was to be included as a ground for divorce.



A view of the participants

Important Decisions

● ‘Women can’t claim in-laws’ property’

A Delhi Court has ruled that women cannot claim their in-laws’ property, observing that it is only husbands, who are liable to provide the wife’s maintenance and not the in-laws. The Additional Sessions judge dismissing the plea of Mamta Kapoor, who claimed rights on the property of her in-laws said, “Merely because the girl had lived in the property in question in the past, the said property does not become her shared household”.

● Divorced Muslim woman entitled to maintenance until she remarries : HC

The Delh High Court has held that a Muslim man is bound to maintain his divorced wife and minor children until she gets remarried, irrespective of Muslim personal laws, under which, the husband is bound to maintain his wife only during *Iddat* period, which is around three months after the divorce. The wife is entitled to maintenance under the Criminal Procedure Code, until she remarries, the court said.

● Husband’s act forcing wife to harm herself is cruelty : HC

An act of a husband that has the potential to drive a wife to take a step which causes injury to her would amount to subjecting her to cruelty, ruled the Dehi High Court which sentenced a man to life term for murdering his spouse.

The court also held the man guilty of the offence of subjecting his wife to cruelty and awarded three years’ jail term by relying on the dying declaration of the victim.

“Even if the woman subjected to cruelty does not actually cause any harm to herself, the act committed by the accused has the potential to drive her to take such a step and the act would constitute cruelty within the Indian Penal Code”, a bench, comprising Justice V.K. Jain and B.D. Ahmed, said.

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Members’ Visits

Member Yasmeen Abrar attended a workshop on ‘Stop crimes against women’ at Lucknow. Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Abrar said crimes against women occur in every part of the country. The society, administration, all try to silence the voice of women. Women are also subjected to all kinds of physical and mental violence.

NRI Cell

An NRI cell was set up by NCW following consultations with other ministries like overseas Indian affairs, stakeholders like NGOs and civil society. The Commission has recommended a separate legislation to address issues including matrimonial discord, maintenance of spouses and children, child custody, settlement of matrimonial property amongst others.

In just six months, the NRI Cell of the National Commission for Women has registered 350 complaints, that is almost two cases every day. Not surprisingly, the maximum number of cases comes from US (52) and UK (17). However, there are nearly 14 cases from Australia indicating the spread of the Indian diaspora.

Of the 350 complaints registered between September 2009 to March 2010, the maximum come from Delhi (23), followed by Punjab (16), U.P. (15), Maharashtra (11) and Haryana (10). Several cases relate to women married and deserted in India by husbands, while in others, women have been left stranded at the airport or in a foreign country without any support. There are others, where women have been subjected to assault, battery and abuse or have been tricked into a divorce.