



Rashtra Mahila

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Editor's Column

Andhra Pradesh Director General of Police, Shri V. Dinesh Reddy's recent comments attributing the rising incidence of rapes in Andhra Pradesh to women wearing "flimsy and fashionable dresses" has attracted all-round condemnation, even from the Central Government. The Union Home Minister disagreeing with the statement said that "everyone is entitled to dress the way he or she pleases as long as he or she has regards to the occasion, the place and the context." The same sentiment has been expressed by the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women and various women's organizations.

Taking serious note of the comments of DGP, linking women's fashionable dresses to an increase in rape cases, NCW Member Secretary Anita Agnihotri wrote to the Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh, asking for a complete recording of the question and answer in the relevant matter along with the comments of the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

While, two days later, in the neighbouring state of Karnataka, Minister of Women and Child

Welfare, C.C. Patil said "I don't favour women wearing provocative clothes..... women who work in IT companies and call centres at night ought to know how much skin they should cover".

To suggest that the victims themselves are responsible for crimes committed against them is not only ridiculous but also reflects the male chauvinist mindset and the gender-bias prevalent in the Indian society. Being subjected to sexual advances and worse is bad enough,

FOCUS

Dress Code for Women

being accused of having brought it upon themselves is the most unkindest cut for them.

Crime or no crime, to say that dresses can provoke a man to rape is obnoxious. No one, particularly a police officer, can afford to talk like this. Does it mean that women in *burqas* or *salwar kameez* will be safe from the rapists? And who will define what is provocative? Is a girl in a western dress more provocative than a girl in *jeans*? What if her job

requires her to wear skirts as in an airline?

In fact, there is no correlation between rape and what women wear. If so, a columnist asks, how does one justify, "a 10-year-old girl being sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend in Chennai; a nurse, whose eyes are gorged out before being raped in Delhi, a 11-year-old abducted and gang-raped in coastal Andhra; a 6-year-old girl raped and killed in Mysore by a trusted neighbour; a woman out on a family errand abducted and raped in an auto-rickshaw in Mumbai? Only a perverse mind would believe that there is a link between what these women and children wore and the heinous crimes committed on them", he added.

The fact of the matter is that dress and crime are not co-related. Instead of moral policing, the police in order to stem the malaise should identify the crime spots and isolated places, patrol areas near schools, colleges, crowded markets, introduce beat policing, watch and ward systems, strengthen police-community partnership and draw a time-bound action-plan to make the cities friendlier and safer for women.

Profile in Courage

Akanksha, a 22-year-old hotel management graduate was returning home from a fitness centre, when a youth in his twenties snatched her mobile phone while she was talking to her mother and tried to run away.

Akanksha ran behind him and chased him until she caught hold of his shirt from the back. She held on to the snatcher and started screaming for help, which caught the attention of a security guard, who made a PCR call.

Within minutes, the police arrived at the spot and arrested the snatcher.

Impressed by her exemplary display of courage and bravery, the Delhi police have announced a reward of ₹1000 in cash and a commendation letter.

Akanksha said, "even though my parents had warned me against confronting anti-social elements, I never hesitate or fear teaching them hard lessons for their misdemeanor." Indeed, the brave-heart could be a role-model for many other women facing similar predicaments.

Chairperson's visit to Kolkata

Aasra, a Kolkata-based social organization organized a seminar and an exhibition of photography on "Empowerment of Women is Empowerment of the Nation," on 10th and 11th December at Kolkata.

The programme started with the welcome speech delivered by the director of *Aasra* Mr. Mumtaz Shamsi. Thereafter, *Aasra* felicitated three achievers, Mrs. Talat Mahmood, Kainat Parveen, Miss Richa Sharma, who contributed in the field of cyber crime, education and swimming respectively.

Inaugurating the seminar, NCW Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma said "prestige and position of women can be enhanced in all spheres of activity through higher education. Women can take part in politics and management if they are educated. Education helps women to become better mothers with better family health perspective. Women can equally contribute to the income of the family, too. This, in turn, enhances their status and decision-making power in the family. It is a major step towards equality and empowerment. There is also a need to network with NGOs, who are working in the field of women empowerment." The programme concluded with a film on empowerment of women.



Ms. Mamta Sharma (2nd from right) with other participants



Ms. Mamta Sharma addressing the gathering

Another seminar on women empowerment was organized by the Akhil Bhartiya Marwari Mahila Samiti at Bangur House in Kolkata.

Speaking on the occasion, NCW Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma citing the example of Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal Chief Minister said, Ms. Banerjee never accepted failure in her life and nor accepted any wrong doing. Women should learn from her life. She said, "in our country women empowerment is limited to the cities only but in rural areas women are still denied their equal rights. The biggest problem is that women there are not aware of the government schemes meant for them".

In cities, too, Ms. Sharma said that women in the race to earn easy money are getting equally exploited. It is necessary for NGOs like Akhil Bhartiya Marwari Mahila Samiti to make them aware of the laws and their rights. It is not enough to create laws but NGOs must make women in rural as well as urban areas aware of the laws for their benefit. She praised the good work being done by the Akhil Bhartiya Marwari Mahila Samiti. What is necessary is to educate women all over the country to oppose female foeticide, dowry menace and raise their voice against domestic violence, honour killing and exploiting women as dayan, she added.

MLC Dr. Sashi Panja said women were exploited no doubt but for which they themselves were responsible to a certain extent, as they are too submissive and do not protest against injustice.

Delivering her speech Ms. Alka Bangur, President of Akhil Bharatia Marwari Mahila Samiti said that the Samiti was committed to bring about social and economic empowerment for women. The Samiti also presented a check of 1 lac to *Asha*, an organization run for disabled children.



Ms. Mamta Sharma with a group of disabled children

National Conference against Witchcraft

A national conference on “Women labelling them as Witches – Problems and Solutions” sponsored by the National Commission for Women was organized by the



Ms. Mamta Sharma lighting the lamp as Ms. Hemlata S. Mohan looks on

Jharkhand Commission for Women (JSWC) at Ranchi. The day-long deliberation focused on the problem, its genesis, the cultural perspectives, social stigma, the legal

aspects and the way forward.

Opening the inaugural session, Ms. Hemlata S. Mohan, Chairperson, JSWC said that her Commission was committed to devise ways to stop human trafficking, lessen domestic violence and taking steps against witch-hunting.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Mamta Sharma, Chairperson, National Commission for Women said that witch-hunting was a social issue that needed proactive involvement of the Police, Press and the Commission. She said that the victims of witch hunting were usually women, who are old, widowed or unprotected, “Such women are branded as witches to enable the assaulters to capture their property or due to problems in the family and sexual exploitation.”

“The only way to curb this social evil is to give women right to property, education and political participation. Such evil practices can be fought only by empowering women,” she added.

Ms. R. Vibha Rao, Chairperson of Chattisgarh Women Commission (CWC) stressed the need to look into existing legislations on witchcraft and redraft the provisions to make it more stringent.

Members of NGOs, inspectors of various women police stations of the state and many social activists participated in the conference.

Seminar on “Marriage Matters Concerning NRIs”

Dr. Charu WaliKhanna, Member NCW was the chief guest at a seminar on “Marriage Matters Concerning NRIs” sponsored by Gujarat State Non-Resident Gujaratis' Foundation, on 29th December, 2011 at Ahmedabad. The seminar organized by the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce & Industry, was attended by over 400 participants.

Dr. WaliKhanna made a presentation on “The Way Out” for women “Trapped in NRI Marriages”. She spoke on the criminal proceedings, civil remedies available, MOIA schemes for deserted Indian women and law and custody of children.

She informed that NCW has been appointed as the coordinating agency by the Government of India and as such an NRI Cell was inaugurated in NCW on 24th September, 2009 to deal with complaints received from India and abroad.

Others who spoke on the occasion included Shri Jay Narayan Vyas, Gujarat Minister for Health, Tourism, Family & Welfare, Shri Arvind Agrawal, Principal Secretary (NRI & ART) Government of Gujarat. Shri Mahendrabhai Patel, President, Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry apprised the participants of the activities of his organization.



Dr. Charu WaliKhanna, Shri Jay Narayan Vyas, Shri Mahendrabhai Patel at the seminar

Members' visits

Dr. Charu WaliKhanna visited Ranchi and met women activists of Jharkhand State in an interaction organized in association with the Jharkhand State Commission for Women (JSCW) and the Mayor of Ranchi, Ms. Rama. The activists, who came from Lohardaga, Ramgarh, Hazaribagh and Ranchi said that they were dealing with issues like violence against women, forest rights, migration, trafficking, displacement, land disputes, alcoholism, social atrocities, female foeticide, etc.

The Member said that the conflict between industry and agriculture would always remain but women's participation



Dr. Charu WaliKhanna (2nd from right) with other dignitaries on the dais

was important and they should learn to use their rehabilitation money judiciously. She also highlighted the need for a Women's Policy and said that women should join together and take up issues irrespective of whether it was a matter related to the tribals or non-tribals.

Later, she attended a State level consultation on the implementation of the PCPNDT Act organized by World Vision India and JSCW.

The objective of the consultation was to come up with specific guidelines relating to PNDT Act and to discuss the follow-up action to be taken to raise awareness regarding the Act.

Reiterating our Commitment for realization of **EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN**

Know your Rights to be a Truly Independent Woman DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

You don't have to be a battered wife anymore!

Domestic violence is an issue that transcends boundaries of race, religion class. After nearly a decade of advocacy and consensus building by NCW and various of women's right groups across the country, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 was enacted. It provides for an effective and efficacious relief through issue of:

- Protection order
- Monetary relief
- Compensation order
- Residence order
- Custody order

The penalty for breach of a protection order is simple or rigorous imprisonment upto 1 year or fine upto ₹ 20,000/-.

Domestic violence means and includes the following:

- Causing hurt, injury or danger to life, limb, health, safety or well-being, whether mental or physical.
- Causing harm, injury, or danger to the woman with an intention to coerce her or any other person related to her to meet any demand for dowry.
- Physical abuse' includes hurt of any kind, assault, criminal intimidation and criminal force.
- Sexual abuse' includes conduct of a sexual nature such as forced sexual intercourse, forcing the aggrieved person to watch pornography or other obscene material, forcibly using a woman to entertain others, any other act of sexual nature, abusing, humiliating, degrading or otherwise violative of one's dignity.
- Verbal and emotional abuse such as accusation /

aspersion on character or conduct, insult for not bringing dowry, insult for not having a male child, etc. forcing not to attend school, college or any other educational institution, preventing one from taking up a job, repeated threats to cause pain to any person in whom the woman is interested. Preventing from marrying a person of her choice

- Economic abuse' such as not providing money for maintaining a woman or her children, not providing food, clothes, medicine, etc, forcing her to give up her job and marry.

- Forcing a woman out of the house, preventing from accessing or using any part of the house, preventing or obstructing her from carrying on employment, non-payment of rent in case of a rented accommodation, selling or pawning stridhan or any other valuables without informing and without consent, forcibly taking away salary, income or wages etc. and non-payment of other bills such as electricity, etc.

Who should the victim of domestic violence approach for help?

The following Officials and persons may be approached in case of domestic violence:-

- Protection officer (notified by the state government)
- Service Provider (notified by the state government)
- Police officer
- Judicial Magistrate
- Any other well-wisher/ local NGO who would approach any of the above officials on victim's behalf.

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