



## Editor's Column

History is repeating itself. Despite all major political parties commitment to give political space to women, the long-standing Women's Reservation Bill ensuring 33.3% reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures failed to break fresh ground as many parties expressed opposition to reservation of seats for women in no uncertain terms. No consensus seems to be in sight with many constituent partners of the ruling alliance demanding 'quota within quota'.

Though women constitute nearly 50% of the population, their number in Parliament and state legislatures has always been negligible. Therefore, asking for 33.3% reservation is not

illogical or absurd but a legitimate demand of women.

The latest attempt to get all political parties to discuss the issue of reservation has reached-as in several times in the past-a dead end. No consensus seems to be in sight. Now the ball is in the Government's court.

### FOCUS

## Women's Reservation Bill

But if the same kind of objections are raised whenever a consensus is sought, the Bill would die a natural death. Can the government allow that to happen? When will India's women, who hold almost "half the sky" would find their place in the nation's decision-making process?

As far as NCW is concerned, it has held many strategic sessions with women MPs and women's groups to get this Bill passed in the Parliament. Very recently, NCW Chairperson and Members along with Chairpersons of State Women's Commission met President Smt. Pratibha Patil seeking her help to ensure the passage of the Bill.

For NCW, this is not merely a women's issue but a national issue and should be taken up as a nation's priority. Once it becomes a law, given its uniqueness and far-reaching significance, the Bill would not only revolutionise electoral politics in India but would be a harbinger of social change ending age-old discrimination in the political system.

## NCW Chairperson and State Chairpersons meet Smt. Pratibha Patil

A delegation from the National Commission for Women led by NCW Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma comprising NCW members and Chairpersons of State Commissions for Women recently called on the President of India, Smt. Pratibha Patil.

During their visit, they discussed various women-related issues and also submitted a Memorandum seeking



Ms. Mamta Sharma submits the Memorandum to the President



Smt. Pratibha Patil with NCW Chairperson, NCW Members and Chairpersons of State Commissions

her intervention to ensure 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies.

The Memorandum said that the Bill would not only revolutionize electoral politics in India but would usher in far reaching social changes ensuring gender justice and equality.

## Chairperson's Press Conference

NCW Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma recently held a press conference in the Commission to apprise the media of the various initiatives undertaken by NCW.

She said that the NCW would soon start a 24-hour helpline exclusively for women in distress across the country by the end of this year. The Commission will launch the helpline in Haryana by July as a pilot project, months after a similar project was launched in Gujarat. It is also in the process of setting up video conference connectivity with the State Commissions.

Batting for the Indian women cricket players, Ms. Sharma demanded one-time payment benefit for former women cricket players from the profits of the Indian Premier League as was done for their male counterparts, "why this discrimination? If former male players are entitled to the payment, women should also get it," she asserted.

While talking about the Women's Reservation Bill, Ms. Sharma said that she along with 26 Chairpersons of State Commissions recently called on the President Smt.



*Chairperson addressing the media*

Pratibha Patil and sought her intervention to ensure 33% reservation for women in the Parliament and State Legislatures.

She mentioned that the Commission was working towards getting a building of its own at Jasola and was also in the process of regularising daily wagers, who have

been working in the Commission for a long time on an adhoc basis.

With regard to crimes against women, Ms. Sharma said that a committee comprising five members would be set up in all states, who would look into cases concerning female foeticide, infanticide, dowry deaths, domestic violence, sexual harassment etc. and liaison with the state govts.

Ms. Sharma said that the NRI Cell of the Commission has settled 120 cases out of 962 and others are in the process of being settled.

The Commission is also conducting sensitisation seminars for law enforcement personnel.

Deploring vacancies in the post of the State Commissions, Ms. Sharma said that she had written to the State Govts. to fill up the vacancies. Appealing to the media, Ms. Sharma urged them to play a constructive and positive role in influencing the thinking of younger generations.

## Awareness Programme

Ms. Mamta Sharma, NCW Chairperson attended an awareness programme for women organised by Rashtriya Manav Association at Ballavgarh.

Speaking on the occasion, while referring to foeticide, Ms. Sharma said that this barbaric social practice was rampant among the educated and affluent people, and in the urban rather than rural areas. She lamented that even now very few women are aware of Govt. schemes for them or laws ensuring their human rights.

This was mainly due to ignorance and lack of education, she added.

She said that the Commission was working for the welfare of women and has decided to start free helplines throughout the country, beginning with Gujarat and Haryana.

She also spoke on women-centric issues concerning domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, dowry death, foeticide, etc. and the laws that have been promulgated on these issues for women's benefit.



*Ms. Mamta Sharma addressing the gathering*

## Member's Visits

● Member Wansuk Syiem was invited by the All India Radio, Shillong, for a talk on the role of the National Commission for Women and issues relating to women, particularly, concerning the women of Meghalaya.

Later, Ms. Syiem suggested to the Director AIR to broadcast awareness programmes for women covering various issues, being dealt with by NCW, for the upliftment and empowerment of distressed women.

● NCW Member Dr. Charu WaliKhanna, was the Chief Guest at a seminar on “State Commission and Women’s Right Vs. Human Rights” at Dehradun. The programme organised by Uttarakhand State Commission for Women was attended by advocates, NGOs, social workers, law students, service providers under the PWDV Act, Dy. Director ICDS, Child Welfare Officer; CDPO, Mahilla Sumkhya Officers, among others.



*Dr. Charu WaliKhanna (centre) at the Dehradun Seminar*

Speaking on the occasion, she said that the UN World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna confirmed that women’s rights were human rights. This was a step forward in recognizing the rightful claims of one half of the humanity, and drawing attention to the relationship between gender and human rights violations. She said that though the Constitution of India guaranteed equal rights

to women, but in reality, they are denied even the basic human rights, being victims of gender-based violence denial of access to justice, healthcare and education.

● Member Shamina Shafiq attended the All-India Muslim Conference ‘IQRA 2012’ in Jaipur.

Speaking on the occasion, she said that Muslim families must encourage girls to avail of opportunities that are available to them. The urgent need is to educationally empower them.

Later, she held a meeting with the Rajasthan State Women’s Commission and urged the Commission to reach out to the women of entire Rajasthan to help the marginalised sections of the society.

On her visit to Sitapur, Ms. Shafiq held a meeting with the members of Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan to discuss issues pertaining to minority women. She also visited the Mahila Jail.

At Kashraila in Sitapur, she held a meeting with the activities of Mahila Samakhya, who help women to bring about a change in their situations.



*Ms. Shamina Shafiq with women activists*

Ms. Shafiq also attended a seminar on the problem of college going girls at Rahimbaad, who were reluctant to send their girls to far-off colleges.

## Women’s Household Chores Also Count as Work

A Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) while awarding compensation to the family of a bus rapid transit (BRT) employee, who was run over by a speeding truck, said that the contribution of a woman to her household, equals her contribution to the workplace, because a working woman bears dual responsibility.

Anita Devi, employed as a cleaner at the BRT corridor in Krishi Vihar, was run over by a speeding truck. While her family laid claim to a substantial settlement on the basis of Devi being a full-time employee, who earned about ₹ 5,000 a month, the insurance company offered far less.

Employment records for three months produced by the investigating officer showed that while Devi was employed, she did not work on all days of the month-often only for 10-15 days.

MACT judge however, held that her salary was to be assessed as that of a full-time worker. The duration of her absence should be taken as “time spent managing her household”, she said. “It is common knowledge that working women bear dual responsibility, which comprises managing the household as well as doing outside work aimed at providing supplementary income to the family”.

## Important Decisions

### ● **Now, Muslim women can annul marriage, says fatwa**

Darul Uloom, the Deoband based Islamic seminary comprising hardliners, has finally empowered Muslim women to annul their marriage, albeit with a rider.

The latest fatwa from the seminary said according to the shariat, (Islamic law) a woman, otherwise barred from calling off her marriage, can be accorded the right to divorce by her husband. The catch is, the woman will be divorcing herself and not the husband.

When the husband submits absolute authority of *talaq*, then the wife can use this authority when she wishes ... she can divorce herself by one, two or three *talaqs*, and the *talaq* shall take place.

The fatwa however, clarified that the marriage will not be annulled if the wife divorces her husband.

### ● **SC : No less than life term for dowry deaths**

The Supreme Court has ruled that nothing less than life sentence should be awarded to anyone convicted for brutally killing his wife for not meeting dowry demands and then pleading that the death was accidental.

If the killing was found to be “brutal” and the accused had lied to prove that the death was an accident, the judiciary normally would not exercise its discretion to award “lesser sentence than life imprisonment”.

### ● **Ex-wife benefits from HC ruling**

In a significant ruling, the Bombay high court said once a woman stops living in adultery and proves that she is a destitute with no source of

earning, she is entitled to continued maintenance from her former husband.

But if she starts residing with another person in adultery after obtaining a maintenance order, the husband has to first get the order cancelled.

### ● **Govt. to carry out ‘sting operations’**

To rein in indiscriminate sex determination, the Delhi health department is cracking down on ultrasound clinics by carrying out sting operations with the help of television channels.

The government has also set aside funds to reward informers, who provide clues about the medical practitioners, carrying out illegal sex tests.

The health department has sealed four ultrasound clinics in south Delhi after the radiologists were caught revealing the sex of the foetus to the parents on camera.

### ● **Muslim girl can marry at 15 if she attains puberty : HC**

Ruling that a muslim girl can marry as per her choice at the age of 15 years if she has attained puberty, the Delhi HC has held the marriage of a minor girl valid and allowed her to stay in her matrimonial house.

However, she has the option of treating the marriage as voidable at the time of her attaining the age of majority, i.e. 18 years.

Accepting the 16-year-old girl’s plea to allow her to stay in her matrimonial home, the bench disposed of a petition filed by the girl’s mother alleging that her daughter was kidnapped by a youth and forced into marriage in April last year.

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