



Editor's Column

At a time, when India, with its rapidly growing economy, is seeking its rightful place in the global comity of nations, barbaric practices such as witch hunting continue unabated in almost all parts of India, particularly, in the rural communities, leading to murders of 2,000 people, mostly women, in the last fifteen years. At least twelve states - Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Haryana, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Assam Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh – are recognized as areas, where witch-hunting is rampant today.

Only last week, a 45-year-old woman, accused of witchcraft, was allegedly stripped, beaten up and gangraped by villagers in West

Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. She was accused of being a 'Dayan' causing a villager to fall ill. In another recent gruesome incident, a man in Chhattisgarh's Korba District beheaded his 45-year-old aunt and kicked the

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Witch Hunting in India

severed head like a football in front of two horrified daughters on the suspicion that she practised witchcraft and caused illness in his family.

It is important to mention here that while ignorance, superstition and mob mentality facilitate these gruesome acts, most of these cases against single women, widows and poor and low-caste women are motivated with the purpose of land grabbing, leading to property

disputes, or even to punish women for turning down sexual advances.

Therefore, the most important step that needs to be taken to curb this menace is to improve the law and order situation with better policing and proper investigation and prosecution. Some states like Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Bihar, Odisha and now Assam, have laws against witch hunting. But laws are as good as their implementation. What is needed is a change in the mindset against superstition, and century-old belief in witchcraft. Meanwhile, the police, the village elders and the civil society have a major role to play in addressing the practice. Unfortunately, very often, they turn a blind eye, or are complicit in the act.

Important Decisions

- It was a red letter day in the history of the Indian Air Force, when for the first time three women combat pilots-Avani Chaturvedi, Bhawana Kanth and Mohana Singh-were inducted into the Indian Air Force on 18th June, 2016, as first women fighter pilots. The pilots will soon fly to Bidar in Karnataka for their next round of training, including flying of fighter jets like Hawk, Sukhoi and Tejas. They will complete the training by next year.
- The Supreme Court has decided to examine whether controversial Islamic laws, such as triple Talaq, polygamy and alleged gender bias in inheritance laws governing marriage and inheritance violated the fundamental rights of Muslim women and whether the court can intervene to modify the codes. The decision came after a batch of petitions filed by Muslim women said the practice was exploitative and violated the fundamental rights of equality and non-discrimination guaranteed by the Constitution.
- The Supreme Court said the provisions of Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act could not be invoked by the alleged sex workers to resist their eviction from places being used as brothels that the courts have directed to be closed. "If the notice had to be given to every occupant of brothels, then the implementation of the Act would be impossible", said the court. "Such an interpretation (of Section 18 of the Act) would be absurd, illogical, unrealistic, impractical and would defeat the purpose of law," the court added.

Profile in Courage

A Delhi University student caught a mobile phone snatcher in north-west Delhi area on 21st June, 2016, while walking towards Kohat Enclave Metro Station. Two boys riding on a scooter came from behind and the pillion rider snatched her mobile phone. The girl, without showing any sign of fear, grabbed the pillion rider. In the commotion, the riders lost balance and the scooter fell. Thereafter, she overpowered the pillion rider with the help of some passersby and recovered her mobile phone from his possession. Meanwhile, the other accused driving the scooter escaped from the spot. The police said that the girl would be rewarded for her daring efforts.

New Joint Secretary Joins NCW



Ms. Vandana Gupta, a 1990 batch officer of the Indian Post & Telecom Account and Finance Service, joined the National Commission for Women as Joint Secretary with effect from 31st May, 2016.

Ms. Gupta worked in various capacities in the Department of Telecommunication, including, the BSNL, MTNL and in the Department of Post as General Manager, (Finance) and Circle Internal Financial Advisor in Delhi and Maharashtra respectively. She also worked as the Controller of Finance in Guru Gobind Singh Indra Prastha University, Delhi.

Prior to joining the Commission, she was posted as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Women & Child Development.

We welcome Ms. Vandana Gupta to the Commission.

Regional Consultation on Draft National Policy for Women, 2016

The Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India, has recently released a draft National Policy for Women, 2016 - with the objective of creating a conducive, socio - cultural, economic and political environment to enable women to realize their full potential.

In that context, the National Commission for Women held a series of regional consultations in Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Delhi, Bhubaneswar and Guwahati, with regional stakeholders across the nation by engaging with the civil society representatives, legal experts, academic and specialized institutions working on gender issues, the State Commissions for Women and the State Government representatives for eliciting their views and comments on the draft policy.

The consultation for the northern region was held on 23rd June, 2016 in New Delhi for the states of Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Chandigarh with more than 100 participants. Deliberations were held on issues mentioned in the draft policy with representatives from the Ministries of Health & Family Welfare, Women & Child Development, Home Affairs, Social Justice and Finance, besides State Women Commissions, civil society, lawyers and experts working in the field of women issues to further improve and strengthen the policy.

The participants expressed the need, among others, for establishing enabling institutional mechanisms, especially at the grassroot level, increased number of forensic laboratories, shelter homes for victims of violence and the need for 'portability' in services as most migrant workers lose access to health, education and other benefits once they leave their homes as all such services are linked to their ration cards, and generation of employment for women to reduce their vulnerability.



Congratulations to Navy's first all-women crew

The Indian Navy's first all-women crew vessel INSV Mhadei set sail from Goa on 24th May, 2016 and sailed into Port Luis in Mauritius on 14th June, 2016, covering 2,100 nautical miles in 20 days, passing through rough seas, whipped up by the South-West monsoon. Lieutenant Commander Vartika Joshi, a naval architect is the first woman skipper of Mhadei. The boat was crewed by Lieutenant P. Swathi, Lieutenant Pratibha Jamwal (Air Traffic Control specialists); Lieutenant Vijaya Devi, Sub Lieutenant Payal Gupta (both education officers) and Lieutenant B. Aishwarya, a naval architect.

Workshop on "Issues and Difficulties of Women-headed families"

A two-day National Workshop on 'Issues and difficulties of Women-headed families while carrying out their responsibilities' was organised by the dept of social work, Amrita Vishwa Vidhyapeetham University at Coimbatore, in association with the National Commission for women on 14th and 15th June, 2016, respectively.

Inaugurating the workshop, NCW Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam said that she could well understand the problems faced by women-headed families better since she herself as a single woman had faced problems in running her family in the earlier days. She stressed that single women must have strong will power to run a family, specially, when they face financial insecurity. She said women must own property to ensure economic stability. The Chairperson said there should be pan- India crèche policy to stop women from leaving their jobs. Even faced with domestic violence, women hesitate to lodge complaints due to absence of men in the family. She said all women, particularly, single women, need to be aware of all government schemes and services implemented for them as well as be conversant with women-related laws and rights.



Chairperson addressing the workshop

Regional Consultation at Hyderabad

The National Commission for Women in collaboration with Telangana State Commission for Women organised a one-day Regional Consultation at Hyderabad to elicit views and comments of the State Women Commissions, state government and civil society representatives, legal experts, academic and specialised institutions working on gender issues, on the National Draft Policy for Women. More than hundred participants attended the consultation, chaired by NCW Member Secretary Preeti Madan. Chairpersons of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Kerala as well as Member Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Commission and a Member of the Karnataka State Women Commission were also present.



NCW Member Secretary Preeti Madan addressing the consultation

Members' Visits

☆ Member Sushma Sahu, alongwith Advocate Manish Kumar, visited Central Jails at Gaya and Muzaffarpur respectively to review the living conditions of women prisoners as per the Jail Manual. The team, not satisfied with the overall condition of the jails advised the jail authorities to improve the infrastructure of the jails and provide better facilities to the inmates. The Member also wrote a letter to Hon'ble Home Minister about the condition of the Jails. ○ The Member, alongwith Advocate Manish Kumar, visited Darbhanga to conduct an enquiry into the alleged irregularities committed by the administration in the course of investigation and rehabilitation of a rape victim of Madhubani.



After meeting the Madhubani District Magistrate & Supdt. of Police, Dharbhanga District Magistrate and Civil Surgeon, the team observed that the administration had investigated the case in a lackadaisical and insensitive manner and contradictory reports were submitted by the doctors. The Commission advised the administration to be more vigilant and also recommended disciplinary action against the doctors.

○ Ms. Sushma Sahu alongwith Ms. Avni Bahri, JTE (Legal) visited Agra to conduct an enquiry into the media report titled "Panchayat mein dushkaram ki saja sirf paanch joote" published in Dainik Jagran as the Panchayat settled the matter by beating the alleged accused five times with shoes on his head. The team met the victim and her mother, who wanted a proper investigation into the case.

Members' Visits

● The Committee recommended that the victim be provided legal aid and suitable compensation. ● The Member conducted an inquiry into a case of sexual harassment at workplace at AIIMS in Patna. The team also met the victim. Later, the Director of AIIMS visited NCW and informed that the respondent had been relieved from that department.

❖ Member Rekha Sharma alongwith Ms. Geeta Rathee, JTE (Legal) visited Vishwa Nirmala Prem Ashram, a shelter home for orphan children and destitute women at Greater Noida. There she spotted a minor girl [REDACTED] and enquired about her from 'Nani' the caretaker of the ashram. The Nani's story as to how the girl was brought to the ashram by a lady sounded suspicious. Meanwhile, the lady, who was also present, said she wanted to take away the girl from the ashram. Getting more suspicious, Ms Sharma forbade the ashram authorities to handover the girl to any one without informing the child welfare committee. Later, she wrote a letter to the principal secretary, Dept. of WCD, UP, mentioning the details of the case. Thereafter, the girl's mother came to the ashram and took her daughter home. ● The Member visited Kanpur and Lucknow to enquire into a media report, "dalit woman, who alleged rape by UP leader's son, dies after fourth arrest", wherein it was reported that a 20-year-old woman alleged that the son of an UP politician had abducted and raped her in 2014. She was jailed three times and finally suffered fatal injuries when the police arrested her for the fourth time. Not satisfied with the enquiry, the Member recommended reinvestigation of the case at the earliest. ● Ms. Sharma visited Chandigarh Nari Niketan, which houses normal as well as mentally challenged women. She suggested that mentally unstable girls should be kept separately and major girls should not be kept in the shelter homes against their wishes. The inmates should be provided skill development and job opportunities. ● The Member visited Telangana and held a meeting with the DGP, and discussed complaints coming from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana with SP, SSPs and other officers. Later, she visited the Telangana State Commission for women. ● While in Telangana, the Member visited the District jail and shelter homes at Hyderabad. ● Ms. Sharma visited Panchkula in Haryana and held a hearing at the office of the Haryana State Commission for women.

❖ Member Alok Rawat participated in the first out of the five Regional Consultations on the Draft National Policy for Women, 2016, organized by NCW at Mumbai with the State Commission of Maharashtra and other States of the Western region. NGOs and civil society representatives of the region, deliberated upon the draft policy. ● The Member also participated at the Consultation held in Delhi.



Member Rekha Sharma holding a meeting with the DGP and other Police officers at Telangana.



Member Alok Rawat addressing the Mumbai consultation.

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