



Rashtra Mahila

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Editor's Column

8th March, the International Women's Day is an occasion celebrated by women's groups around the world. Women of all continents, often divided by national boundaries and by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political diversities come together to celebrate solidarity on this day. They look back to a tradition that represents decades of struggle for equality, justice, peace and development.

The International Women's Day is the story of ordinary women as makers of history; it is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society on an equal footing with men.

The idea of the International Women's Day first arose at the turn of the nineteenth century, which in the industrialized world was a period of expansion and turbulence, booming population growth and radical ideologies.

Since those early years, the International Women's Day has assumed a new dimension for women in developed and developing countries alike. The growing international women's movement, which has been strengthened by global United Nations Women's Conferences has helped to make the commemoration a rallying point for coordinated efforts to demand women's rights and participation in the political and economic process. Increasingly, the International Women's Day, is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for

change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women, who have played an extraordinary role in the history of women's rights.

During the last five decades, the women's movement has become a truly global phenomenon. The "Beijing Plus Five", special session of the General Assembly, showed that while we have moved forward in some areas in implementing the recommendations of the 1995 Beijing Conference, there are many points on which we have yet to make a serious headway. However, the commitments

FOCUS INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY

made by Governments in Beijing reflect the understanding that women's equality must be a central component of any attempt to solve the world's social economic and political problems. Thus, where once women fought to put gender equality on the international agenda, gender equality is now one of the primary factors shaping that agenda.

In many countries, provisions guaranteeing enjoyment of human rights without discrimination on the basis of sex have been included in Constitutions or integrated into legislative reforms. Discriminatory legal provisions have been repealed and legal literacy and other measures introduced to alert women to their rights.

Yet, much remains to be done. More than half a century after

independence, women in India still find themselves shackled. At the forefront is the impact on women of globalization, liberalization, economic restructuring and privatization. Poverty among women, especially, heads of households and older women appears to be deepening. Women are over represented among the unemployed and under-employed. They still continue to pay with their lives for child marriage, domestic violence, dowry demands, foeticide, rapes and inadequate provision of health care.

On this International Women's Day, let us re-dedicate ourselves to the cause of upliftment and empowerment of women. For when women thrive, the whole society benefits, and succeeding generations are given a better start in life.

NCW to Help Air Hostesses

The National Commission for Women has taken cognizance of the alleged gender discrimination against the air hostesses in Air India, and said that if necessary, the Commission might move the court for upholding the hostesses' rights. The NCW was acting on a complaint from the CITU.

The CITU stated that Air India hostesses, for a long time, have been superseded by male pursers junior to them as "in-flight services in-charge".

National Stakeholder Consultation

The Integrated Research and Action for Development and All India Women's Conference recently organised a national stakeholder consultation : energy, gender issues, MDG and poverty alleviation for CSD 14, supported by the International Network on Gender and Energy, Netherlands.

The objective of the consultation was to identify issues of importance regarding the country's implementation of the Millenium Development Goals; specially on how incorporating gender considerations into energy products and policies could contribute to sustainable development.

The participants spoke on Key Energy, MDG, Gender and poverty alleviation issues, national energy policies and implementation, etc. and came out with a number of



NCW Chairperson, Dr. Girija Vyas addressing the consultation.

recommendations. The speakers included among others, NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas, Mr. Rakesh Bakshi, Ms. Maxime Olson, Resident

Representative, UNDP, Dr. Pradipto Ghosh, Secretary Ministry of Environment & Forest, Dr. Kirit Parikh, Member, Planning Commission.

Members' Visits

- Member Malini Bhattacharya attended a meeting of the Advisory Committee, West Bengal State on PNDT implementation. She also attended a meeting held at the Writers' Building, Calcutta with the WBSCW and Secretaries and Commissioners/ Directors of different departments to discuss implementation of NCW's Chalo Gaon Ki Ore programme, which will be launched after the assembly elections.

Ms. Bhattacharya inaugurated the Parivarik Lok Adalat organised by Mahila Bal Jyoti Kendra at Bhojpur in Bihar, attended by nearly 140 women. Later, she attended another Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalat at Bihar Shariff organised by Mahila Sewak Samaj. 70 women, including a large number of Muslim women, were present. Coming back to Patna, she met the Chairperson, members of the State Commission for Women and representatives of various Govt./

departments to discuss implementation of the Chalo Gaon Ki Ore programme.

- Member Sushila Tiriya visited Hyderabad to attend programmes organised by the State Women's Commission and the NGO's on women related issues. She also visited Baripada in Orissa and attended the inaugural function on the occasion of launching a new train - Roopsa-Bangri-Posi wherein Shri Lalu Prasad Yadav promised to give jobs to some tribal women.
- Member Neeva Konwar inaugurated a state-level conference at Guwahati on 'Political Empowerment of Women: A Journey from Panchayat to Parliament', sponsored by the National Commission for Women. Ms. Konwar stressed the need to make women aware about the Bills on women's issues that are recommended and passed in the Parliament to protect them from all forms of injustice.

- Member Nirmala Venkatesh went to Bangalore to investigate into Madhulika Rastogi's case of dowry harassment. She also investigated into the rape case of G. Sarada and instructed the Bangalore police to trace the accused.

Later, Ms. Nirmala Venkatesh visited the State Commission for Women to discuss the launching of NCW programme 'Chalo Gaon Ki Ore' in the state of Karnataka. The member also held a meeting with the Karnataka women bank employees and scrutinised their complaints of sexual harassment at workplace. The member enquired into a case of suicide committed by a student of BMS College of Engineering over alleged humiliation meted out to her by a software company during campus interview. Summons had been issued to the placement officer, and a complaint had been registered at the Banaswadi Police station.

SC Stays HC Decision on Marriage of Teenage Girls

On a petition by the National Commission for Women (NCW), the Supreme Court stayed a Delhi High Court decision of October 2005, which had the effect of ratifying the marriage of teenage girls between 15 and 18 years of age, with their consent, to men of their choice.

A bench headed by Chief Justice also issued notices to the Centre, the Delhi Government and a remand home, Nirmal Chaya, and sought the assistance of the Law Commission of India in the matter. Challenging the HC verdict which came on three separate cases of kidnapping lodged by parents of girls aged above 15 and below 18, who had eloped with men of their choice, the NCW referred to its potential for misuse.

The NCW petition also pointed out disparities in the laws with regard to marriageable age of girls and their age for giving consent for sex. It referred to the different criteria set by the Child Marriage (Restraint) Act, 1955, the Indian Divorce Act, Juvenile Justice Act, 2000, the Shariat and provision on rape in the IPC. The petition pointed out that the HC verdict “further adds to the existing confusion regarding the marriage of a minor and highlights the existing contradictions in the legislations which reduce our laws to the level of mockery and renders their implementation ineffective”.

From the Complaint Cell

- The National Commission for Women, received a complaint from a poor lady, named S. Devi alleging mental and physical harassment for dowry. It was further alleged that the husband, C. Singh, was illegally staying with another married woman and was not cooperating in any manner.

The Commission issued notices to both the parties directing them to personally appear before the Commission. The hearing was conducted in 5-6 sessions in the presence of the complainant. The husband was present in 3 hearings and

NCW, Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas recently attended the 50th Session of UN Commission on the Status of Women at UN Headquarters, in New York.



Dr. Girija Vyas (centre) is seen with delegates from Thailand and Nigeria. Ms. Rajani Patil, Chairperson, Central Social Welfare Board is on the right.



The Indian delegation discussing the problems of NRI marriages.

after counselling both the parties, it was agreed that the complainant's husband would return all the dowry articles along with a cash amount of Rs. 10,000/- on the next date. However, he failed to appear on the agreed date, and as such, the matter could not be settled amicably. The complainant was not in a position to file a case against her

husband as she was barely able to maintain herself and she would not be able to meet the expenses for the lawyer, case fees, etc. Thereafter, the Commission wrote a letter to the concerned police authority to take necessary action against the husband. An FIR was registered against the husband and later, he was sent to jail.

Rights of Women in Ancestral Property

A seminar was recently held on 'Rights of Women in Ancestral Property and Testamentary Disposition' in New Delhi.

Speaking on the occasion, Lt. Governor of Delhi Shri B.L. Joshi said that women without independent resources were highly vulnerable to poverty and deprivation in case of desertion, divorce or widowhood. Sons or brothers did not provide the expected economic security to women, whose marriages had broken down, hence equal inheritance rights were essential to safeguard the interest of women.

Addressing the gathering, NCW Chairperson, Dr. Girija Vyas said that in the last decade the judiciary had given landmark decisions with regard to registration of marriage, rape, sexual harassment, dowry, domestic violence, etc. and giving property rights to women was a right step in women's empowerment. However, there was need for proper implementation of these rights and she urged the media to create awareness among women about their rights.



Dr. Girija Vyas addressing the seminar. Lt. Governor, Shri B.L. Joshi is in the centre.

Sop for Single Girl Child

In yet another boon for parents of single girl child after the waiver of school fees in Class VI-XII in Kendriya Vidyalayas, the HRD Ministry has decided to give a special consideration for admission in central schools.

Single girl children, who do not qualify for admission from Class VI onwards based on rank in admission test but who obtain the minimum qualifying marks, would be admitted in central schools up to a maximum of two girls per class, over and above the sanctioned strength.

For admission in Class I, if there are single female children left among the unsuccessful applicants, upto two children would be admitted in each section of Class I.

Important Decisions

Amend Law for Divorce : SC

The Supreme Court has recommended to the government to "seriously consider" bringing an amendment in the Hindu Marriage law to make "irretrievable break-down" of marriage as a ground for divorce.

Expressing concern that divorce could not be granted in number of cases where marriages were virtually dead due to the absence of the provision of "irretrievable breakdown" under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the court strongly advocated incorporating this concept in the law in view of the change of circumstances.

Court Should Protect the Identity of Rape Victim : SC

To give full effect to the law punishing disclosure of name of a victim of rape, the Supreme Court has a piece of advice for all courts : Just refer the victim as "the victim".

Non Consummation of Marriage Constitutes Ground for Divorce

The Supreme Court has held that indifference and frigidity towards wife and sexual abstinence and non consummation of marriage constitute mental cruelty and could be valid grounds for divorce.

Rape Case : Corroboration is not *sine qua non*

The Supreme Court has held that the accused in sexual assault cases cannot insist on corroborative evidence. It observed that corroboration is not the *sine qua non* for conviction in rape cases".

Goa for HIV Test for Marriage Registration

The Goa government has decided to make HIV test mandatory for registration of marriage.

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