



Editor's Column

8th March, the International Women's Day is an occasion celebrated by the 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 Conference has helped to make the commemoration a rallying point for coordinated efforts to demand women's right and participation in the political and economic processes. 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 made by Governments in Beijing reflect the understanding that

FOCUS

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

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 Discriminatory legal provisions have been repealed and legal literacy and other measures introduced to alert women to their rights.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 62 years after independence, despite the extraordinary plethora of

laws, 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.

Women continue to find themselves in a vulnerable position - at the workplace, in their access to basic needs like health, education and employment, and even at their own homes.

Thus, to improve the lot of women, we have to put more our girl children in school and equip them with quality education - as opposed to making them merely literate. We have to make primary health centres accessible to women so that hundreds of women in rural areas do not die every year during childbirth for want of medical attention. And most importantly, we have to reform property laws so that gender parity becomes a reality. While these changes are necessary, they will amount to nothing, if we, as a society, continue to deny our women, the dignity, liberty and opportunities that are rightfully theirs. For when women thrive, the whole society benefits and succeeding generations are given a better start in life.

The National Commission for Women held a press conference at the Commission on the Women's Reservation Bill. Apart from the media, representatives from various women organisations attended the press meet. Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas thanked parties like the congress, BJP, JD(U) and the Left for supporting the Bill, providing 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies.

She appealed to the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal to support the Women's Reservation Bill.

Asked about the opposition to the Bill in its present form, Dr. Vyas said, "We appeal to everyone to support the Bill. But even if they do not, it (the Bill) will still be passed."

Dr. Vyas said, "It is a golden opportunity for all MPs to be part of



NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas speaking at the press conference in connection with the Women's Reservation Bill

such a momentous Bill, which will have far-reaching implications not only for empowerment of women but future generations."

Ruling out a quota within quota as demanded by the SP and the RJD, Dr. Vyas said : "Reservation within reservation is not possible. The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes already get reservation, and there is no need for reservation in this category."



Chairperson interacting with women activists on the issue of Reservation Bill. Member Yasmeen Abrar is on the left.

Uttar Pradesh tops child rape, abuse chart

Uttar Pradesh has earned the dubious distinction of being the state with most child sex abuse and child rape cases.

According to the National Crime Record Bureau and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), of the 5,446 cases of child rape registered in the country in 2008, almost 900 were from U.P.

The state also reported the most cases of child abuse, including molestation, in 2007 - 61 of 298.

Equally worrying were the conviction and disposal rates - only eight of the 61 cases of child abuse have been disposed of to date.

Next was Madhya Pradesh, which registered 892 cases of child rape and 18 incidents of sexual abuse, followed by Maharashtra (690 child rapes and 9 sexual abuses).

Delhi reported 52 cases of child sexual abuse and 301 child rapes. Karnataka received 97 complaints of child rape and nine of child sexual

abuse, Gujarat 99 and 6, Rajasthan 420 and 5, Andhra Pradesh 412 and 16, Bihar 91 and 15 and Orissa registered 65 child rape and 22 child sexual abuse cases.

The government's first child abuse survey in 2007 had said that about 53% of children faced sexual abuse. Across groups, children aged 5-12 years reported higher levels of abuse by persons of trust and authority. Worst, 70% of abused children never reported the matter.

Nepali delegates visits NCW

A delegation of 12 women editors and journalists from various media organisations of Nepal visited the National Commission for Women and interacted with the Chairperson, the members, Member-Secretary and the officers.

Welcoming the delegates, Member-Secretary Shri S. Chatterjee explained some of the main functions of NCW, which comprised redressal of complaints, review of laws, research on women issues and proposing amendments to laws, etc.

Answering a question, NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas said that India had quite a few stringent laws relating to atrocities committed against women but their implementation was tardy. She said that the civil society and the media had a big role to play in creating awareness about such laws among women.



Chairperson interacting with the leader of the Nepali delegation

Intervening in the discussion, Law officer Shri Yogesh Mehta said that Govt. of India was reviewing the law on rape and widening the definition of rape as well as drafting relief, rehabilitation and rescue programme for women victims of sexual assault.

Members of the Nepali delegation expressed their concern about the issue of trafficking which plagues both India and Nepal and hoped that India and Nepal would work together to combat problems that were common to both the countries.

Members' Visits

- Member Yasmeen Abrar attended a seminar on women empowerment sponsored by NCW and organised by Parikrama Mahila Samity at



Ms. Yasmeen Abrar addressing the seminar

Jabalpur. About 175 women participated in the seminar.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Abrar said that the entire society must stand up against atrocities committed against women. She said that if the government, administration or influential people failed to protect the rights of women, the NCW would take cognizance of such violations and take necessary action. Later, she inaugurated the posters done by Vinay Amber to commemorate the Women's International Day.

- Member Wansuk Syiem conducted an enquiry into a complaint filed by the students against the Principal of Siliguri Women's College in West Bengal.

● **Divorced Muslim women entitled to maintenance**

A Division Bench of the Kerala High Court has ruled that a divorced Muslim woman's right to claim maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code did not stand "extinguished" if payment under Section 3 of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986 had not been made by her former husband.

The Bench made it clear that a divorced Muslim woman would be entitled to claim maintenance from her former husband till she remained a divorcee. However, her remarriage or actual payment of maintenance or fair provision under Section 3 of the Act shall "extinguish" her right to claim maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

● **Lower courts can't judge child custody battle for NRIs, rules High Court**

Setting a precedent for custody battles fought by couples living abroad, when a child is brought to India by either of the parents and the custody petition is filed in a local court, the Delhi High Court has ruled that a court in Delhi had no jurisdiction to entertain any such petition.

"Where the parties are citizens of a country, and the child born to them is also a citizen of that country, the jurisdiction of that court cannot be taken away just by removing the child to another country and expressing a desire that the spouse wants to live in another country."

Giving the ruling, the judge said, "if this is allowed, then any of the two parents, who had problem with the other spouse would come on holiday to India with the child, give a notice that henceforth he or she has decided to live in India, and deprive the other spouse of custody and other rights over the child just by removing him or her to India."

● **'Woman can't claim in-laws' house**

A Delhi court said, while dismissing a woman's appeal against a Metropolitan Magistrate's order, that a woman cannot claim right to residence in her in-laws' house under the Domestic Violence Act as she can seek maintenance only from her husband, sons and daughters.

In a move to promote inter-caste marriages, the Maharashtra government has increased from Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 50,000 the one-time largesse to be paid to such couples.

The objective of the monetary incentive is to promote marriages between people from the upper caste and the lower castes (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and nomadic tribes). Often, such marriages happen in the face of opposition from parents of both sides. So the couple largely has no financial support when they get married. This is to help them get started in their wedded life.

The state is following the example set up by states such as Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab, etc.

A part of the money is put in a fixed deposit in the name of the couple. The couple is given a small amount for immediate expenses, besides additional funds to purchase household items.

Do you know?

Over two lakh women were victims of sexual crimes in the country during the period 2006-2008.

On an average, about 191 women every day were either victims of rape, sexual harassment or molestation in three years from 2006. As per the latest Union Home Ministry figures, a total of 61,552 cases of rape were registered during 2006-2008 in the country.

While 19,348 cases were registered in 2006, the number rose to 20,737 in 2007 and to 21,467 in 2008. Similarly, a total of 33,130 cases of sexual harassment, eve-teasing were registered in the country between 2006-2008.

While 9,966 such cases were registered in 2006, the number rose to 10,950 in 2007 and to 12,214 in 2008. As far as molestation cases are concerned, a total of 1,15,764 cases were registered during 2006-2008.

for further information visit our website at :
www.new.nic.in