



Editor's Column

8th March, the International Women's Day, is an occasion celebrated by the women 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.

International Women's Day is the story of ordinary women as makers of history. It is rooted in the century-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 rights 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.

FOCUS International Women's Day

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 Discriminatory legal provisions have been repealed and legal literacy and other measures introduced to alert women to their rights.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 66 years after independence, despite plethora of laws, women in India still find themselves shackled. Poverty of women, especially, heads of households, appears to be deepening. Women are over represented among the unemployed. They still continue to pay with their lives for child marriage, domestic violence, dowry demands, foeticide, rapes and inadequate provisions of healthcare.

Thus, in order to improve the lot of women, we have to put more of our girl children in schools and equip them with quality education - as opposed to making them merely literates. 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.

Enquiries undertaken by NCW

◆ Member Shamina Shafiq as Chairperson of an enquiry committee alongwith Ms. Zakia Soman and Ms. Yogita Bhayana, visited Bundi in Rajasthan to enquire into a complaint alleging harassment and physical assault of a divorced woman. ◆ Member Hemlata Kheria as Chairperson alongwith Ms. Priya Thakur, enquired into media reports titled "Panchayat Mein Mahila Ko Nirvastra Kiya" at Tikamgarh, MP. ◆ She also as Chairperson of an enquiry committee comprising Ms. Priya Thakur, enquired into a report that women are not allowed to go upstairs due to superstition in Kitora village, Dabra district, MP.

Profile in Courage

US First Lady Michelle Obama felicitated Indian acid attack survivor Laxmi, after she won the "International Women of Courage Award", for successfully leading a campaign against acid attack on women in India. She left the Americans impressed with her speech, passion and guts. Mrs. Obama and the large crowd at the America's State Department Auditorium was moved and touched when Laxmi recited a poem recounting her experience:

"You haven't thrown acid on my face; You threw it on my dreams.
You did not have love in your heart; You had acid in it".

Her attacker threw acid on her face after she refused to respond to his romantic advances.

● Chairperson Mamta Sharma attended a one-day 'documentary film festival on women issues' as the Chief Guest organized by the Faculty of Media Studies of Manav Rachna International University in New Delhi.

● The Chairperson attended a awareness programme at Jantar Mantar on the occasion of International Women's Day. Speaking on the occasion, she said crimes against women would only stop if the society stopped treating women as commodities. The Police or the government did not have a magic-wand to stop all kinds of atrocities against women. To combat violence against women, she said, there must be change in the mindset of the society.

● A programme was organized by Manavadhikar Mission, Silvasa, in New Delhi in which the Chairperson was the Chief Guest. Later, she released a book "Janiye Mahila Aapne Adhikar" on the occasion.

● Rajasthani Academy organized 23rd Kavyatri Sannam at India Habitat Centre in New Delhi and honoured talented women on the occasion of International Women's Day. Speaking on the occasion,

NCW Chairperson appreciated the work carried out by the Academy by promoting Rajasthani culture, dance, art and literature in Delhi and nearby areas. Women working in different fields such as judiciary, education, women empowerment, child upliftment etc. were honoured for their outstanding contributions in their respective fields.



Chairperson addressing the gathering at the screening of documentary films

National Consultation

NCW organized a national consultation on "Prohibition of Atrocities against Women by Dehumanizing and Stigmatizing them in Public", in Jaipur, Rajasthan, to finalize the NCW Draft Model Central Legislation to eliminate violence against women by dehumanizing and stigmatizing them in public.

Delivering the welcome address, Dr. Charu WaliKhanna said that the issue of dehumanizing and stigmatizing women needed to be dealt with sensitivity. She said that labelling or targeting a woman, or parading or disrobing her or tonsuring her hair or blackening her face violated a woman's rights and undermined her dignity. She said she was looking forward to a promising solution to this problem through this consultation.

Inaugurating the seminar, Smt. Margaret Alva, Governor of Rajasthan, said that the issue was not only limited to atrocities against women by labelling them as Dayans but it had larger ramifications. Women were not only dehumanized in order to grab their property but also called insane or possessed with some spirit to denigrate them. Though there were laws in every state against such atrocities, yet they were not implemented properly.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Mamta Sharma said that the issue had been discussed in seminars organized in different states with a view to finding possible solutions and thereof bringing a national consensus. She

emphasised the need for a separate national law on this issue. She stressed for rehabilitation of and compensation to the victims of these crimes and objected to serials and movies portraying women as Dayans.

Member Hemlata Kheria said that there should be a stringent law against such atrocities and emphasised the need to sensitize and educate people on this issue.

Wrapping up the last session, Member Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar mentioned the recommendations arrived at after exhaustive deliberations: (1) There should be a special central legislation on this issue (2) There should be effective implementation after legislation (3) The draft bill should be reviewed.



At the national consultation, Chairperson Mamta Sharma and Smt. Margaret Alva

NCW celebrates International Women's Day

The National Commission for Women celebrated the International Women's Day by honouring 25 outstanding women for their achievements in their respective fields. Dr. Nandita Chatterjee, Member Secretary, in the presence of Chairperson Mamta Sharma, presented awards to the distinguished women at the award ceremony held at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi.

The NCW also presented awards to three college students for best entries in essay competition organized by NCW in collaboration with State Women Commissions among college students in their respective states on topics "Ensuring Safety and Security to Women in Public Spaces", "Our Patriarchal Society: Changing the Mindset". The first prize was given to Ms. Reena Maithani from Uttarakhand, the second prize was bagged by Ms. Priyanka Barse from Madhya Pradesh while the third prize went to Ms. Jaya Jain from Rajasthan.

A skit on women empowerment was staged during the programme depicting increasing empowerment of women in every sphere of life. A large number of participants attended the programme from various parts of the country. All Members of the Commission were present on the occasion.



Ms. Mamta Sharma lighting the lamp. The Members of the Commission look on.



Ms. Mamta Sharma handing over a certificate to an awardee. Member Secretary Dr. Nandita Chatterjee looks on.



The Chairperson, Commission Members with the awardees.

Members' Visits

❖ Member Hemlata Kheria attended a national consultation on "The Portrayal of Women in the Media" in Mumbai.

● She attended a national consultation on "Prohibition of Atrocities by Dehumanizing and Stigmatizing Women in Public" at Jaipur. ● Member Kheria visited Tikamgarh in MP to enquire into an incident, wherein an old woman was named a thief at the behest of a tantrik and was forced to disrobe. The Member met the DM, SP, district officials and Panchayat members to discuss the issue and later directed the authorities to take appropriate action in the matter. ● She visited the district jail at Chhatarpur in MP and held a meeting with the SP of Jail, officials and female inmates. The inmates said that there was no legal aid system, counselling or vocational education for women and no crèche facilities for their children.

● She visited Kitora in Dabra village in MP for an enquiry. The village with a population of nearly 2000 is inhabited by nearly



Member Hemlata Kheria in discussion with DM, SP and Panchayat members at Tikamgarh

800 Mongia tribals, who are victims of superstition. Women are not allowed to climb stairs or go to the roof of the house, which would amount to displeasing the deities and incur their wrath. She found the village devoid of basic amenities like drinking water, education, sanitation, etc.

❖ NCW Member Adv. Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar attended a national consultation on "The Portrayal of women in the Media" organized by NCW in Mumbai. NCW Chairperson Mamta Sharma, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, his wife and three other Ministers also attended the consultation. The theme in the plenary session was "Portrayal of Women in Film and Television" and the second session dealt with "Portrayal of Women in Advertising". The theme of the third session was "Women, Media, Violence and the Repercussions in the Society". The last session discussed "The Way Forward - Censorship or Self Regulation" chaired by Mr. Ujwal Uke, Principal Secretary WCD, Government of Maharashtra. ● The Member visited Jaipur to attend a seminar and chaired the session for a national legislation on

"Prohibition of Atrocities against Women by Dehumanizing and Stigmatizing them in Public". ● The Member met fisher women activists in Worli Koliwara, Mumbai and heard their problems. ● Ms. Prabhavalkar attended a program organized by District Legal Aid Authority Service and a one-day inter-collegiate seminar on "Fundamental Duties of a Citizen – Protect and Respect the Dignity of Women", organized by the Mumbai High Court. ● She was also the Chief Guest at a function organized by Nuclear Power Corporation of India in Mumbai to celebrate the International Women's Day. ● The Member attended hearings in the office of the Maharashtra State Women Commission (MSWC) arranged by NCW and MSWC.

❖ Member Shamina Shafiq attended a workshop on "New Approaches to Address Gender-Related Problems", in New Delhi. ● The Member visited Kochi to attend a national workshop on "Empowerment of Women and Children", organized by National Forum for People's Rights, which is working for protection, promotion of human rights, economic upliftment of the under-privileged, peace, harmony and national & international integration. ● The Member was the Chief Guest at a function organized by Manav Adhikar Samwardhan Sanstha at Hapur in UP on "Mahiloan ki Dasha aur Disha". ● She delivered the keynote address on "Women Empowerment in the Context of Violence against Women," organized by Women Power Connect and CARE in New Delhi, at the India International Centre in New Delhi. ● Ms. Shafiq delivered the keynote address on "Women's Voices, One Movement – Ending Sexual Violence in India". Justice – Aftermath: Communicating with Police and Hospitals".

❖ Dr. Charu WaliKhanna as the Chief Guest participated in a National Consultation organized by NCW in Kolkata on Government schemes UJJWALA and SABLA to deliberate on the constraints in effective implementation of the schemes. She also chaired the technical session. ● Dr. WaliKhanna participated in a National Consultation on "Prohibition of Atrocities by Dehumanizing and Stigmatizing Women in Public" at Jaipur. ● She was also the Guest of Honour at Grand Kavi Sammelan organized by Delhi Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and GK II, RWA, in New Delhi.



Member Prabhavalkar addressing the consultation on 'Portrayal of Women in the Media'



Member Shamina Shafiq addressing the gathering

● The Member attended a seminar on "Youth and Governance" and attended a national conference organized by Maitri on "Many Faces of Women – Gaining Control and Seeking Justice – Aftermath: Communicating with Police and Hospitals". She participated in the session "Gaining Control and Seeking



Dr. Charu WaliKhanna with delegates of National Consultation on Government Schemes

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