



Rashtra Mahila

Vol. 1 No. 200 MARCH 2016

Published by the National Commission For Women

Editor's Column

8th March, the International Women's Day, is an occasion celebrated by 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 their 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 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 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 Discriminatory legal provisions have been repealed and legal literacy and other measures introduced to alert women to their rights.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 68 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.

The situation is alarming and calls for urgent, matching interventions. 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.

Print Advertisement

- The Commission released an advertisement on NRI marriages through DAVP on 12th February, 2016, in all leading newspapers of the country, especially, focusing on the states, wherein the issue is most prevalent.
- The National Commission for Women, in collaboration with Delhi Police, announced setting up of Social Service Units for women Survivors of Violence in all districts of Delhi. To create awareness on the services offered under the project, the Commission published an advertisement through DAVP in all leading newspapers on 22nd February, 2016.

Important Decisions

- The Supreme Court panel has recommended that the police must not interfere or take criminal action against adult sex workers since voluntary sex work is not illegal and only running a brothel is unlawful.
- The Madras High Court has ruled that marriage of minors will not become void automatically without either of them obtaining divorce within two years of attaining the legal age for marriage as a Division Bench set aside the order of a lower court refusing to take on file, a woman's divorce petition, saying she was a minor during marriage, which was automatically void.
- According to a proposal by the Centre, no woman government employee will be refused childcare leave for at least 5 days consecutively unless there are "grave and extraordinarily," compelling circumstances that warrant refusal. The Department of Personnel and Training has decided to modify necessary service rules and sought all Ministries comments.
- In a verdict with wide ramifications, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has held that divorce by mutual consent passed by the Court could not be annulled by assertion of any party later that the decree was meant to be a sham for facilitating employment in a foreign country. The High Court was of the view that marriage was the only contract that could not be annulled by mere wish of parties outside the court. The judgement came in response to a petition filed by a woman asking the High Court to quash orders of divorce granted by a lower court. The high court dismissed her petition.

Violence Free Home - A Woman's Right

The Commission had earlier decided to scale up its pilot project "Violence Free Home - A Woman's Right" by setting up special cells in police stations in Delhi to cover all 11 districts of Delhi and also replicate the model in selected 22 districts of 7 States namely-Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in collaboration with Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Mumbai.

To review the progress of the project and setting up of special cells in Police Stations, Member Secretary Preeti Madan also visited the special cell at Dadar in Mumbai. The cell takes up all cases relating to violation of women's rights and undertakes home visits and follow-up in cases that require outreach. Any case which is registered in these cells is never closed, and women can come back to the special cell any time throughout their life.

From the Legal Cell

The National Commission for Women, in collaboration with Bureau of Police Research and Development (B.P.R. & D) and Ministry of Home Affairs had organized a three-day training programme for women police officers at ITBP, Panchkula, Haryana.



Member Rekha Sharma (centre) with senior police officers and participants

The training programme was attended by 70 women police officers from the ranks of head constables to SSPs, representing 5 states namely: Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. NCW Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam, Member Rekha Sharma, Law Officer, Sudha Chaudhary and Ms. Sukham Giran, Legal Expert, represented NCW.

Eminent senior police officers and experts on different fields spoke on "Sexual Harassment Act, 2013", "Criminal Amendment Act 2013", "Forensic Science and Crime, Investigation", "Status of Women in Society", "Crimes against women-problems and remedies", "Forensic Medicine and Post Mortem examination", "Establishment of Human Identity", "Expert Evidence and its Presentation in the Court of Law", "Investigation at the scene of crime and investigation of Cyber Crimes", etc.

Delivering the valedictory address, Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam said that the training programme offered an opportunity to women police officers to gain better knowledge and technical know-how regarding nuances of investigation of crimes against women, including, forensic investigation and cyber crimes.

Workshop for Women Entrepreneurs

To commemorate 8th March, the International Women's Day, the National Commission for Women in collaboration with Your Story organized "Shakti", an interactive workshop aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs. Discussions were conducted by experts in areas of startup, funding, investments and financing, legal and tax matters related to startups and running a business against all odds.

Addressing a large gathering of women, the Chairperson urged women to break stereotypes. She said, "today there are numerous initiatives that promote the spirit of entrepreneurship and empowerment of women; yet there are gaps and in spite of the government's efforts, we are unable to achieve the desired outcome. That is why NCW wants to listen and learn. Tell us what we can do and how better we can do it". Later, the panel held discussions on "how to turn an idea into real business; when the going gets tough", "how to keep your venture going; startup, standup India for women entrepreneurs"; "doing business@home". Speakers and workshop facilitators, included several successful women entrepreneurs, who have braved personal and professional odds to become what they are today.



Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam addressing the workshop. Sitting on the dais (from left), Ms. Shradha Sharma, NCW Members Alok Rawat and Laldingliani Sailo

From the North-East Cell



On the dais (fourth from left) Dr. Temsula Ao, Chairperson, Nagaland State Commission for Women; NCW Member Laldingliani Sailo, Prof. Dr. Rajaretnam and Ms. Theilin Phanbuh, Chairperson, Meghalaya State Commission for Women and Resource persons

anomalies, conversion of data to SPSS format was indispensable. She stressed on the need to bring out a consolidated report of the North-East States at the earliest to make policy-based recommendations. Prof. Rajaretnam then gave an overview of the structure of the meeting highlighting the tentative format to be followed for the report. Thereafter, tables were generated through the SPSS system and ways to analyse them were dealt upon in detail. Experts from TISS had a one-on-one interaction with the States, especially Sikkim, Tripura and Mizoram, which did not have their data in SPSS/ Excel format, to check inaccuracies in data and explained to them the appropriate method to generate accurate data.

The meeting on the second day, attended by 21 delegates, began with a discussion about ways to analyse tables in detail. Prof. Rajaretnam enumerated cross-tabular analysis on SPSS for the ease to draw a link between two variables that had a bearing on each other. It was decided to incorporate a new chapter in the report based on inter-sectoral analysis to facilitate formulation of policy recommendations. The meeting concluded with discussions on the structure of the revised report proposed by NCW and March 17 was set as the deadline to receive the revised reports from the respective State Commissions.

A review meeting on 'Social, Economic and Political Empowerment of Women in North-East States' was held in Guwahati on March 10 and 11, 2016. The meeting chaired by NCW Member Laldingliani Sailo, was attended by Chairpersons, Members, Member Secretaries and resource persons of all the eight North-East States and the team from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences led by Prof. Rajaretnam.

In her inaugural address Member Sailo gave a brief introduction of the purpose of the meeting. She said that in order to refine the available information and fix

Symposium on Women's Emancipation

"Women's Emancipation and Societal Wellness" organised by PSG College of Arts & Science at Coimbatore, was inaugurated by NCW chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam. In her speech, she mentioned the role played by NCW and legal aids that foster women's emancipation.

At the inaugural function, the first edition of newsletter of Centre for Women's studies "PENN MURASU" and four monographs, two in Tamil and two in English, authored by members of women's forum of PSGCAS were released by Ms Lalitha Kumaramangalam. Later, performances on women's issues were staged. A poster competition was also conducted for the students and the posters were displayed at the venue.



Chairperson releasing a booklet

Members' Visits

★ Member Rekha Sharma enquired into the complaint regarding alleged outraging of modesty of women with continuous harassment and threats by some residents of Exotica Elegance in Ghaziabad. After investigating into the matter, she asked SSP Ghaziabad to provide protection to the complainants and submit an action taken report to the Commission. ● The National Commission for Women took suo moto cognizance of the media report “women commuters violated by highway goons”, which appeared in the Tribune of 24th February, 2016, wherein it was reported that vehicles with women passengers were stopped on the national highway near Murthal at Sonipat and women were dragged out in a nearby fields and raped”. A three-member enquiry committee headed by Member Rekha Sharma visited Murthal to conduct an enquiry. The committee members met DSP Gannaur, sub-divisional Magistrate, owner of Sukhdev Dhaba, truck drivers and villagers, who provided shelter to the stranded commuters affected by the Jat agitation. The committee has asked the police to act expeditiously and instruct the district



Member Rekha Sharma with Senior Police officers, conducting a hearing

administration to submit reports on the action taken to the Commission. ● Ms. Sharma attended a workshop of the Central Board of Film Certification, wherein she had been nominated as a member of CBFC. ● The Member attended the workshop on “capacity building of women police officers” at BTC, ITBP at Panchkula at Haryana. ● Ms. Sharma was the Chief Guest at a function to mark the International Women's Day organized by Gitanjali Welfare Samiti, Ghaziabad. ● The Member visited Jaipur and met Chairperson and Members of Rajasthan State Commission for Women. ● She also conducted hearings of a few cases registered at NCW at DGPs office, wherein SPs, investigation officers and complainants were present. Later, Ms. Sharma

visited Jaipur Women's Jail and met the inmates as well as Jail officials. ● Member Rekha Sharma, Member Sushma Sahu and Member Secretary Preeti Madan attended a function to mark the International Women's Day on 8th March at Rashtrapati Bhawan, organized by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

★ Member Alok Rawat attended a programme on the International Women Day on 8th March, jointly organized by NCW and Your Story on women entrepreneurs and shared his thoughts. ● The Member participated in the review meeting held by Minister WCD in the context of NIMHANS presentation based on their visits to 10 out of 43 odd mental asylums in the country, housing women inmates. His suggestion for exploring issue of Aadhaar Numbers to women inmates, who have been deemed fit by the psychiatrists for release from the asylums, was approved by the Minister. ● Shri Rawat visited Gujarat and held discussions with Chairperson of Gujarat State Commission for Women and State Women and Child Development functionaries at Ahmedabad. He also attended a Nari Adalat and a Mahila Sammelan at Vehalav and Khambat respectively. ● He visited GVK Emergency Management and Research Institute, which provides an integrated call centre for toll lines of 100 (Police control room), 101 (Fire services), 108 (Emergency), 102 (Non Emergency Ambulance Services) and a special Helpline for women (181) which provides assistance to any woman facing or fearing domestic violence.



Member Alok Rawat (3rd from left) with officers of GVK Emergency Management and Research Institute

◆ Member Sushma Sahu attended a seminar on “Insurance as a vehicle for weaving social security systems for women”, organized by the National Law School at Jodhpur. Speaking on the occasion, she said that insurance can provide social and financial



Member Sushma Sahu (Centre) at the Seminar on Insurance

security to women. She talked about the need for generating awareness among women about basic social requirements like voter ID card, Aadhaar card and various women-oriented schemes sponsored by the government. She gave details about Atal Pension Scheme and urged students to spread awareness about such types of social security schemes promulgated for the benefit of women.

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