



Editor's Column

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The court further said that "there are serious outcomes of child marriage. It is the worst form of domestic violence against the child not only by the respondents (husband and his family) but also by her parents. Child brides have a diminished chance of completing their education and are at a higher risk of being physically abused, contracting HIV and other diseases, and dying while pregnant or giving birth."

A recent report by the UNICEF on child marriages in India found that among women in the 22-24 age

group, two out of every five women surveyed had been married off as children. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and West Bengal had the highest incidents of child marriage and among all the states, Rajasthan is still the capital of child-brides. 15% of all women married in Rajasthan between

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CHILD MARRIAGE

2009-11 were underage – 10 times more than the percentage of such women in Uttarakhand.

The report observed that the slow rate at which child marriages are decreasing in the country, it will take about 50 years to eradicate this practice. The data reiterates that the strategies adopted and implemented in the country to end this regressive social custom have failed. It is not that there has not been any progress but it has been too slow.

Child marriages once involved both boys and girls but now it is mostly girls, who are married off at a very young age. Many girls do not go to school at all and out of these, many discontinue their education when they get married. Consequently, they become dependent on their husbands for their entire lives. The practice is more prevalent in socially, economically and educationally backward areas and groups. Though there are laws against child marriage, they are blatantly violated. The campaigns and awareness programmes of government and other bodies have to be more effective so that schemes directed at girl children have a positive impact. The Kenyashree Prakalpa Scheme in West Bengal, for instance, offering scholarships to girls students has been able to keep girls in schools and prevent their early marriages. Similar schemes and incentives must be initiated by the Central and the State governments to curb this social evil.

Important Decisions

- The Supreme Court has ruled that courts cannot summon a husband's distant relations as accused in dowry cases in the absence of any specific role played by them and materials to support such allegations. Only the husband and his parents and at best close family relations may be expected to demand dowry or harass the wife but not distant relations. The Court further said the attitude to arrest first and then proceed to rest is "despicable" and the police must give reasons and proofs to the Magistrate before making an arrest u/s 498A of IPC.
- A Division Bench of Punjab and Haryana High Court has ruled that the state is duty-bound to safeguard the life and liberty of runaway couples even without solemnization of a valid marriage and the question to ponder is whether they can be deprived of the protection of their life and liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.
- Women employees of public sector insurance companies will soon be entitled to get postings at the place of their choice. The Finance Ministry has asked all public sector insurance companies, including LIC, to formulate women-friendly transfer policies so that they can get transfers at places, where their husbands are working or parents are living.

NCW Chairperson greets people on Diwali

NCW Chairperson Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam also to the readers of *Rashtra Mahila* on the the triumph of good over evil, hope over despair “on this auspicious occasion of Diwali, I extend this year’s celebration strengthen the bonds of gender equality. Let us on this day dedicate empowerment. May the festival of lights bring also renew and strengthen the bonds of family,



has extended her greetings to the people of India and occasion of Diwali, saying “this festival celebrates and light over darkness”. In her message, she said, my warm greetings and good wishes to all. May goodwill and trust, by promoting the cause of ourselves to spreading the message of women’s peace, prosperity and progress all around. May it community and country amongst all Indians.”

Prevention of Trafficking in Women and Girls

A National Consultation on “Prevention of Trafficking in Women and Girls: State Accountability and Community Action”, was organized by the UN Women in New Delhi, aimed at creating institutionalized mechanisms to prevent trafficking through community-based action and ensure state accountability.

The consultation’s objective was to share best practices of state accountability and community-based modules for prevention of trafficking and identify opportunities for synergy among participants within government, civil society, donors and the UN. 70 participants took part in the consultation, including Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam, Chairperson of NCW, Ambassador of European Union to India, representatives from UN Agencies, activists from Civil Society Organizations, representatives from Panchayats, survivors of trafficking and peer educators.

Some of the major recommendations were: Amend ITPA, 1956 (a) Include a comprehensive definition of human trafficking; (b) Do not criminalize the sex worker; (c) Rehabilitation to be made a legal mandate and a constitutional right; (d) Set up a nodal agency to fight human trafficking, etc.



Chairperson addressing the consultation

Seminar on Gender and Violence

A two-day National Seminar on “Gender and Violence: A Challenge for Equitable Society”, was inaugurated by NCW Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. Speaking on the occasion, the Chairperson emphasized that gender-based violence is omnipresent – cutting across nations, manifesting itself in psychological, emotional, physical aspects. Right from female foeticides to dowry harassment, these highlight the lopsided equation between women and men, where the power structure portrays women as redundant. She further stated that we must recognize women’s rights as basic human rights – not only through legislations but also through political will. She said she would try her best to reduce violence against women and work towards bringing in reforms to build a gender-just society.

Swachhta Pledge

To commemorate the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on 2nd October, 2014, the Chairperson, Members, officers and staff took the swachhta pledge to keep the country neat and clean.



Annual Conference of Terapanth Mahila Mandal

The Chairperson was the Chief Guest at the 45th Annual Conference organized by Jain Shwetamber Terapanth Mahila Mandal at New Delhi. While delivering her address, she said that Terapanth was doing commendable work to protect girl children, as well as, in the field of environmental protection and de-addiction. However, to empower the nation, both men and women must work together, she added.



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◆ Member Shamina Shafiq attended a conference organized by the Centre for Social Research on surrogacy, wherein the participants discussed the bill to regulate assisted reproduction like surrogacy and in-vitro fertilization (IVF), which is likely to be introduced in the winter session of Parliament. Speaking on the occasion, the Member said that the contracts were in English and could not be comprehended by the surrogate mothers, while surrogacy was all about the child and not the mother. ● The Member attended a meeting on Police Reforms organized by the Guild of Service in New Delhi and focused her discussion on improving the working and living conditions of policemen. ● Ms. Shafiq was a member of an enquiry committee headed by the Chairperson to enquire into an alleged rape and sexual abuse in Bangalore. ● The Member attended a national seminar and panel discussion on "Police Reforms – its Perspectives and Challenges in India", organized by Indian World Foundation at Dehradun. ● Ms. Shafiq attended the meeting of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women Empowerment along with the Chairperson, other Members and senior officers of the NCW.



Member Shamina Shafiq (right) at the meeting on police reforms



Member Hemlata Kheria interacting with women scavengers

◆ Member Hemlata Kheria visited Ranipur and Masthi villages of Bhanwarkol block in Mahammadabad Tehsil of Ghazipur in UP to participate in two public hearings organized by Social Development Foundation. ● Later, she met dalit, maha dalit and Musahar women and also women from manual scavenging community, who sought her help. They said that they were forced to work as scavengers as most of them were landless and had to depend on other caste people for survival. They also said that under the new scavenging Act they had not been identified as manual scavengers whereas under the new Act they were entitled to get help from the govt. They said that the money they get in lieu of their work was nominal and therefore, wanted an economic alternative. Most of them said they did not want their children to do the same work as they faced discrimination within their community, too, as well as, tremendous pressure at home. Many of the officials present

with the Member were shocked to know that women were still engaged as manual scavengers, which was prohibited by law. The Member felt that our Acts and laws need better monitoring. ● The Member was the Chief Guest at a seminar on dowry organized by Jan Kalyan Samity in collaboration with NCW at Agra. ● Member Kheria attended a programme organized by Durga Puja Samiti in Delhi and later attended a Kali Puja organized by Kali Puja Samiti in Karolbagh, New Delhi. She distributed NCW print material in Bengali and reiterated NCW's commitment towards women empowerment and redressal of complaints. ● She was also a special guest at a Regar Mahasammellan at Madipur, Delhi.

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