



Editor's Column

In a country where women often face discrimination and deprivation at home, or at workplace or even on the streets - the amendments to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and the Domestic Violence Bill, 2005, passed by the Parliament mark yet another milestone in the battle for gender equality in the country.

The passing of the Hindu Succession (Amendments) Bill 2004 is significant not only because it gets women equal rights in all property, including ancestral one, but also because it gives them equal rights on agricultural land. Agricultural land did not figure in the original Bill and was included only after women's groups in the country lobbied for its inclusion. Significantly, it also gives daughters rights equivalent to sons in joint family property.

As regards the Bill on domestic violence, the Act aims to provide more effective protection to women, who are victims of violence of any kind within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

The comprehensive legislation aims at checking all forms of exploitation of

FOCUS

**MILESTONE
FOR WOMEN**

women - physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic, actual abuse or threat of abuse. Harassment by way of unlawful dowry demands to the woman or her relatives will come under the purview of the Bill, which also covers women living in joint families or nuclear families and provides succour to them if exploited or harassed by their family members, in-laws or other relatives.

In addition, relationships with family members living together as a joint family are also included.

Moreover, a police officer, protection officer, service provider or magistrate, who has received a message of domestic violence shall inform the aggrieved person of her right to make an application for obtaining relief by way of a protection order, of availability of services of service providers, of her right to free legal aid under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, and of her right to file a complaint under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, wherever relevant.

However, laws alone will not help better the lot of Indian women, a large number of whom endure ill-treatment, oppression and abuse. What is needed is a change in the mindset; this has to happen not only among the masses but among our law-makers.

Meri Delhi Award - 2005

NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas has been conferred the 'Meri Delhi Award' for her outstanding contribution in the field of Social Right. The award is presented every year to eminent personalities of Delhi for their exemplary achievements.



Dr. Girija Vyas receiving the award from Shri A.R. Kidwai, Governor of Haryana

Breast-feeding is best feeding for your newborn

- i) Start breastfeeding within half an hour of the delivery.
- ii) Colostrum, thick yellow secretion in the first few days has anti-infective properties and should not be discarded.
- iii) Breast milk provides complete nutrition; baby does not require honey, water or any other liquid.
- iv) Exclusive breastfeeding for your baby for six months.
- v) Breastfeeding forms an *Emotional Bond* between mother and baby.

Conference on Foeticide and Infanticide

The All-India Conference of State Secretaries - Health, WCD and Director Generals of Police on the implementation of PC & PNDT Act was recently organised by NCW in New Delhi. It being a part of the Commission's campaign against female foeticide and infanticide.

Addressing the gathering, NCW chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas said there was a need to strengthen the penal provisions of the PNDT Act as the sex ratio in the country has declined from 976 girls per 1,000 boys in 1991 to 927 girls per 1,000 boys in 2001.

Speaking on the occasion, the Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Anbumani Ramadoss said that a national surveillance cell will be set up to check female foeticide. He also stressed the need to make punishment more stringent under the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act.



At the All-India Conference of State Secretaries Ms. Reva Nayyar, Dr. Girija Vyas, Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss, Smt. Kanti Singh and (below) Ms. Neeva Konwar, Ms. Malini Bhattacharya, Ms. Sushila Tiriya, Dr. Girija Vyas, Ms. Yasmeen Abrar and Ms. Nirmala Venkatesh.

Mr. Ramadoss said the cell would comprise retired police personnel, members of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and citizen groups, which would conduct surprise checks on diagnostic clinics to ensure better implementation of the Act.

Some of the speakers said that the present fine of Rs. 1 lakh and imprisonment up to five years should be increased substantially to act as a proper deterrent. There has been no convictions under the PCPNDT Act so far. And although the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act did not allow sex selective abortions, it was being misused "to prevent grave injury to the mental health of pregnant women" in pregnancy resulting from contraceptive failure. Hence, there was a need to monitor abortions conducted after 12 weeks of pregnancy and to modify the Act.

From the Complaints Cell

Smt. Savitri, a resident of Kotdwar, Uttaranchal, approached the Commission regarding exploitation of her deaf and dumb daughter Sunita (name changed). Sunita was studying in a school in New Delhi.

Savitri was the neighbour of Mahendra Prasad. Rohit Kumar (name changed), son of Mahendra Prasad, was also staying at the same time in R.K. Puram, New Delhi, in connection with his studies. A few years ago, Savitri withdrew her daughter from the Deaf and Dumb School and brought her to her house at Kotdwar. Rohit Kumar used to visit the girl at her house in Kotdwar and during these meetings, developed physical intimacy, on account of which, Sunita became pregnant. When the complainant got to know about this development, she pressurized Rohit Kumar to marry her daughter, where upon Sunita and Rohit Kumar were married in July, 2004 in Kotdwar. The marriage was also registered. In August, 2004, Mahendra Prasad disowned his son and daughter-in-law. In Oct. 2004, Sunita delivered a daughter. Thereafter, Rohit Kumar deserted her. At this juncture, the complainant approached NCW. Earlier, the complainant had approached the police for obtaining justice but she was not heard by anyone. The Commission summoned SP, Pauri Garhwal, to the Commission, urging him to take necessary action. After the Commission's intervention, the police traced the husband and counselled him. He has now agreed to rehabilitate his wife and daughter.

Maharashtra to Launch Special Insurance Scheme for Women

The Maharashtra Government proposes to launch a unique insurance scheme exclusively for women in the State, who are below the poverty line, handicapped, widowed and landless. The scheme will be valid for five years.

The premium for the policies would be as low as Re 1 or Rs. 2 and the coverage would be Rs. 10,000 for minor accidents, Rs. 50,000 for partial disability and Rs. 1,00,000 in the event of death.

The scheme will also provide mediclaim facilities for maternity, breast cancer and other women-related health conditions.

Website for NCW and NRCW

The Union Minister for Human Resource Development Shri Arjun Singh recently inaugurated websites for NCW (www.ncw.nic.in) and National Resource Centre for Women (www.nrcw.nic.in) in New Delhi.

Indicating a thorough revamp of NCW, he said that the apex body for woman had to prove its credibility in not only solving complaints but also helping women to be

Addressing the gathering, NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas said while online complaints would be in English initially, the system will be upgraded from 1st October to receive these in Hindi and other Indian languages.

She said, "there has been a great jump in the number of complaints received by NCW this year. Till August, there were about 7,000 complaints as against 5,000



Shri Arjun Singh inaugurating the websites. Dr. Girija Vyas, Ms Malini Bhattacharya, Member-Secretary Shri N.P. Gupta look on.

empowered. Admitting that there were serious deficiencies in the Commission, Shri Arjun Singh said the shortcomings would be removed by March 2006, so that the Commission could play its role more effectively.

Women can now lodge their complaints at www.ncw.nic.in while all information related to women's issues and rights could be obtained from www.nrcw.nic.in

Earlier, delivering the welcome address, Member Malini Bhattacharya said that the NRCW aimed at creating information base in the fields of women's development and facilitating generation of data on contemporary issues of women besides providing networking facilities to institutions and individuals actively engaged in women's development.

in the whole of last year", adding that the new website would encourage more distressed women, including those from the rural areas, to come to the Commission and the complainants could monitor the status of their cases online.

The portal will be jointly managed by the NCW and National Informatics Centre and will be constantly upgraded.

She said the NRCW portal will have links to national and international library collections through digital catalogue, statistics, information about women's organisations, legislations, profiles of important Indian women and abstracts of studies on women from around the country and though its focus will be on India, the website will have regional linkages with SAARC countries and provide statistics in comparison to major countries.

NCW Scheme for Compensation to Rape Victims

The National Commission for Women has formalised a scheme for giving compensation to rape victims ranging from Rs. two to five lakh.

The draft scheme prepared in response to a Supreme Court directive proposes setting up of District Criminal inquiries Relief Boards (DCIRB), to be headed by the Collectors or District Magistrates to provide rape victims with relief and rehabilitation.

The victims or their legal heir or any NGO on her behalf can approach the Board for compensation.

A sum of Rs. 20,000 will be given as interim relief if the Board was satisfied that a prima facie case of rape could be registered.

While a relief of Rs. two lakh can be awarded by the District Board, compensation of up to Rs. five lakh will be decided by Boards set up at the state and central levels.

A National Rape Victims Assistance Fund with budgetary allocations from the Centre will also be created under the scheme and the Commission would monitor the overall implementation of the scheme.

Contact numbers of the Chairperson and the Members of NCW

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5. **Ms. Malini Bhattacharya**
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6. **Mr. N.P. Gupta**
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Members' Visits

- Member Yasmeen Abrar attended a public hearing of women artisans at Saharanpur to know their problems and devise means for redressal. Ms Abrar visited Kota and held a meeting with the DC, SP and Deputy Director WCD and enquired about the status of complaints regarding crimes against women. Dy. Director, WCD said that 544 complaints regarding harassment of women had been received and out of which 542 complaints have been sorted out.



Ms Yasmeen Abrar addressing the Public Hearing

Later, she held a meeting with women NGOs working for the welfare of women at Kota. She also attended a seminar organised by Aman Bidi. Mazdoor Union at Anjuman Madrasa Islamia Makbara, who forwarded a memorandum to her mentioning the problems of bidi workers. Later, Ms Abrar attended a public hearing of mahila bidi workers where issues of low wages, non payment of wages, non issue of BPL I-Cards, housing, widow pension, harassment by contractors etc. were discussed. Later, she inspected the mahila barrack in the Central Jail, whose condition she found was unsatisfactory.

- Member Malini Bhattacharya attended a meeting at the State Planning Board to consider a study of implementation of ICDS in West Bengal. Ms Bhattacharya also visited Patna and held a meeting with the Bihar State Commission for Women who envisaged keenness to do some programmes with NCW. Later, she attended a meeting with NGOs and women's organisations. She also inaugurated a 3-day seminar organised by Development Alternatives on their Poverty Alleviation Strategies Programme.

On her return to Kolkata, she visited the National University of Juridical Sciences to deliver a lecture on Gender Perspective in population policies.

Ms Bhattacharya attended a seminar on prevention of child marriage, trafficking in women and dowry prohibition in Kolkata. She also delivered the key-note address on politics of representation and the Gender Question at the school of Women Studies, Jadavpur University.

- Member Nirmala Venkatesh visited Shiddalagatta town, Kolar district to enquire into the alleged rape of Sadika by two men in a car. One of the culprits has been arrested. She met Sadika and persuaded her would be father-in-law before the press to go ahead with his son's marriage with Sadika.

She has asked the police to arrest the other culprit within 48 hours. Thereafter, she contacted Sadika's fiance, who said he would marry her on 30th September, 2005.

Important Decisions

Point of no return ground for divorce : court

The Supreme Court has held that irrevocable separation between a man and his wife for long years making reunion impossible for leading a normal conjugal life is a valid ground for divorce.

CJ to judges : Hold back remarks against women

In a landmark ruling in favour of women and activists, the Chief Justice of the Bombay high court strongly disapproved of intemperate remarks against a woman's character in judgements passed in Maharashtra's courts. He has laid down rules for fellow judges, magistrates and tribunals on the need for sobriety and restraint while delivering verdicts, stating that "courts should refrain from making any remarks on the character of a person, particularly women, unless it is absolutely imperative".

Rajasthan HC bans sati worship

Setting aside a lower court decision, the Rajasthan HC has disallowed glorification of Sati in five temples of Jhunjhunu. The HC issued the directive after the state government filed a petition against an order of the Jhunjhunu district court which had allowed the priests of perform *puja* in the temples.

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