



## Editor's Column

They come in search of "Moksha" to Kashi, Mathura and Vrindavan, expecting to find spiritual peace and physical security. But once they reach these pilgrim centres, their dreams are shattered. They find another fate awaiting them.

Most of them after becoming widows, have been persuaded to settle down in these pilgrim centres and were promised regular financial assistance. But before long, the flow of money stops and for their relatives they almost cease to exist. Bereft of financial, social or emotional support, deserted by their husbands' families after their husbands' deaths, they are then left to fend for themselves, leading a life of penury, neglect and humiliation.

The majority of women does not have pension and ration-cards and survives on earnings from singing bhajans. While most among them are engaged in performing daily chores at the temples, ashrams and bhajan homes, some of them beg for alms around street corners, temple porches and markets. There is urgent need for constructing housing facilities for the widows as several spend nights in make shift tents, under the staircase or in the open in appalling conditions without proper toilets, water and electricity and health care. What appalled the nation was a report filed by the District Legal Cell Authority that after the death of a widow, nobody was prepared to cremate her and a sweeper had to be paid Rs. 200/- to take her body, cut into pieces, stuff these in a sack and dump them in the river. As if the ignominy of begging for survival was not enough, there seems to be no deliverance for these unfortunate women even after death.

In this context, the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women Ms. Mamta Sharma along with Member Adv. Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar recently visited Vrindavan to assess the present condition of the widows. They held meetings with concerned state authorities to redress their grievances relating to health care, hygiene, safe drinking water, food and cleanliness. The NCW has also made a request in its affidavit to the Supreme Court to set up a state government agency to develop infrastructure to provide civic amenities, disposal of sewerage and overall development of



Member Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar and Chairperson Mamta Sharma (centre) interacting with the widows

## FOCUS

## WIDOWS OF PILGRIM CENTRES

Vrindavan, particularly, keeping in mind the pitiable conditions of the widows.

However, apart from food, clothing or shelter, or getting money, building ashrams, funding kitchens, what is more important is to provide them a life of dignity and give them their rightful place within the families and the communities. Indeed, a society that cannot look after its vulnerable members cannot be called civilized.

Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma along with Member Shamina Shafiq visited Jalandhar to enquire into the alleged suicide of Shivali, a girl student, who jumped before a train after she was humiliated by police personnel and some photo journalists. She also visited the site where Shivali's body was found and later met her parents at their house.

The Chairperson recently visited the Mahila thana at Kota in Rajasthan. The Thana comprised one sub-inspector, two head constables and two constables, all female staff members. Since

January 2012, 352 cases of different crimes had been reported. Out of these, 108 cases were found to be false and challans had been submitted in other cases for court's direction. Mostly, the cases were related to dowry harassment, marital dispute etc.

The Chairperson visited Kota Jail, where 23 women undertrials were housed. The Chairperson was happy to note that the inmates did not have any complaint against the jail officials. The food supplied to them was of good quality and one doctor, two compounders were always there to check up their health. They were also provided with religious books and also a TV set for their entertainment. When asked whether legal aid was provided to them, the DSP informed that whenever any undertrial required legal aid, the request was forwarded to the CGM, who in turn, forwarded the same to the concerned court for providing government advocates, free of cost.

The Chairperson attended the closing ceremony of the Lexicon Art Show at the Ambience Mall, Gurgaon where around 100 artists showcased their art works as well as finer aspects of painting techniques.

## National Consultation

The NCW organized a consultation on “*Natal Family Violence against Females in India – Right to Bodily Integrity and Autonomy*” at MD University at Rohtak.

Speaking on the occasion, NCW Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma said that though all religions respected women and prohibited violence against them yet women were subjected to all types of atrocities in various parts of the country. Therefore, she said, the Commission proposes to organize sensitization programmes for personnel of the criminal justice system.

Addressing the gathering, Dr. Charu WaliKhanna deplored that despite Constitution of India guaranteeing equal rights for all citizens yet at the ground level gender justice was still to be a reality; they are denied basic human rights and often subjected to coercion, discrimination and violence by their natal family.

Member Hemlata Kheria stressed the need to change the patriarchal attitudes of subordination of women.



*Chairperson lighting the lamp to inaugurate the programme. Members Hemlata Kheria and Charu WaliKhanna look on*

She said it was most unfortunate that women were being subjected to atrocities and killed in the name of false “honour”. The technical session discussed whether a separate bill for killing in the name of “honour” would be a solution to eradicating the problem or whether special provisions or

chapters in the Indian Penal Code could prevent such crimes or whether a cultural revolution by way of social engineering was the need of the hour. The participants and the panelists also discussed the Bill proposed by the NCW to deal with such crimes, its provisions and the appropriateness of the title.

## Consultation on Impact of Science & Technology

A two-day national workshop sponsored by the National Commission for Women on “*Impact of Science and Technology on Social Change; Women issues and challenges*” was organized at College of Home Science, Maharana Pratap University of Agriculture and Technology, (MPUAT) at Udaipur, Rajasthan. Over 120 delegates from various institutes of Udaipur and other parts of the country participated in the workshop.

In her inaugural address, Chief Guest NCW Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma stressed that women empowerment should be initiated while tackling issues like female foeticide, child marriage, dowry system etc. with the joint efforts of NCW, police, the civil society and particularly, women. She said that a helpline has been started by NCW in the state of Gujarat and soon women of Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana will be benefited by the same.

On the second day, discussions were held on various women related issues and strategies to be adopted to cope with the challenges ahead.



*Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma addressing the gathering*

## Azad Maidan Incident

NCW took suo moto cognizance of the alleged incidence of mishandling, harassment and molestation of women police officers of the Mumbai Police and women in general at Azad Maidan.

Chairperson Ms. Mamta Sharma, and Member, Adv. Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar, visited Mumbai to inquire into the matter. They met the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and handed over a letter comprising recommendations suggested by the enquiry team. The Chief Minister assured that he would look into the matter. Some of the recommendations, among others, included that the case be tried by a fast-track court and the culprits should be given stringent punishment and injured women police personnel on duty to be given adequate financial compensation and body protect jackets should be introduced during field operations. The women police may be given regular 8 hours duty with relievers available for them.



*Chairperson along with Member Prabhavalkar handing over the letter comprising recommendations to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra*

## Members' Visits

● Member Dr. Charu WaliKhanna in-charge of the state of Bihar visited Bihar in view of the rising crimes against women in the state. At Patna, she met the victims of molestation and sexual abuse cases pending with the Commission and assured them of quick action through NCW's intervention. The victims told her that the accused have morphed their photographs and circulating them through MMS and CD/DVD and the police, despite numerous complaints, are taking no action. The member also met the DGP, Shri Abhyananda, who provided details of steps taken to control such crimes along with an action taken report. Later, the member inspected the Mahila Police Station at Sultanganj at Patna.



*Member Charu WaliKhanna with the victims*

Dr. WaliKhanna was the Chief Guest at the Legal Awareness Camp on "Reproductive Health Rights, Foeticide, Infanticide, PC

and PNDT Act, 1994, and the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act" held at Dwarka. It was organized by the Social Development Welfare Society. Releasing the legal awareness manual developed by the NGO, she said that it was unfortunate that even now women are considered as a liability, and as a result sex determination tests were taking place for selective abortion of girl child.

The Member was the Chief Guest at the "National Workshop on Land Rights of Women" held at Lucknow, organized by Sakhi Kendra, an NGO, in association with NCW. She said that land was an important resource in India, especially, for women, because they are depended on it for their livelihood. She said that despite women providing most of the agricultural labour, they own only a fraction of the land, although women's right to land is a critical factor in social status, economic wellbeing and empowerment.

● Member Advocate Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar attended a consultation in the State of Maharashtra on 'Review of Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971'. The NCW examining whether the existing provisions require any amendment in view of Haresh and Nikita Mehta case, in which the couple had sought medical termination of pregnancy as the reports showed that the foetus had congenital heart problems. The termination was not allowed because there were no specific provisions of abortion with regard to a 24-week pregnancy. In this connection, Ms. Prabhavalkar held a consultation with the Federation of Obstetric and Gynecological Society of India, to revisit the provisions of

NTP Act due to changes in technology and advances in medical sciences. The recommendations are awaited.

- The Member visited Charkop Police Station in Mumbai to inquire into an incident wherein it was learnt that one Amrita was booked by the Charkop Police Station under Section 372 IPC which deals with selling of minor children for the purpose of prostitution. During enquiry, it was learnt that due to poverty, hunger as well as neglect by the husband, the 22-year-old Amrita was forced to beg on the streets and was trapped by a child-selling racket. The Police laid a trap to catch the culprits. Amrita was also arrested as part of the procedure. The suo moto inquiry undertaken by the Commission revealed that Amrita was willing to hand over her 45-day-old son to a family not for money but for his wellbeing. At present, the mother is in Byculla Jail and her three children are staying in the Children Home at Mankhurd, Maharashtra. The Commission has decided to rehabilitate the mother and is in the process of reuniting the children as soon as the legal process is over.

- NCW took suo moto cognizance of an incident regarding Navjeevan Sudhar Grah from where a group of 17 women ran away and was booked under ITPA. Member Prabhavalkar visited the Sudhargraha to investigate into the matter. Recommendations based on the above report, will be sent to the concerned Ministry.



*Member Hemlata Kheria with the officials of the Commission*

- Member Hemlata Kheria visited the State Commission in Chandigarh to discuss women-related issues and the cases which are being dealt by the Commission.

Miss Hemlata Kheria visited village Garhi Sampla in Rohtak District, Haryana and participated in an interactive session with

women and students present on the occasion. She asked them about their views regarding their right to choose a partner. The older generation said that inter-caste marriage was acceptable but not within the same village. At the same time, they resisted inter-caste marriages with dalits even if the boy was educated and earning well. In such circumstances, violence against the girl would be committed. However, parents of younger generations were more to accepting changes and did not attach much importance to the caste factor.



*Member Hemlata Kheria interacting with the students*

She also participated in an interactive session on family violence in India at the Government College Rohtak. Speaking on the occasion, she said that though cultural values are very deep rooted in our society, the younger generation is challenging the established norms while taking the wrath of the society in the form of social boycotts. Various suggestions were given by the students on the contentious issues like belonging to the same caste or gotra.

- Member Shamina Shafiq delivered a lecture at a workshop on “Women Studies – an introduction” organized by Centre for Women Studies, at Aligarh Muslim University. The member dealt upon the subject to apprise the faculty and research scholars with the objectives, concepts of women studies as an academic discipline that pertains to social activism. She also spoke on NCW, its objectives, structures and functions.

*for further information visit our website at : [www.ncw.nic.in](http://www.ncw.nic.in)*