



Editor's Column

The Supreme Court judgement permitting an unwed mother to become the sole guardian of her child without the consent of the father is a welcome one. If she does not want to disclose the name of the father, she does not have to and the authorities must issue a birth certificate that lists only the mother's name. She is only required to furnish an affidavit to this effect. The box under the father's name on school forms, passport applications and assorted official paperwork can be left blank.

The society at large, and

particularly the Indian society looks down upon unwed mothers simply because they had participated in a natural process but without a legal sanction and decided not to abandon their children.

But the court, while giving this judgement was not concerned about

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Positive Decision

societal approval but only thought about the well-being of a child above the rights of the parents. The verdict was not based on any consideration of gender parity either. Progressive court ruling, aimed at reducing harassment faced

by single mothers across the country, will empower women to raise their children single-handedly. Citing various civil and common law jurisdictions across the globe, the court affirmed that the "welfare of a child was more important than the rights of an uninvolved father".

Admittedly, there is little to be gained by the child by giving legal recognition to a man, who has no interest in the welfare of the child. On the contrary, interference from an abusive, uninvolved father would not only be detrimental to the family but would cause irreparable damage to the child.

Chairperson addresses the Rotary Club of Madras

The Chairperson attended a meeting of the Rotary Club of Madras and addressed the audience on women empowerment. She said most of the complaints received by the Commission were violence-related and shockingly it was the well-heeled area of South Delhi having maximum number of female foeticides.

She said that to bring about changes in the patriarchal mindset, empowerment of women was essential. "The notion that a woman is firmly rooted needs to be shelved. A woman will move around today, just like a man would, and, yes, her partner will adjust, just like a woman would. We need more women in senior posts". She lamented that there were only a few lady judges and none at the Supreme Court Bench. Her next point was - a single woman needs to be accepted, just as a single man. Just because a woman is single, it doesn't mean that there is something wrong with her. She need not be a divorcee/widow. A single woman could just be single by choice, she said.

"Women need to realize that they are in this too - not just the men. They are just as biased. Our orphanages would not house a whopping 90% of girls, if women did not agreed to give up their babies". Finally, she stressed that gender parity was essential or else India would never forge ahead. "Respect all women, and teach your sons to do the same", she added.



Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam (2nd from left) with the President and other office bearers.

Interactive Meeting with State Women Commissions

The National Commission for Women held an interactive meeting with the State Women Commissions in New Delhi to discuss action taken on the recommendations of the earlier interactive meetings held in New Delhi, Manipur and Hyderabad.

The various issues discussed related to (i) infrastructure and budgetary allocation of the State Women Commissions to facilitate redressal of grievances as well as safeguard the interests of women; (ii) capacity building of the staff of the State Women Commissions; (iii) discussion on the nuances of the Supreme Court Judgement in Indra Sarma Vs. V.K.K. (SLP) CrI. No. 4895 of 2012 with regard to domestic



Ms. Preeti Sudan addressing the gathering along with the Chairperson and Member Secretary

included the Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam, NCW Members Laldingliani Sailo, Rekha Sharma, Sushma Sahu, Preeti Madan, NCW legal officer Sudha Chaudhary and Chairpersons, Member Secretaries and other officials of State Women Commissions. Ms. Preeti Sudan, Addl. Secretary, WCD also spoke on the occasion.



NCW law officer Sudha Chaudhary addressing the meeting. Sitting on the dais (from left) Ms. Rekha Sharma, Ms. Laldingliani Sailo, Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam, Ms. Preeti Madan and Ms. Sushma Sahu

violence, live in relationship etc.; (iv) discussion about the Bill titled the 'Prevention and Protection of Women from (dehumanising and stigmatization) Atrocities Bill, 2014.

Later, a presentation was made on an NCW project Violence Free Home - A Women's Right - for replication in the states. The speakers, who addressed different sessions



NCW Chairperson (centre) with NCW Members and Chairpersons of State Commissions for Women

Chairperson attends UPASI programme

NCW Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam was the chief guest at the annual conference of the United Planters Association of South India (UPASI) held at Coonoor. Speaking on the occasion, the Chairperson said that she would play the role of a facilitator to take up issues of the plantation industry with the centre. Adverting to the recent labour issues in the plantation sector, with women labourers complaining of under payment in Kerala, she said that the NCW would initiate a research to assess the present condition of labourers in the plantation industry to evolve a suitable mechanism mutually beneficial to the labourers and owners to see that the industry focuses on improvement.

Stressing upon the need for skill upgradation for plantation labourers. Ms. Kumaramangalam said that the Centre is committed to structural reforms both in tax and labour regimes and hoped that things would improve in the future. She asked the plantation industry to move forward to tide over the crisis and to bring India on top in the global market for its plantation products.



NCW Chairperson addressing the gathering

❖ Member Laldingliani Sailo was on a four-day visit to Assam to discuss various women-related issues with the Assam Government which included measures to strengthen the Assam State Commission for Women. In this connection, she met the Chief Secretary alongwith the Chairperson of Assam Commission and its Members requesting for enhancement of the budgetary support to the State Commission and providing it additional technical manpower. The NCW and the State Commission are working on a report on the socio-economic and political status of women in Assam, which forms a part of the overall North East report on empowerment of women. The report will serve as the baseline survey for policy and programme recommendations for women. ● Ms. Sailo alongwith Member Secretary Monidipa Borkotoki and other members visited the central Jail in Guwahati and interacted with women inmates and held discussions with the jail authorities regarding repairing of the building, toilets, bathrooms and improving the sanitary conditions and medical facilities. ● The Member also visited Jalukbari State Home Complex for destitute women. The condition of the home was satisfactory. She recommended better recreational facilities as well as rehabilitation of the inmates.



NCW Member Sailo (centre) discussing women-related issues with government officials flanked by Member Secretary and Assam Chairperson

❖ Member Sushma Sahu visited the Old Age Home at Tarash Mandir Complex in Vrindavan alongwith NCW counsellor Neha Mahajan Gupta and social activist Dr. Laxmi Goutam. They interacted with elderly women (mostly widows) and found their living conditions deplorable. Later, she visited other sadans and spoke to inmates residing there. She said she would send her report to the Chairperson of NCW and to the Ministry of WCD and state governments so that prompt measures are taken to improve healthcare facilities and the living conditions of the inmates. She also said steps should be taken to combat problems relating to sanitation and water.



Member Sushma Sahu interacting with widows

❖ Member Rekha Sharma met Shri Manoharlal, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Haryana to discuss problems faced by women in the Shelter Homes of Haryana. She told him that though the pension given to the widows amounted to Rs. 1,200 per month, yet they were receiving only Rs. 850 per month. She also apprised the chief minister of the poor condition of the homes and lack of security of the inmates. The Chief Minister immediately called the concerned officials and the Minister for Women and Child Development, Smt. Kavita Jain and directed them to look into these matters. The pension issue was sorted out then and there. ● Member Sharma visited the Shelter Home and the District Jail of Faridabad to interact with women inmates and inspect their living conditions. ● She also visited the Shelter Home and District Jail of Karnal. She expressed her unhappiness over the joint accomodation provided to mentally-retarded inmates along with others in the Nari Niketan. However, she lauded the efforts initiated by the jail authorities to improve the living conditions of the inmates. ●



Ms. Rekha Sharma with Chief Minister of Haryana

Ms. Sharma also visited the Model Jail of Chandigarh and interacted with the inmates as well as the jail authorities as to how to improve the condition of the women inmates. ● The Member attended the programme on "Equality and Women", organised by Aditi Mahavidyalaya, Bawana in New Delhi. ● Ms. Sharma visited Bhubaneshwar to attend the National Convention on "Inter-state Coordination on Anti-Trafficking of Girls and Women", organized by the Odisha State Commission for Women.

Important Decisions

- In a landmark verdict, the Delhi High Court has ruled that mothers, who have children through surrogacy are entitled to maternity leave which includes pre and post-natal period. Reasoning that the commissioning mother is the legal mother of the child, the High Court laid down guidelines for surrogate mothers saying that “a commissioning mother needs to bond with the child and at times takes over the role of a breast-feeding mother, immediately after the delivery of the child”, and her emotional involvement may be more than the surrogate mother.
- A DoPT order says that a government employee facing allegations of sexual harassment at workplace may be suspended before or after filing of the chargesheet if his continuance in office is likely to prejudice the investigation or leads to a scandal, compromising wider public interest.
- The Chhattisgarh High Court has upheld the decision of a family court in Kankar district of M.P. which granted a 70-year-old woman maintenance of Rs. 1,000 from her stepson. The High Court has ruled that a childless stepmother is entitled to maintenance from her stepsons.
- The Ministry of Minority Affairs has implemented ‘Nai Roshni’, a scheme for Leadership Development of Minority women, to empower and instil confidence in women by providing knowledge, tools and techniques for interacting with government systems, banks and intermediaries at all levels. The scheme implemented through NGOs, civil societies, trusts, etc. provides one week training programmes followed by necessary help for a year.

Making a difference

Kunwarbai Jadav, a 102-year-old woman in a remote village in Chhattisgarh is spear-heading a campaign to build toilets at homes. In an unprecedented gesture, Kunwarbai sold off her goats for Rs. 22,000 for building a toilet. After coming to know about diseases that could spread through open defecation, the frail-old-lady moved from house to house in Kotabharri village at Dhamtari in Raipur, generating awareness and motivating people to create an open-defecation-free zone.

Her efforts and dedication enthused the 450 residents of the village to take a pledge to construct toilets at their homes. Help also came from the collector of Dhamtari by way of providing subsidy in toilet construction under MNREGS. By July, Kotabharri village was declared as an open-defecation free village. In addition, kamar tribals, who reside on nearby hills, have also been inspired to construct toilets at homes.

Liaison officers in police stations

The National Commission for Women has proposed that all state governments adopt the practice of appointing liaison officers in police stations, who are sensitive to women issues. NCW has facilitated appointment of such officers in three police stations in Delhi to assist women, who approach police stations to file complaints.

This is India!

In their bizzare quest for sons, Ramsinh and Kanusangod, a tribal couple belonging to a village in Dahod district of Gujarat, had hoped that their sixteenth child would be a boy. But with another girl, the family’s 15th daughter, Ramsinh wants his wife to make a ‘one last try’, for a second son. At present, the couple had 13 daughters (two having died earlier) and one 18-month-old son.

According to Ramsinh, in their community, the brother has to bear all wedding and customary expenses for their sisters. As his son is the youngest among all his daughters, except for the newborn daughter, he feels it will be impossible for him to carry out these important customs for his daughters alone. That is why he wants a second son, who can share his burden.

Meanwhile, Kanu is pleading for undergoing hysterectomy as her body is weak and thinks she will not be able to withstand another pregnancy.

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