



Editor's Column

In a landmark verdict, the Bombay High Court had struck down a ban on women's entry into the inner sanctum of Mumbai's iconic Haji Ali Dargah. The ban on the entry of women was imposed in 2012, and the Trust sought to defend the ban by saying that women's presence in close proximity to the tomb of a male saint was a grievous sin in Islam. However, the court countered by saying that the Trust failed to prove that Islam prevented the entry of women in places of worship and also junked the argument that the ban protected women from "sexual harassment".

The court directed that women be allowed into the sanctum of the 15th century saint, just as they were allowed before the Trust managing the Dargah imposed the ban five years ago. A 2-judge bench said the

ban "contravenes Article 14 (Right to Equality), 15 (Prohibition of Discrimination on grounds of Religion) and 25 (Right to Religion) of the Constitution.

Thereafter, the Trust had moved the Supreme Court, challenging the Bombay High Court decision for a stay order. While granting the stay order, the apex court expressed hope

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Breaching Gender Barriers

that the Trust "would take a stand which was progressive." The bench had also remarked that if "you are not allowing both men and women to go beyond a point, there is no problem. But if you are allowing some to go beyond a point, while others are not, it is a problem."

Soon after this, in a landmark decision, the Haji Ali Dargah

management informed the Supreme Court that it would allow both men and women to enter the room that houses the sanctum sanctorum of Pir Haji Ali Shah Bukhari right up to the sanctum. However, neither men nor women would be allowed to touch the sanctum sanctorum.

More recently, reversing the earlier official stand, even the Kerala Government told the Supreme Court that all women irrespective of their age, should be allowed to enter the Sabrimala Temple.

Admittedly, struggle for gender equality is the key to the progress of a nation and no country can thrive if women are discriminated against and not given access to religious places. The courts have given women legal power to challenge regressive notions, and it would be wonderful to see Hindus and Muslims, women and men standing shoulder to shoulder to build a more just society.

Important Decisions

- To help women in distress, from January, 2017 onwards, every mobile phone sold in India will have a 'panic button' that could be used to alert the police. The panic button will be mapped to emergency number 100.
- The Delhi High Court has held that demand for privacy by a married woman in her matrimonial home cannot be dubbed as cruelty towards the husband to grant him divorce. The observation came as the bench dismissed a plea by the husband seeking dissolution of marriage saying that privacy is a fundamental human right.
- The Centre has launched a scheme to provide free health check-ups to pregnant women at Government health centres and hospitals. Women from semi-urban, poor and rural areas will be given priority. As part of the scheme, women will be tested for anaemia, blood pressure, high blood sugar (gestational diabetes) and other problems associated with pregnancy and provided free ultrasounds to track the health and development of the baby in the womb.
- The Delhi High Court has directed the state government to provide free medical treatment to an acid attack victim, who suffered injuries in a 2009 attack and provide specialised treatment as the same is not available at the Lok Nayak Hospital. The court also asked for response of the Delhi Govt. and the Delhi Legal Services Authority on the woman's plea for rehabilitation and enhancement of the compensation amount as the ceiling of Rs 7 lakhs under the Victim Compensation Scheme was arbitrary and unrealistic as she had suffered serious injuries.

Golden Jubilee National Conference

A national conference on women was organised by the department of Political Science, Indraprastha college of women in New Delhi. Dr. Babli Moitra Saraf, the Principal of the college introduced the panel comprising NCW Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam, Indu Agnihotri, Director at the Centre for Development Studies and Professor Sushil Bharadwaj.

In the inaugural session, the conference's topic - Women, State and Power : Reflections of Democracy was discussed. It was deliberated how patriarchy played a major role in the democratic set up of the country which excluded women from gaining any benefit of democracy and how in India equal rights were denied to women.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms Lalitha Kumaramangalam lamented the meagre participation of women in the democratic set up of the country. She said that about 90 percent of Indian women were not even aware of their rights and the concept of 'globalisation' was an utopian concept for women when they did not even have access to their basic rights. She further commented that opposition to the women reservation bill was related to the "traditional" and "non-traditional" roles assigned to women by the patriarchal society.

Concluding the session, Ms Sushil Bharadwaj said that by taking part in the electoral system, women of the country would be able to achieve emancipation. The other sessions discussed 'politics of culture and identity', 'gender perspective in development and ecology' and 'state and structure of violence'.



NCW Chairperson addressing the conference

Legal Awareness Programme

Online e-proposals received from NALSA /reputed Universities/Law Departments/Colleges /State Women Commissions for organising Legal Awareness Programmes as per the Standardised Module for LAP about women related laws were accorded approval by NCW during the financial year 2016-17. Till the month of November, 2016, NCW has sanctioned 82 Legal Awareness Programmes from all over India.

A Legal Awareness Programme about women-related laws was held on 6th-7th October, 2016, at Women Studies Research Centre, Kurukshetra University, sponsored by the National Commission for Women, New Delhi.



Legal awareness programme being conducted

Profile in courage

● Shanti Devi, a truck mechanic in Delhi's Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar has proved that there is nothing that a woman cannot do. Shanti Devi is strong enough to repair tyres that weigh 60 to 80 kilos and punctures for at least 15 trucks a day. Initially, people asked her to leave this work because they thought it was a man's job. But Shanti Devi remained resolute. Though people stare at her while she repairs tyres, she does not care. With the help of her husband, she learnt every part of the truck and its repair techniques.

● India's first woman Merchant Navy Captain, Radhika Menon has become the first woman to be awarded by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) for displaying exceptional bravery while rescuing seven fishermen from a sinking boat in the tumultuous Bay of Bengal. Radhika received her medal and certificate of commendation at a recent ceremony at the IMO headquarters.

Jan Sunwai

● The National Commission for Women held a Mahila Jan Sunwai on 21st October, 2016 at training Hall, Police Station- Chittranjan Park in Delhi, headed by Member Alok Rawat along with Sh. Varun Chhabra, Counsellor and Ms. Ranjani, JTE (NRI) in coordination with District Legal Services Authority and police officials. 50 cases were taken up in Jan Sunwai; out of which, 34 cases were disposed of.



*Member Alok Rawat conducting the Jan Sunwai.
Ms. Kanchan Khattar is on his right.*

● The National Commission for Women organized a “Mahila Jan Sunwai” in Dehradun, Uttarakhand on 24th-25th November, 2016. Member Alok Rawat along with an NCW team attended the Sunwai conducted in collaboration with the State Police and the District Legal Services Authority. During the Sunwai, 140 cases were taken up.

Intervention by NCW

- An inquiry committee under the chairmanship of Member Rekha Sharma visited Noida to look into two complaints of sexual harassment one in an educational institution and other within the police department and met concerned authorities and police officers.
- An inquiry committee under the chairmanship of Member Sushma Sahu visited Patna to look into four complaints of violence against women involving police apathy and met the concerned authorities and the complainants. Thereafter, a meeting was also held with the Governor of Bihar, to discuss rising incidents of crimes against women and the indifferent attitude of the police.
- A telephonic complaint was received regarding wrongful confinement of a domestic worker by her owner. The Commission immediately directed the concerned police officials to inquire into the matter. With the prompt action of the Commission and the police, the victim was rescued.

Girl in bridal dress complains of dowry demand

A girl wearing a bridal dress met Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal at Badal village, alleging that the family of the groom from Guruharshai demanded a dowry of Rs. 5 lakhs and a car saying that their son had now got the job of ETT teacher and refused to go ahead with the marriage ceremony. The CM has asked the local SP and the SHO to take immediate action on the matter.

NRI Cell

The Commission in collaboration with Telangana State Women Commission held a National Seminar to discuss issues related to NRI marriages on 5th November, 2016 at Hyderabad.

Complaints received by NCW in November, 2016

Month	Complaints Received	Action Taken Reports received	Complaints Closed
November 2016	1290	673	916

The Commission took cognizance of 16 cases in November, 2016.

Members' Visits

❖ Member Sushma Sahu alongwith Counsellors, Praveen and Smita Jha, attended a Jan Sunwai at Kanpur on 25th and 26th October, 2016. At the Jan Sunwai, 40 cases were taken up; out of which 31 were closed, and in 9 cases directions were given to police authorities for speedy action. 2 cases were also taken up on the spot and forwarded to the police authorities for further action.



*Member Sushma Sahu addressing the Jan Sunwai at Kanpur.
The Member with the Governor of Bihar.*

● The Commission took suo motu cognizance of media report which

appeared in “Hindustan Times” captioned “Mentally challenged woman alleges rape by shelter home staff” wherein it was reported that, a 32 year old mentally challenged woman had alleged rape by three employees of an old age shelter home. Member Sahu alongwith Geeta Rathi, Jr. Technical Expert (Legal), visited the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS) to meet the victim and to inquire into her mental and physical condition. The Member also visited the shelter home where the victim was allegedly raped. The concerned police authorities updated the Member of the action taken in the matter and ensured speedy and fair investigation into the matter. ● The Member alongwith Shri Raman, PS to Chairperson visited Cochi from 10th – 11th November to enquire into a complaint received in the Commission. ● The Commission has constituted an Inquiry Committee headed by Ms. Sushma Sahu and Advocate Manish. The inquiry committee visited Patna to inquire into six complaints. The committee met the complainants and had given directions to concerned police authorities. Out of six complaints, three were of dowry death, one of rape by a police official, one of kidnapping and one of Dowry Harassment. Later, Member Sushma Sahu also met the Governor of Bihar to discuss complaints received in the National Commission for Women.

❖ The Commission took cognizance of a report which appeared in the electronic media captioned “A 20-year-old woman has been attacked with acid by her husband after she refused to go to her in-laws house in New Delhi”. Member Rekha Sharma met the victim and her family at their residence in Rohini. The victim had suffered 40% burns. The victim’s statement has been recorded and she will be compensated under the Acid Victim Compensation Scheme. Member Rekha Sharma also interacted with SHO Udham Singh, who briefed her about the horrendous incident. The victim was transferred for further treatment to Safdarjung Hospital but was denied admission and referred to OPD. She was not given proper care at the casualty ward and was not informed about the procurement of free medicine available to them. ● The Member has asked the Medical Superintendent of the Safdarjung Hospital to appear before the Commission on 26.10.2016. ● Member Rekha Sharma alongwith Ms. Geeta Rathee Singh, JTE(Legal), visited Vishwa Nirmla Prem Ashram, Noida to see the condition of mentally-challenged women and also help them in their rehabilitation. ● Member Rekha Sharma alongwith Avni Bahri JTE (Legal), visited Katwaria Sarai, Vasant Vihar, to investigate into the case of a “Woman found dead in house at Katwaria Sarai”. ● The Member met the family of the victim at their residence at Mehrauli, New Delhi. The family alleged that deceased woman was tortured by her in-laws and husband both physically and mentally for dowry since she got married in June, 2010. Though the victim’s family fulfilled all their demands, the husband and in-laws finding out that she would deliver a girl child, forced her to go to her mother’s house for delivery.

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