
ROLE OF SOCIETY FOR PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT OF DALIT WOMEN

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Abstract

In the year 2013-2014 NariGunjan has supported 250 Musahar girls who belong to various Districts in Bihar. These girls come from some of the most marginalized families in Musahar communities across the district. They all access government and private education, something they would not be able to do if they lived in their villages. Prerana Hostel also runs a special school for providing additional support along with government school education. All the children of Prerana hostel are enrolled into government schools to make sure they avail the government benefits. The special school of Prerana during the year 2013-2014 laid emphasis on Activity based teaching and personality development. Various educational initiatives have been taken up to trigger the spirit of competition among the girls. The girls are distributed into various classes from 1-7 based on their knowledge during admission

Keywords: personality, development, government, school.

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Dalit women

The situation of Dalit women in India needs special attention. They are one of the largest socially segregated groups anywhere in the world, and make up 2% of the world's total population. Dalit women are discriminated against three times over: they are poor, they are women, and they are Dalits. Dalit women constitute 16.3 of the total Indian female population. The traditional taboos are the same for Dalit men and Dalit women. However, Dalit women have to deal with them more often. Dalit women are discriminated against not only by people of higher castes, but also within their own communities. Men are dominant in Dalit communities. Dalit women also have less power within the Dalit movement itself. Women are active in large numbers in the movement but most leadership positions in the organisations, local bodies and associations have until now been held by men.

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD)

'Women human rights defenders' include women active in human rights defense who are targeted for who they are, as well as all those active in the defense of women's rights who are targeted for what they do.

WHRDs program equips the women by improving their leadership and articulation skills through various capacity building trainings, workshops, advocacy and campaign support. Many women among them are working in situations of criminal violence and face challenges on a daily basis.

IPAC

IPAC is committed to the issue of women leadership and development and plans to further take up the issue of women leadership and participation in other states as well. The issue of women human rights exists in every Indian state. The focus shifts in the states depending on the socio-political situation of that particular state. , for example in Chhattisgarh and Northeast the issues was more about security of women in these conflict areas and in Uttar Pradesh the issue is about real political and social empowerment of the women.

SDS is currently running this program in 4 regions of India under IPAC- North-East, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh.

North- east- WinG

WHRD- Rajasthan

WHRD- Chhattisgarh

WHRD- Uttar Pradesh

1. North-East- WinG Assam

WinG works for developing a strong network of grassroots Women human rights defenders in different parts of Assam with particular focus on NC Hills, Kokrajhar, (under Bodo land Territorial Council), Sonitpur, Jorhat and Kamrup districts and a renewed understanding of the issues relating to governance and participation including the customary laws and their implications. Also to Observe International Campaign on Violence against Women (VAW) and to Coordinate networking of NEW-Net and WinG-India.

The North eastern and central part of India have seen situation of grave armed conflict in the form of cultural- ethnic and naxalite conflict since time immemorial. Women have been on the receiving end in all these places both from state and non state actors. They bear the brunt of the ugly scene of violence every time; they are raped, abducted and killed. Though the government makes some policies for the welfare of the fairer sex, but the very system who executes them is grossly insensitive toward the issues women face.

The need to strengthen women in fields of governance has been long felt by women from different parts of India working in various capacities and also other like-minded individuals from various sectors. Carrying forward the concerns on women representation in the society in general and decision making bodies , some women's groups from Northeast India and from the Dalit Community came together to form a network of women to work towards bringing women into governance positions in the year 2009. The network as emerged was named as Women in Governance (WinG), with different state chapters

Another important aspect identified was the issue of local governance in Northeast India and also in other parts of India. Most tribal societies in Northeast follow traditional customary laws that hold more sway than the Indian legal system. However, these customary laws aren't without loopholes and are essentially very patriarchal in their structure and functioning. Women don't get a say in matters pertaining to them and even if they are selected in the village councils, they cannot exercise their rights due to the dominant position of men and the societal structure that challenges the women every time they get out of the homestead to assume public roles.

Hence, it is essential to work on documenting and researching the customary laws prevalent in the North-eastern societies through the lens of gender perspective and collate these works for further study. However, it is also felt important to network with likeminded organizations, in individuals across India concerning customary laws and practices to influence the law makers, decision makers in the civil society.

As a result of WinG Assam's intervention in last two years, we see a ray of hope in the form of a strong network of grassroots Women human rights defenders in different parts of Assam and a renewed understanding of the issues relating to governance and participation including the customary laws and their implications.

Few of the initiatives till now have been-

- Formation of Legal cell
- Budget Analyses Training at NCDHR,
- Consultation on Witch Hunting
- General Body Meeting on Child Rights
- Workshop on Domestic Violence Act:
- Meeting with Special Reporters on Human Rights Defenders
- Personality Development Training
- Meeting with Indigenous group of Assam: Missing, Rabha, Boro and Karbi
- Consultation on Internal Displacement People
- Workshop on Gender and Culture

2. WHRD- Rajasthan

It aims at strengthening of good governance and deepening democracy in the state of Rajasthan by enlarging spaces for women in decision making and political participation. The project covers the entire Rajasthan and project location will be divided on the basis of seven revenue divisions of Rajasthan i.e. Ajmer Division, Bharatpur Division, Bikaner Division, Jaipur Division, Jodhpur division, Kota Division, and Udaipur division.

SDS has been actively involved with the issue of empowerment and participation of women in Rajasthan in various forms. SDS established Women Dignity Forum to raise the voice for gender issues and has also worked on Land rights for women. This issues deals with the real political and civil rights of the women in Rajasthan specially women from Minorities. Since Rajasthan is not one of the conflict ridden states as is northeast and central part of India, The issues related to Human Rights also have different dimension. It is to do with dignity of women and stopping violence against them in

any form. The focus in Rajasthan is a step beyond preparing Cadre of Women human rights defenders. This includes civil and political rights of the women and their participation in various decision making bodies

Rajasthan has been a patriarchal society and women have always been given a second position in the traditional society. While Rajasthan has a fairly good sex ratio of 926 women per thousand males, the child sex ratio of 883 girl for per thousand males is alarming. The literacy rate for women is 52.66 % and for males it is 80.51%. In Rajasthan Female literacy rate is lowest amongst the Indian states. There social evils of Child marriage, dowry deaths, female feticide, sati system, etc are wide spread in every section of the society.

The picture about political participation of women is equally sad; there are only 29 women members in the state assembly out of 200 members in 13th legislative assembly. Although there is 50% reservation for women in panchayats, the real political representation of women is still a farfetched dream. There are issues of Proxy Candidature, Caste based discrimination etc which make their political power ineffective. They are just the nominal head in most of the cases.

Another issue is discrimination against minority, be it caste based discrimination or religion based discrimination. Women become a minority within minority and have to walk on a double edged sword. Dalit women sarpanches have to face extreme form of discrimination.

Though legally women can buy, sell or own the agricultural, commercial and residential land but in reality the gaps in implementation. The rules are governed by customs which are biased in favor of men.

Ongoing intervention aims at:

- To work for enhanced awareness of political and civil rights of women in Rajasthan
 - To work for leadership development in women especially women from minority background
 - To build a network of Women Human Rights defenders (WHRDs) to work collectively on developing a National Policy on WHRDs in India.
 - To advocate and lobby for effective political participation of women
 - The ongoing program is envisaged to pass through a two step process in Next three years.
 - Identification and assessment and support: Identifying women (including Muslims and Dalits) working on women human rights, who may be working as individuals or through organizations. Supporting them in their capacity building and personality development for effective articulation and in approaching government authorities. This will also include the assessment of their needs for further activities.
1. Follow-up and support : This includes
 1. Organizing workshops, meetings and regional consultations on women in governance with effective participation of the women members.
 2. Establish support system for legal Counseling
 3. Provide Campaign support.
 4. Networking: Build a network of organizations working on the similar issues in Rajasthan
 5. Policy advocacy : Advocating and lobbying for policy change on the related issues with the help of the partner organizations

As an Outcome of the Intervention SDS aims to have -

- A strong working Women's Network in Rajasthan who are in a position to represent their community for women rights and are active participants of political processes (at local Panchayat level to district, state and national levels)
- Strong working relationships developed with government authorities who can further back our project as advisors and taking up our recommendations at Central government level.

3. WHRD- Chhattisgarh

The state of Chhattisgarh along with Jharkhand is facing consequence of violence resulting due to various reasons. We are concerned about issue of women security in the conflict affected area and their participation in the policy making processes as envisioned in United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325. The focus here is on ensuring participation of women through building a strong cadre of Women Human Rights Defenders in Chhattisgarh.

The situation in state of Chhattisgarh, as far as women's security and their position in governance is concerned, is precarious and needs immediate attention. Left Wing Extremism (Naxalism) is seen as one biggest threats to Internal Security of India. As such the problem of Naxalism is rooted in the problem of poverty and distress facing the marginalized groups, especially in areas that have not seen land reforms, further exacerbated by the nexus between corrupt government officials, contractors and the land and forest mafia divert development funds leading to high levels of unemployment. However, the movement has not been able to make life easy for poor and marginalized people in any manner. In fact, the cycle of violence perpetuated and complicated by the movement has further contributed to the violation of basic human rights of the people, especially the women leading to a huge human security deficit.

The failure of the Indian state to address the tensions between what it sees as national security and the human security requirements of increasing numbers of newly articulate groups, has resulted in spawning a culture of militarism.

In Chhattisgarh, like in many other parts of the country, Women are missing in leadership positions. As women in communities governed by strong patriarchal norms, they don't have inheritance rights and are excluded from decision-making processes within their own communities and the state. Under the counter insurgency measures such as CSPA, women have faced special problems of the violence, particularly sexual violence, by security forces and the insurgent groups. As such they have been caught in between warring parties.

Poor governance at the state level, high level of corruption in government programs, lack of participation in decision making processes and sharp differences among tribals and non tribals have been the major problems in the Chhattisgarh. Women face double discrimination and exclusion on the basis of their ethnic/caste and gender identities. As members of different minority communities, they are under-represented in governance and largely deprived of social and economic development.

There is a need to bring the women folk in the fore front and involve them in the establishment of peace. But to make this a reality there are another issues which needs to be approached simultaneously.

Violence against women is one such issue. Women inherit the status of second sex by virtue of their being born as women. Domestic violence and sexual harassment by immediate relatives is a reality no one can deny. SDS being a strong advocate of women's rights aims to advocate for the security of women at the family level as the core issue. Women from religious, ethnic and linguistic minority group have no say in the processes of decision making and are missing from the leadership positions.

Also any measure to empower women is seen in exclusion of men in the processes. This results in failure of many initiatives because of lack of ownership of the entire society and the creation of divide of us vs. them in the process. SDS believes that to sensitize men towards the role of women in the family and society at large, is essential to bring attitudinal changes in the society. The problem needs to be attacked at the root.

Now if we think about how to turn word into action, we will have to begin with awakening the concerned people in the society i.e., women, Panchayats. Civil society groups etc and this awareness need to reach to every woman whose rights are violated in one way or the other. Along with the awareness identification and articulation of problems is another important step towards realization of women's rights.

SDS realizes the need to help build the capacities of women activist to enable them to defend rights of women at the grassroots level, this can be achieved through technical support provided to them and to help them reach the policy makers and highlight the issues articulated. SDS will also like to have a strong network of people and organizations working on the issues of role and security of women in general and human rights defenders in specific.

4. WHRD- Uttar Pradesh

Advocating for the civil and human rights of the women in Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh has been a patriarchal society and women have always been given a second position in the traditional society. According to 2011 population census, literacy rate in the state is 69.72 percent. Of that, male literacy stands at 79.24 percent while female literacy rate is at 59.26 percent. Sex ratio in the state is 908 i.e. for each 1000 male, which is below national average of 940 as per census 2011. There are social evils prevalent like child marriage; dowry deaths, female feticide etc.

Women's presence in governance is a crucial indicator of women's empowerment. Historically very few women have been rulers or decision makers in public spaces. U.P. has had two women chief ministers and a Governor in the post independence era. The first legislative assembly had 13 women members. This number went up to 29 in 1957 and to 30 in 1985. It has come down sharply since then. There were only 10 women members in the U.P. assembly in 1991 and 14 in 1993, while 20 were elected in 1996. This figure rose to 26 in 2002 elections. These numbers are abysmally small. The women members have also a low presence in the Assembly. The money and muscle associated with the electoral process inhibits a large number of women from joining politics. Restriction on mobility, lack of control over resources, low literacy may seem to be obstacles but the correlations are complex. Across the globe as well as within the country more women in elected bodies is not necessarily related to better health care, education, security and income for women.

Another issue is- discrimination against minority, be it caste based discrimination or religion based discrimination. Women become a minority within minority and have to walk on a double edged sword. Dalit women sarpanches have to face extreme form of discrimination.

Access to productive resources is critical to enhancing women's economic choice. Ownership of properties in the name of women is a strong evidence of women's economic strength and offers a platform for her to exercise her agency. An independent ownership is important in case of widowhood or divorce or separation. According to a recent study of Kerala, women's risk of physical violence from husbands is dramatically less if they own land or a house. The incidence of violence is 49 percent among women without property, but 18 percent among land owning women and 7 percent if they own both land and house (BinaAgarwal, 2005).

A study on women's empowerment commissioned by the planning Department, U. P government highlights that only 2.6 percent women, both rural and urban respondents, own property in their own name (Manoj Agarwal, 2006). The 21.1 percent and the 29.8 percent "No response" among the rural and urban respondents points to the ambiguity which may arise from women's location in the family where property is held and seen as a common resource for the family well being.

The ongoing intervention aims at:

- *To work for enhanced awareness of political and civil rights of women in Uttar Pradesh*
- *To work for leadership development in women especially women from minority background*
- *To build a network of Women Human Rights defenders (WHRDs) to work collectively on developing a National Policy on WHRDs in India.*
- *To advocate and lobby for effective political participation of women*
- *The ongoing program is envisaged to pass through a two step process in Next three years.*
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- *Follow-up and support : This includes*
 - a) *Organizing workshops, meetings and regional consultations on women in governance with effective participation of the women members.*
 - b) *Establish support system for legal Counseling*
 - c) *Provide Campaign support.*
 - d) *Networking: Build a network of organizations working on the similar issues in Uttar Pradesh.*
 - e) *Policy advocacy : Advocating and lobbying for policy change on the related issues with the help of the partner organizations*

As an Outcome of the Intervention SDS aims to have -

- *A strong working Women's Network in Uttar Pradesh who are in a position to represent their community for women rights and are active participants of political processes (at local Panchayat level to district, state and national levels)*
- *Strong working relationships developed with government authorities who can further back our project as advisors and taking up our recommendations at Central government level.*

Education Programme

NariGunjan considers education to be a powerful tool to change inequalities and discrimination in the society. Its Education Programme aims to enable extremely marginalized and discriminated children (predominantly from the Musahar community but also other Mahadalit groups) to access and successfully complete their education and become agents of change within their community and responsible citizens of the society, being able to recognize and defend their rights and those of the other members of their community as equal to those of every Indian citizen.

AnandSikshaKendras (ASK)

AnandSikshaKendras (ASK) are a form of Joyful learning centers for children belonging to the age of 3-8 years. The AnandSiksha Kendra runs like the day care centers. Each center is run by a teacher and an Assistant teacher who belong to the same community. Early childhood education focuses on children's learning through play, which would impact their development and cognitive skills.

Kishori Kendra (KK)

Kishori Kendra are education centres for adolescent girls. Kks are not a replacement for government education and each case has to be approved by the NariGunjan Education management before being admitted to the KK, while all efforts must be made to solve the problem that prohibits the child from attending government school (to which, in any case, children should be enrolled so that they receive the related benefits: meals and uniforms). Each Kendra is operated by a single teacher from the same community who teaches in their local language by engaging them into various activities like music, drama and stories. This Kendra focuses on providing basic literacy skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. This informal value based education also promotes transformation in rural communities by providing basic information on moral issues, sanitation, health and various issues about women and children. This informal education is a multi-grade system of learning, which extend for 3 years for each child. This form of education is aimed towards reducing dropout in schools and also increasing the regular school enrollment. All students receive school materials and books. Community Mobilizers ensure the enrolment of girls in the KishoriKendra, targeting specifically the poorest girls and those at risk of being forced into early marriages. They also liaise with government schools to facilitate enrolment and monitor teacher's attendance.

In 2014NariGunjan will run 4 centres for 241 girls (90%) and boys (10).

Conclusion

The main reasons for the very low literacy rate among Dalit women could be some or all of the following:

- The Lack of educational resources especially in rural areas.
- Privatization of schools and colleges.
- Extreme poverty, because of which they cannot afford the expensive fees for the private schools.
- The demand for an increase in the Dowry for educated girls

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