

Main Identity

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Sent: Monday, February 09, 2004 4:42 PM
Subject: [bangaloresolidarity] Seeking your support and contributions to counter child marriage

Mass Marriage – A proactive step to counter child marriages

Many of you have supported *Bhima Sangha* and The Concerned for Working Children, India (CWC) in our struggle against child marriage. To further this struggle, Bhima Sangha and CWC have planned to organise an annual mass marriage event, which we see as a proactive step to counter child marriage. Child marriage is one the most distressing social maladies of our time. Its practice still continues in many parts of India, with as many as 65 per cent of the girls in India getting married by the time they are 18 years of age.

In 2002, *Uthengamma*, who was 15 at the time, fought a courageous battle against her own marriage that had been planned and endorsed by her whole family and community in Holagundi village, Bellary District, in Karnataka. She had to defy her parents, relatives and community, at times facing grave threats to her and her family. With Bhima Sangha's persistent support and resolve, she prevented her marriage from taking place. Since her struggle, 7 child marriages have been stopped by the Bhima Sangha in Holagundi and a considerable degree of support has been generated to challenge the practise of child marriages in the region.

Many studies have shown that the causes of child marriage are numerous and varied, one of them being economic. In India, marriages are viewed by families as opportunities to showcase their wealth and status. People from all economic strata feel that marriages, especially those of their daughters' stretch their expenditure far beyond their means. Due to this, many families in Northern Karnataka prefer to marry off more than one offspring at the same wedding function. This results in the younger offsprings, often as young as 10 years, being married off in the same function as their elder sibling. Many families, view child marriages as a way to cut down costs and to provide some 'security' to their children.

Our struggle against child marriage has not been an easy one, despite law being on our side. Many members of the community express displeasure and anger over Bhima Sangha's and CWC's actions to prevent child marriages. They have repeatedly told us not to interfere in their personal matters. "If our children remain unmarried, are you ready to take their responsibility?" they challenge us. All the information we have been sharing about the ill effects of child marriage on children and our extensive discussions have borne some fruit. Most of all, children themselves, both boys and girls, now have very strong opinions against child marriage and that has begun to show positive results.

However, in order to present the adults with alternatives to child marriage, Bhima Sangha and CWC have planed an annual Mass marriage event. The first of these events will take place in March 2004 during which we expect around 30 couples to get married.

The couples who are eligible to get married at this programme have to:

- Provide documentary proof of age that they are majors according to law. (As per the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, no woman under 18 and no man under 21 are permitted to get married)
- Register their marriage at the office of the Sub-registrar.
- Not receive or give dowry.
- Provide a letter from their respective Panchayats that they have not been married before.

Prior to the event, a health camp to provide information about responsible sexuality will be conducted. The issues covered will include ill affects of child marriages & marriages among close relatives; information about family planning

and HIV etc. Voluntary testing for HIV will also be carried out in collaboration with Freedom Foundation, an NGO renowned for its work on HIV.

The marriages will be simple, cost effective and informed. A booklet on health, sexuality rights, reproduction and family planning will be distributed to each couple.

Each couple is allowed to have 30 guests at the wedding for lunch. A new pair of clothes will be given to the bride and the groom. The cost incurred to support the marriage of one couple is Rs. 2000. Bhima Sangha and CWC are mobilising local resources to cover the costs. In addition, we request you to contribute generously to this cause.

Your contributions may be made in Favour of "the Concerned for Working Children". Your contributions will be recorded and acknowledged. All cash contributions made to CWC are tax exempted under 80 G no: DIT (E) 80G 269 W-2 02-03. Our bank A/c No. 4524, Bank of India, Richmond Town Branch, Richmond Road, Bangalore.

If you require any further information our contacts are:

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This initiative being led by the members of Bhima Sangha is a concrete, practical and proactive step to reduce the incidence of child marriage in their area. Only if this initiative is endorsed and supported by all quarters, will it be successful. It may also prove to be replicable in other regions of India. We need your support to make this intervention a successful one.

Thanking you,

Kavita Ratna

Director Communications

Bhima Sangha : A union of, by and for working children in Karnataka facilitated by the Concerned for Working Children, with a membership of over 20,000, striving for the realisation of child rights

18 years of age : According to the findings of the second survey of the National Family Health held in 1998-99

Uchengemma : Former President of Bhima Sangha, State Committee

Yahoo! Groups Links

- To visit your group on the web, go to:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bangaloresolidarity/>
- To unsubscribe from this group, send an email to:
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