

WOMEN AND HEALTH

WOMEN WORKERS AND INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

**C.H.A.I - C.M.A.I. - V.H.A.I. Dialogue
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Voluntary Health Association of India

COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL

Main, I

WOMEN WORKERS AND INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

Women bear an extra ordinary load on their shoulders. The returns may not commensurate with their work. House work collecting the fuel and fodder, walking miles to fill water, cooking for the family.... the list goes on, they may never meet with any appreciation leave alone economic gains.

The cost of living today has gone up to such an extent that women in rural areas do not restrict themselves to household work but are also compelled to work in the fields, which may/may not belong to them. She works just as hard as any worker yet there is a disparity in her wages.

In semi-urban areas and urban areas, women today, thanks to education, are seeing the need to work as a means to use one's potential and intelligence more creatively, to be economically independant, to enhance a career and develop one's personality. It is also known for a fact that the level of unemployment does not offer all that one would ideally want, yet the need to have a job whatever it maybe as there is dignity of labour indicates a positive trend amongst women today.

It is therefore very disturbing to note that women are not treated properly in their workplace. Rural and urban women have gone through humiliating experiences in the past which have affected their psyche and compelled them to leave and resign. Thus frustrating a lot of their aspirations. The harassment comprises of taunts at the way they handle the job, increaments and promotions ignored, leave from office not sanctioned, unhealthy and unfair working hours, and sexual overtures of male colleagues and employers which is the worst form of violence in the workplace. It is a violation of a fundamental right. The usage of sex to depict one's fictitious superiority is a profound act of cowardice.

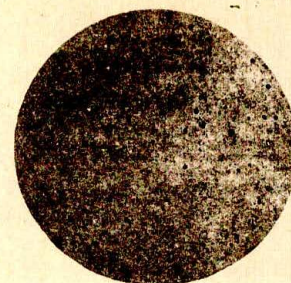
Many women put up with a lot of this as an alternate option is difficult to find. But the question here is for how long can women suffer this discrimination! Some women fight it out when it gets unbearable, most do not and grow reticent thus giving rise to mental problems or worse still contemplate suicide.

This issue has to be addressed at every forum if we want to create public awareness, hence we decided to join in the struggle against sexual harassment of women in the workplace. There is a Bill No. LX 1990 called The Prevention of Sexual Harassment of Womwn Employees at their work places Bill 1990. This bill has to be used with grit and determination by women.

We look forward to the time when women shall be employed with regard to their skill and competency for the job, not for their value as sex objects.

Fiona Dias
Public Policy Divison,
V.H.A.I.

medico
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May/June 1992



NURSES SEEK CHANGE AND AUTHORITY

by Anuradha Athavale * & Mira Sadgopal

Indexed

"One-day night-duty by rotation" is a current demand of Government nurses in Maharashtra. It means that a nurse must not be forced to do more than one routine night-duty in a row. At present some nurses are required to perform three to seven consecutive nights of hospital duty, putting stress on their family life and causing undue exhaustion. The demand is several years old. According to a union decision of 25th November 1991, Government nurses of Pune have been implementing this practice among themselves. These nurses are members of the local Pune District Government Nurses' Association affiliated through their Maharashtra state-level organization with the All India Government Nurses' Federation (AIGNF).

Taking up practical affairs and making the best of adverse conditions are traits that nurses have developed since their profession began during the nineteenth century. While nursing has advanced since pre-Independence days, demeaning public attitudes and assumption about nurses and nursing remain stubbornly unchanged. These prejudices pervade all levels of society and prove to be the greatest obstacles to improving the nurses' lot. The AIGNF and its state-level member organizations work for changes in three main areas : nursing education, working conditions, and life in society as women.

The key intervention for change is nursing education. It had humble beginnings early in the last century. Charitable bodies like Seva Sadan in Pune and Bombay adopted a policy of

sending homeless girls and women on contract basis to city hospitals. The women were given food, clothes and shelter without wages, and were expected to learn entirely through experience in hospital.

Florence Nightingale's "Notes On Nursing", published in 1858, influenced the development of the nursing profession in India through the colonial hierarchy. From 1860 onwards a school was opened at J. J. Hospital in Bombay, where a medical College was also founded within a few years. Kashibai Ganpat became the first woman in Western India to receive the Certificate for General Nursing and Midwifery.

During pre-Independence days, nurses were recruited from the ranks of orphaned, cast-off or otherwise destitute women. Prominent nationalist leaders like Ranade, Agarkar and Deodhar urged that such abandoned women (parityaktas) to join this profession. The dominant public attitude of pity combined with condescension about their service to society and distaste for their poverty-stricken origins served to keep the nursing profession in virtual bondage.

The occupation of nursing was morally lifted by Mahatma Gandhi who wrote about it as a "noble profession". Indeed, he and his co-workers themselves personally nursed the sick and established nursing school for young women at the various well-known Ashrams.

Despite improvements like this and others in the field of women's education, the general situation of nursing did not change much with independence. A few privileged "colleges" of nursing in places like Delhi, Bombay and Vellore were established, fit to admit daughters of the better-off, but this trend has never threatened to become the rule for the

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Editor's Note:

The nursing profession has lot of woes that arise from secondary status in the medical profession, tedious duty schedules, harassment. This issue carries this article by Anuradha Athavale and Mira Sadgopal stating the nurses' perspective.

I would like to add a thing - 'the peoples' perspective. Our villages have been without doctors and the situation is likely to continue for good, given all the developments, trends till date. One must rethink about the role of ANMS in this very special situation that exists in all the developing nations. Is it necessary to stick to the western model of nursing profession that divides dignities and drudgeries of doctors and nurses? I feel that the existing secondary status of nurses in the medical world partly emanate from denying them any curative (that is diagnosis and treating) role. Today, the ANMS are just distributors of condoms and pills plus the vaccinations. This, I think must change to a role of truly 'comprehensive health services'. Such a change should bring a seachange in the dignity of nursing profession and a good quality medicare to the doorstep of our villagers. It will also help to increase the degrees of freedom of this very tightly regimented community.

In absence of such a change, nursing profession will continue to suffer the extended domestic status of housekeeping, a bit well paid, no matter what reforms unions demand and govts can possibly accede to.

nursing rank and file.

In the sixties, for the first time nurses in Pune and Bombay began to unionize. In Pune, the Government Nurses' Association was organized in 1966. Anuradha Athavale, Ushatai Chaudhari, Suman Barbhui and Charlotte Unipathy were active in founding this union, which celebrated its twenty-fifth year in 1991.

It was during the Third Five Year Plan (1962-67) that nursing education first received some attention from the new Government. In connection with the launching of the Family Planning Programme, every district was to get facilities to train nurses. Subsequently, however, nursing education facilities did not develop in step with the needs of our people in either quantity or quality. Stagnation prevails even today.

In 1976, responding to growing union pressure from several states over the previous decade, the Government appointed the Mohite Committee to look into the problems of nursing. The recommendations in the Committee's detailed report

(1977) affirmed the union-demand of six-hour duty and 10 + 2 + 3 educational pattern (see below), etc. However, the printed report has been merely collecting dust in cupboards.

Meeting No. 157 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) focussed on nursing in 1977. Its main importance was that it affirmed nurses' right to unionize and bargain collectively. Otherwise, the Meeting's outcome was vague.

In the eighties under the Late Rajiv Gandhi's Government, populist policies affecting women included provision of more nurses for rural areas, without actual follow-up, however.

In the 1988, various state-level Government Nurses' Federations came together in New Delhi to form the AIGNF. The AIGNF's third convention will be held this year (1992).

Nurses organizations generally try to avoid strikes, preferring to wage ongoing low-key struggles with occasional marches and demonstrations. Only in dire desperation do they resort to strikes. In recent years, the issue of nurses' personal security has claimed as much attention as general working and wage conditions. Security was the main issue in the strike by Nagpur's nurses in 1988, and in the August 1991 strike of Solapur's nurses. The six-week-long "Weekend Strike" (on Saturdays and Sundays) by Delhi nurses in 1989 was about service conditions.

The last fifteen to twenty years have seen a new profile of the nurse emerging, different from the old "pariyakta" image. Due to rise in prices, more and more middle class girls have gone into this unique profession for women. The majority of nurses now are (or will be) married and have families and a social life besides their job. Being a nurse has acquired some 'status' on the marriage market, as many prospective husbands would now choose a bride who can earn.

However, despite this change and despite the crucial importance of nursing to the functioning of hospitals and the whole health care system, nursing education is still in the doldrums. There is a severe shortage of nurses in proportion to population size and to the number of doctors. It is officially acknowledged that the doctor-to-nurse ratio should be 1:3 (one doctor to three nurses). Presently 12,000 doctors graduate annually from Indian Medical Colleges, while only 9,000 nurses get certified, thus creating an cumulative shortage of 27,000 nurses per year. The usual practice in 'nursing homes' is to operate without trained nurses.

In certain better states like Delhi, Maharashtra, Punjab & Kerala the situation is better than in others. One percent of nurses are males, and for some reason most of them are in Rajasthan and Karnataka. There they are visible in the top positions of the state-level Government Nurses' Federations.

Modern nursing education has to be comprehensive. Nurses

must attend to the physical and psychological needs of patients in hospitals, adapt to the social qualities of families and communities, and fulfil the medical requirements of the attending physicians and technicians. Frequently they require specialization, such as in cardiac nursing or modern surgical specialities and anaesthesia.

Only the few elite nursing colleges offer a comprehensive syllabus with modern audiovisual aids and library facilities. The Ordinary nursing schools around the country are not even pale shadows of the medical colleges towering above them.

Doctors should care about and support education of nurses, but in actual fact they do not bother. Private medical colleges flourish because doctors come from the affluent class, whereas nurses by and large still come from poor families who can't pay for their education. Society seems to accept that the poor deserve only poor standard education. The general public does not give the matter priority, and exploitation of poorly educated nurses is the persisting norm.

Hence, the image of nursing is tied up together with poor education and exploitation. After declaration of S.S.C. results, no bright, talented young girl would say, that she will be a nurse. If she goes into nursing, it is because she gets forced by circumstances. Unless the nurses' image is elevated, candidates will not be attracted to nursing in the numbers required.

The AIGNF has recommended changes in education. In place of the present system of basic nursing school of three years after the 10+2 stage, with few and privileged nurses going on with the two years of the 'Post-basic' B.Sc. course, a more affirming alternative is projected. The two years of post-S.S.C. Intermediate (+2) would include pre-nursing basics, akin to the pre-medical course. Following this would be three years of nursing college leading to the B.Sc. degree in Nursing for all nurses. Specialization would be given post graduate status. Implementing such a programme, however, will require a sea-change in public attitude and a strong, sustained campaign by nurses to pressurise the decision making authorities.

For generations, nurses have been conditioned both as women and as servants of the sick. Hence, they have been used to serving quietly, enabling the exploitative system to continue without question or complaint, often because there was no alternative for shelter or livelihood. Even today, miserable "free" government hostel facilities are merely a fraud. All nurses living in hostels are anaemic. The range of hemoglobin levels is between seven and nine grams. Eleven

Note: This article, written as a part of Pune Medico Friend Circle activity has been published in the Maharashtra Herald

to thirteen grams percent is considered desirable for Indian woman, while even this falls below western standards. Meanwhile, nurses are supposed to teach patients and public about adequate nutrition, and the public expects them to stay healthy and hardworking on a hostel mess diet of Rs.130/- per month.

Poignant problems of nursing students from low-income or broken families are unaddressed. Such youthful girls hunger for kind words. In their search for sympathy, they fall easy prey to fancying males who ensnare them for sexual indulgence.

Nurses are required by doctors and by circumstances to perform various functions without legal authorization. Examples are many routine tasks, like giving some medications without a doctor's written orders, stitching up minor wounds, inserting intrauterine devices (copper-T or Loop), etc. without due remuneration or respect for their work. They lack legal protection in event of mishap or scapegoating by doctors or administrators. Nurses will no longer tolerate this haphazard situation. Now, they are demanding 'authority' in the full sense of the word. This includes a honest, comprehensive nursing education and legal sanction for professional duties.

Sometimes a nurse is ideally placed to perform a legal function where she has no official locus standi. Take the recording of the 'dying declaration' of burns patients, the majority of whom are young women. The attending nurse is in a position to receive such a woman's confidence. Hence some nurses have asked for the legal right to record the dying declaration and help the law in revealing the truth.

There is no sensible reason why nurses should not be equal to doctors, just as medical technicians, medical social workers, pharmacologists and hospital administrators should also be equal to doctors. It is a matter of re-elaborating all their important and different functions, and of re-setting our social priorities. The public must demand and get adequate-standard service from its health professionals. Among them, nurses have certainly been the most caring, and are the most deserving of public concern today.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE CONVENTION 149

Convention concerning employment and conditions of work and life of Nursing Personnel. (Some excerpts)

The working conditions that prevail for the nurses in our country falls far short of any standard, low salary, extensive working hours, no social security are some of the features that characterise the work-life of a nurse, except of those working in formal sector. (Even there, not everything is alright.)

International Labour Conference has laid down standard, governing the functions, hiring, and working condition of nursing personnel under its convention 149.

Convention 149, while stressing the use for minimum level of training and continuing education makes a specific recommendation regarding the level of training.

9. (1) The duration of basic nursing education and training should be related to the minimum educational requirements for entry to training and to the purposes of training.

(2) There should be two levels of approved basic education and training:

(a) an advanced level, designed to train professional nurses having sufficiently wide and thorough skills to enable them to provide the most complex nursing care and to organise and evaluate nursing care, in hospitals and other health-related community services; as far as possible, students accepted for education and training at this level should have the background of general education required for entry to university;

(b) a less advanced level, designed to train auxiliary nurses able to provide general nursing care which is less complex but which requires technical skills and aptitude for personal relations; students accepted for education and training at this level should have attained as advanced a level as possible of secondary education. The convention also stresses the need for participation of nursing personnel in planning and implementation of national health policy and in determining condition governing their working life.

Some of the important recommendations for determining the working condition are given below:

10. There should be programmes of higher nursing education to prepare nursing personnel for the highest responsibilities in direct and supportive nursing care, in the administration of nursing services, in nursing education and in research and development in the field of nursing.

11. Nursing aids should be given theoretical and practical training appropriate of their functions.

12. (1) Continuing education and training both at the workplace and outside should be an integral part of the programme referred to in Paragraph 8, sub-paragraph 1, of this Recommendation and be available to all so as to ensure the updating of knowledge and skills and to enable nursing personnel to acquire and apply new ideas and techniques in the field of nursing and related sciences.

(2) Continuing nursing education and training should include provision for programmes which would promote and facilitate the advancement of nursing aids and auxiliary nurses.

(3) Such education and training should also include provision for programmes which would facilitate

re-entry into nursing after a period of interruption.

Participation

19. (1) Measures should be taken to promote the participation of nursing personnel in the planning and in decisions concerning national health policy in general and concerning their profession in particular at all levels, in a manner appropriate to national conditions.

(2) In particular-

(a) qualified representatives of nursing personnel, or of organisations representing them, should be associated with the elaboration and application of policies and general principles regarding the nursing profession, including those regarding education and training and the practice of the profession;

(b) conditions of employment and work should be determined by negotiation between the employers' and workers' organisations concerned;

(c) the settlement of disputes arising in connection with the determination of terms and conditions of employment should be sought through negotiation between the parties or through independent and impartial machinery, such as mediation conciliation and voluntary arbitration, with a view to making it unnecessary for the organisations representing nursing personnel to have recourse to such other steps as are normally open to organisations of other workers in defence of their legitimate interests;

(d) in the employing establishment, nursing personnel or their representatives, in the meaning of Article 3 of the Workers' Representatives Convention, 1971, should be associated with decisions relating to their professional life, in a manner appropriate to the questions at issue.

20. Representatives of nursing personnel should be assured the protection provided for in the Workers' Representatives Convention and Recommendation, 1971.

29. Work clothing, medical kits, transport facilities and other supplies required by the employer or necessary for the performance of the work should be provided by the employer to nursing personnel and maintained free of charge.

Working Time, Rest Periods

30. For the purpose of this Recommendation-

(a) the term "normal hours of work" means the number of hours fixed in each country by or in pursuance of laws or regulations, collective agreements or arbitration awards;

(b) the term "overtime" mean hours worked in excess of normal hours of work;

(c) the term "on-call duty" means periods of time during which nursing personnel are, at the workplace or elsewhere, at the disposal of the employer in order to

respond to possible calls;

(d) the term "inconvenient hours" means hours worked on other than the normal working days and at other than the normal working time of the country.

31. The time during which nursing personnel are at the disposals of the employer- such as the time needed to organise their work and the time needed to receive and to transmit instructions- should be counted as working time for nursing personnel, subject to possible special provisions concerning on-call duty.
32. (1) The normal weekly hours of nursing personnel should not be higher than those set in the country concerned for workers in general.
(a) Where the normal working week of workers in general exceeds 40 hours, steps should be taken to bring it down, progressively, but as rapidly as possible, to that level for nursing personnel, without any reduction in salary, in accordance with Paragraph 9 of the Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation, 1962.
33. (1) Normal daily hours of work should be continuous and not exceed eight hours, except where arrangements are made by laws or regulations, collective arrangements, works rules or arbitration awards for flexible hours or a compressed week; in any case, the normal working week should remain within the limits referred to in Paragraph 32, subparagraph (1), of this Recommendation.
(2) The working day, including overtime, should not exceed 12 hours.
(3) Temporary exceptions to the provisions of this Paragraph should be authorised only in case of special emergency.
34. (1) There should be meal breaks of reasonable duration.
(2) There should be rest breaks of reasonable duration included in the normal hours of work.
35. Nursing personnel should have sufficient notice of working schedules to enable them to organise their personal and family life accordingly. Exceptions to these schedules should be authorised only in case of special emergency.
36. (1) Where nursing personnel are entitled to less than 48 hours of continuous weekly rest, steps should be taken to bring their weekly rest to that level.
(2) The weekly rest of nursing personnel should in no case be less than 36 uninterrupted hours.
37. (1) There should be as little recourse to overtime work, work at inconvenient hours and on-call duty as possible.
(2) Overtime and work on public holidays should be compensated in time off and /or remuneration at a higher rate than the normal salary rate.
(3) Work at inconvenient hours other than public holidays should be compensated by an addition to salary.
38. (1) Shift work should be compensated by increase in

remuneration which should not be less than that applicable to shift work in other employment in the country.

(2) Nursing personnel assigned to shift work should have a period of continuous rest of at least 12 hours between shifts.

(3) A single shift of duty divided by a period of unremunerated time (split shift) should be avoided.

39. (1) Nursing personnel should be entitled to, and required to take, a paid annual holiday of at least the same length as other workers in the country.

(2) Where the length of the paid annual holiday is less than four weeks for one year of service, steps should be taken to bring it progressively, but as rapidly as possible, to that level for nursing personnel.

40. Nursing personnel who work in particularly arduous or unpleasant conditions should benefit from a reduction of working hours and/or an increase in rest periods without any decrease in total remuneration.

41. (1) Nursing personnel absent from work by reason of illness or injury should be entitled, for a period and in a manner determined by laws or regulations or by collective agreements, to-

(a) maintenance of the employment relationship and of rights deriving therefrom;

(b) income security.

(2) The laws or regulations or collective agreements establishing sick leave entitlement should distinguish between-

(a) cases in which the illness or injury is service-incurred;

(b) cases in which the person concerned is not incapacitated for work but absence from work is necessary to protect the health of others;

(c) cases of illness or injury unrelated to work.

42. (1) Nursing personnel, without distinction between married and unmarried persons, should be assured the benefits and protection provided for in the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952, and the Maternity Protection Recommendation, 1952.

(2) Maternity leave should not be considered to be sick leave.

(3) The measures provided for in the Employment (Women with Family Responsibilities) Recommendation, 1965, should be applied in respect of nursing personnel.

43. In accordance with Paragraph 19 of this Recommendation, decisions concerning the organisation of work, working time and rest periods should be taken in agreement or in consultation with freely chosen representatives of the nursing personnel or with organisations representing them. They should bear, in particular, on-

(a) the hours to be regarded inconvenient hours;

- (b) the conditions in which on-call duty will be counted as working time;
- (c) the conditions in which the exceptions provided for in Paragraph 33, subparagraph (3), and in Paragraph 35 of this Recommendation will be authorised;
- (d) the length of the breaks provided for in Paragraph 34 of this Recommendation and the manner in which they are to be taken;
- (e) the form and amount of the compensation provided for in Paragraphs 37 and 38 of this Recommendation;
- (f) working schedules;
- (g) the conditions to be considered as particularly arduous or unpleasant for the purpose of Paragraphs 27 and 40 of this Recommendation.

Occupational Health Protection

- 44. Each Member should endeavour to adopt laws and regulations on occupational health and safety to the special nature of nursing work and of the environment in which it is carried out, and to increase the protection afforded by them.
- 45. (1) Nursing personnel should have access to occupational health services operating in accordance with the provisions of the Occupational Health Services Recommendation, 1959.
(2) Where occupational health services have not yet been set up for all undertakings, medical care establishments employing nursing personnel should be among the undertakings for which, in accordance with paragraph 4 of that recommendation, such services should be set up in first instance.
- 46. (1) Each Member and the employers' organisations concerned should pay particular attention to the provisions of the Protection of Workers' Health Recommendation, 1983, and endeavour to ensure its application to nursing personnel.
(2) All appropriate measures should be taken in accordance with Paragraphs 1 to 7 of that Recommendation to prevent, reduce or eliminate risks to the health or safety of nursing personnel.
- 47. (1) Nursing personnel should undergo medical examinations on taking up and terminating an appointment, and at regular intervals during their service.
(2) Nursing personnel regularly assigned to work in circumstances such that a definite risk to their health or to that of others around them exists or may be suspected should undergo regular medical examinations at intervals appropriate to the risk involved.
(3) Objectivity and confidentiality should be assured in examinations provided for in this Paragraph; the examinations referred to should not be carried out by doctors with whom the persons examined have a close working relationship.
- 48. (1) Studies should be undertaken - and kept up to date - to determine special risks to which nursing

personnel may be exposed in the exercise of their profession so that these risks may be prevented and, as appropriate compensated.

- (2) For that purpose, cases of occupational accidents and cases of diseases recognised as occupational under laws or regulations concerning employment injury benefits or liable to be occupational in origin, should be notified to the competent authority in a manner to be prescribed by national laws or regulations, in accordance with Paragraphs 14 to 17 of the Protection of Workers' Health Recommendation, 1953.
- 49. (1) All possible steps should be taken to ensure that nursing personnel are not exposed to special risks. Where exposure to special risks is unavoidable, measures should be taken to minimise it.
(2) Measures such as the provision and use of protective clothing, immunisation, shorter hours more frequent rest breaks, temporary removal from the risk or longer annual holidays should be provided for in respect to nursing personnel regularly assigned to duties involving special risks so as to reduce their exposure to these risks.
(3) In addition, nursing personnel who are exposed to special risks should receive financial compensation.
- 50. Pregnant women and parents of young children whose normal assignment could be prejudicial to their health or that of their child should be transferred, without loss of entitlements, to work, appropriate to their situation.
- 51. The collaboration of nursing personnel and of organisations representing them should be sought in ensuring the effective application of provisions concerning the protection of the health and safety of nursing personnel.
- 52. Appropriate measures should be taken for the supervision of the application of the laws and regulations and other provisions concerning the protection of the health and safety of nursing personnel.

Social Security

- 53. (1) Nursing personnel should enjoy social security protection at least equivalent, as the case may be, to that of other persons employed in the public service or sector, employed in the private sector, or self-employed, in the country concerned; this protection should cover periods of probation and periods of training of persons regularly employed as nursing personnel.
(2) The social security protection of nursing personnel should take account of the particular nature of their activity.
- 54. As far as possible, appropriate arrangements should be made to ensure continuity in the acquisition of rights and the provision of benefits in case of change of employment and temporary cessation of employment.

55. (1) Where the social security scheme gives protected persons the free choice of doctor and medical institution, nursing personnel should enjoy the same freedom of choice.

(2) The medical records of nursing personnel should be confidential.

56. National laws or regulations should make possible the compensation, as an occupational disease, of any illness contracted by nursing personnel as a result of their work.

PRESS REPORTS ABOUT NIGHT SHIFT "PARALYSIS" AMONGST NURSES.

ILO Warning

Shift work wrecking family life

GENEVA, April 7:

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has said that irregular working hours disrupt social life and should be restricted by industrialized nations, reports, A.P.

The effect on family life, it said yesterday, was the most obvious and irksome drawback of the multiple shift system with irregular timetables upsetting "the quality of relations among family members."

The Organization also warned that shift work often resulted in "higher sickness rates, sleeping difficulties, over-headaches and disruption of eating patterns."

Experiments have shown that for an equal output night work demands a greater expenditure of physical and nervous energy. Multiple shift introduced for purely economic reasons should be restricted, said the ILO report.

The report urged that workers employed during the night "must have the options of returning to normal working hours at will" and it called for renewed efforts to improve their living and working conditions.

Night - work shortens life

PARIS, August 2:

Night work is harmful to health and cuts down a man's life by 10 years, according to an official report issued yesterday.

The report, drawn up by Prof. Alain studied the conditions of two million French night workers.

After five years, man starts getting nervous troubles or stomach ulcers as the normal pattern of sleep is absent.

Night shift paralysis among nurses

Despite the fact that nurses form the backbone of health care services, in govt-run hospitals, no survey worth its name has been done of the effect of working conditions on their health. This was revealed to Maharashtra Herald by Mrs. Anuradha Athawale, President of the Maharashtra State Nurses' Federation in Pune on Saturday when we met her to

ask for her comments on a recent survey of nurses conducted in England in 1983.

The survey in question, related to a phenomenon called "night-shift paralysis" in the nursing profession, which had revealed that 12 per cent of night-shift nurses out of 434 observed had claimed to have suffered from a totally "incapacitating paralysis" that may be related to "sleep paralysis and contribute to impaired levels of safety on the night shift."

The survey had been located by Dr.P.B. Vidyasagar of the Physics Department, University of Poona in the journal 'Experientia' volume 40 of 1984, published from Switzerland. The authors of the survey S. Folkard R Condon and M Herbert of the University of Sussex and the University Hospital and Medical School at Nottingham in the U.K. drew their sample in 1983 from nine general hospitals located in four different areas of England.

The nurses whose experience of night duty ranged from less than 15 months to about 12 years had reported that they were generally performing a task, such as reading or writing, and were sure they were awake immediately prior to the onset of paralysis - which lasted in duration for periods greater than two minutes upto half an hour.

Ninety-two per cent of cases, largely confined to nurses below the age of 30, reported that the paralysis was "triggered" by some external event; such as a patient calling, requiring them to make a gross motor movement rather than by their own desire to move.

Nurses at the Sassoon Hospital in Pune, however, did not recall vividly any such occurrence during their night shift. Two senior nurses, however, reported extreme fatigue and said that continued night shifts resulted in their bodies being unable to move and perform muscular movement though they knew they had to. They attributed this to the fact that they may have been forcing themselves to keep awake when actually they were in utmost need of sleep.

Incidentally the survey also quoted reports that a little over half of the sufferers admitted to feeling sleepier than normal for the time of day prior to their paralysis and 25 percent of them spontaneously reported being frightened by it.

It may be safe to assume that in the absence of any attempt, however amateur, to elicit feedback from Indian nurses regarding the effects on their health of prolonged working hours and night-shifts duties, many instances of similar night-shift paralysis may have gone unreported, undetected or unnoticed and will have to be researched by systematic surveying of nurses who have over 30 years of experience and are nearing retirement now.

Sassoon Hospital nurses have reported that the practice of seven days of continuous night-shift by rotation was discontinued only as late as 1975 and five days continuous night-shift introduced which was further reduced to three days in 1980. Since November 1984, on an experimental basis they said, one-day night shift by rotation has been introduced only at the Sassoon-among all the government hospitals in the state.

Harmful effects of night shift.

Mrs Athavale who is a staff nurse, was very happy with the new experiment, commenting that it had favourable impact on the health of the nurses, as well as their social and family life, besides producing the maximum alertness and work capacity during night shifts.

The U.K. survey which goes into an extensive analysis of trends among night-shift nurses of various age groups based on subjective ratings of alertness and drowsiness, notes that the paralysis seems to occur when the nurses manage to maintain a state of wakefulness despite considerable pressures to sleep. It was about four times more likely to

occur on the 7th or subsequent night shifts, than on the first or second, the scientists observe.

Clearly it would be the study concludes, of interest to study male populations such as process controllers (in industry) pilots or air-traffic controller who often perform an essentially sedentary task in the early hours of the morning and under relatively sleep deprived conditions.

The safety consequences of the survey are all too obvious. However, conscientiously such individuals (under prolonged night shift strain) may force themselves to stay awake any emergency that arouse could trigger a paralysis that prevented them from responding to it. In such situations, it can be safely said that constant night work is inviting catastrophe at a time when maximum alertness is the need of the moment.

The role of nurses in saving human lives need not be dwelt upon. Forcing them to err consequently endangering a human life can only be said to be a grave crime. However, unknowingly it is being perpetrated by unscientifically designed work schedules.

MEDICAL EDUCATION IN INDIA:

IS IT SUITABLE TO INDIAN NEEDS.

(Dr. Anil Mokashi)

In India we have inherited the British system of medical education. It was suitable for British occupant. We have never thought of our needs. We merely imitated them. Over years inadequacies have become apparent. While clinging to the concept of the so called 'high standards', the system is plagued with substandard and bogus educational elements.

Who is the authority?

Medical education in India is a headless monster. The right hand is not bothered of what the left hand is doing. Right hand thinks it has very high standard; While left hand knows it can play with lives of people because there is nobody to control it.

1. Medical Council of India : (The right hand)

It has no control over non-allopathic doctors practicing allopathy. It has no control over starting and running a medical college.

2. National boards of Indian medicines : (The left hand)

Have no control over their graduates. 99% of them are practicing allopathy. The boards are not concerned. They are exploiting the situation of anarchy.

3. Health Ministries:

They have no control over anything. They are happy with a

facade of "promoting the great traditional Indian medicine for the benefit of poor and downtrodden". Ministries after Ministries have come and gone, all proclaiming such hollow statements. They are least bothered of what these graduates of Indian medicine are doing. "Playing with lives of masses".

An array of intriguing questions have cropped up since independence. India will have to solve these problems one day or other.

1. Can a medical college be run without recognition of Medical Council of India?

Answer: Yes. They are being run so for decades. There are about 20 medical colleges in India being run without MCI recognition. They are affiliated to Universities and recognised by State Medical Councils. The MCI has now become irrelevant.

2. Is a MBBS graduate well trained?

Ans: No. After spending five and half years in medical college, he has never treated a single patient on his own. He is trained in reading, writing, and seeing. He has not 'done' anything. He is examined by 'on table discussion' (even in practical examination). The whole concept of medical education is western. The knowledge is never implemented in Indian situation.

BATTERED and bruised by the dictates of official life and almost mauled by incapacity in the city's transport system, the work of this burgeoning metropolis returns home to the cosy confines of the drawing room. The regular soap opera, news and other follow ritualistically till it is time to hit the sack and await another morn. But for Neeta, things are different. She is dressed up and waiting at the door of her housing society in a dark sari. The familiar horn and the glowing lights announce the arrival of the van and she rides to the night and away from the haughty multitude. Like many of her ilk, Suneta works as a receptionist in a five star hotel in South Bombay. She is one among a large number of women who work at night. Viewed through a conservative angle, night shift was considered a male bastion till women stepped in. Cutting loose from tradition and demolishing the outworn Shibboleths of the past, women nowadays are seen in action as telephone operators, receptionists, nurses, ticketing staff, doctors, airline traffic assistants and air hostesses. In this nocturnal environment which is physically demanding and mentally exhausting the travails of working women go unnoticed. Can women be replaced by men is the question to which the answer is no and that precisely is the reason why telephone operators are in a majority of the cases women and not men, the reason being a woman's voice is pleasant & has better audibility. Similarly, compulsions of a few professions make woman indispensable for that kind of job & this argument applies well to nurses and receptionists. These women face a spectrum of problems which has a bearing on many things like sleep, home, marriage, domestic life and health.

Anita, 22, worked in the house-keeping department of a five star hotel in the suburbs for a year and half. "The night shift (10 p.m. - 7.30 a.m.) undoubtedly was the toughest", confessed Anita. "We had to shoulder additional responsibility and had to be extremely careful while scrubbing & cleaning to get that spick and span look for the next day. What with international airline crews checking in and out throughout night, we had to be on our feet. At times, work pressure would increase with a number of flights landing at the same time. Workload apart reaching the hotel at 10 in the night is in itself a big exercise." It is rather surprising that some of the so called "five star monoliths" do not provide transportation for night shift employees, much less for women. Though Bombay, by any standards is safe, there have been cases of chain snatching and eve teasing involving women going on the night shift. In Anita's case, her father would religiously wait for her at the bus stop at Sion to escort her home after the 1 pm - 10 pm shift. Asked which shift would she choose given a choice, Anita says, "Day, of course. I still remember the time I had to do a night shift and a day shift during a 'bandh'. At the end of it, I could barely stand." Anita is unequivocal in stating that night shift means more work, but Neeta an economics graduate who works in yet another five star environment in North East Bombay disagrees.

"On the contrary, there is hardly any work on the night shift," observes Neeta, "No

doubt it starts telling on your health for the simple reason that you are going against the natural process of sleep. I have seen pretty girls losing weight and developing dark circles under the eyes in less than three months for the simple reasons that "disorientation" sets in. You really can't compensate by sleeping during day time." Asked as to why many girls are still active in night shifts, Neeta opines that the only attractive factor about nightshift is there is little or no work. "Compared to the quantum of the work during the day there is hardly any at night. New Year Eve, Christmas and late night parties are rare occasions where the girls are busy throughout night. But most of them bask in

everything went on smoothly till she met and married Sunil, an executive in a private firm. Sunil would leave home by 8.30 in the morning and return late. By the time Anita would have left for her nightshift, so the first two months after marriage, the young couple resign. Sunil was also sore about the business like attitude of hotels. "The effort is not worth it, nor is it going to fetch her anything additional to what she is getting. As compared to international standards, these 'desi' five-star version pay a pittance. What is more the girls are left to fend for themselves at night in the absence of hotel transport. There were quite a few instances of chain snatching, yet, they don't bother. They should give a better

On Night Duty?

Challenges and problems women face on taking up night shifts



the glitter and grandeur of the vent. Looking at the trend, it is only the young girls belonging to the "hip" crowd who relish every moment of it. But one has to be tough to withstand the rigours of work at unearthly hours. The receptionists have to stand throughout the night to recline as their presence at the desk is needed every minute. Night shift is enjoyable only when you like it. Otherwise it is tough." About safety, Neeta has had no problems. She would invariably take a taxi home at three or four in the morning rather than wait for the hotel bus pooled for a number of girls with homes spread out all over the city.

Most of the girls mentioned above are unmarried, which brings us to yet another important facet of their lives - the domestic angle, involving anxious moments and sleepless nights for parents and in the case of married women, a fair amount of attention at home following an emmer didn't have any time together. Frequent quarrels disturbed the prevailing tranquility at home. Anita had no other choice but to vating night shift. In Anita's case

deal for these young women who work all night. "The glitter, ambience and the highly sophisticated working atmosphere is tailor-made only to appeal to the aesthetic sense of the tourist, but reveals an absence of sympathy and compassion as reflected by Kaajal Sinha, a colleague of Anita. Kaajal had to go back to work exactly for months after she delivered a baby. "Luckily, my in-laws look after the baby during my absence. Otherwise, I wouldn't even think of doing a night shift," views Kaajal.

Money certainly plays a key role in helping women cling to night shift jobs. Though the salaries paid by hotels and hospitals is unattractive, it is a different story with the high-flying ladies.

Maya has been airhostess with an international airline for almost a decade. There isn't a city in the world she hasn't seen. Two years ago, she married Anil, an executive in a computer software firm. They have a ten month-old daughter. Luckily for Maya, Anil shouldered the entire responsibility during her absence. He perfectly played his role as a "proxy mother," in spite of the fact that

they had a maid servant. When asked about her demanding profession, Maya says, "It is hard work. Sometimes we take off at night and it is night again when we land in Europe or the United States of America. All these

years, I have got used to working in the night." But she states emphatically that she has no intentions of giving up. "The money is good and it gives me a chance to see new places every-time." Maya too, admits that she has lost a lot of weight. Her health has deteriorated, but has tried to compensate during the off period. The psychological factor of missing her child during flight has been underplayed. "Distraction is the only answer. After finishing work, we would either gossip or take a bestseller to while away time. Otherwise, you just can't work with these emotional constraints," was Maya's reply.

In Maya's case, money seems to be the driving force in her putting up with the vicissitudes of jet lag and sleeplessness but then there are certain women totally dedicated, but unsung and un-honoured and yet having the gratification of having attended to the sick. Mary Kutty, 24, hails from Kerala and works in a South Bombay hospital. Neither the fatigue of work nor sleeplessness shows up on her face. "Night shift is normally calm. Sometimes we come across critical cases and things become difficult," says Mary. "The I.C.U. is the toughest posting and the patients have to be watched for any abnormal signs every minute. The tension is just unbearable. Home sickness is bugging and we hardly get any leave. Her colleague, head nurse Mrs. Nair, 36, married with 2 children ages eight and four agrees with Mary Kutty. "I have a more difficult task to perform each day. Managing home and children on one side and a tough demanding job with additional responsibilities on other, it is literally a tight rope walk. Fortunately, all through these years, I have had excellent support from my husband, neighbours and servants, except on one occasion when everything went wrong and I was about to resign," she went on to explain. "My husband was on tour as usual, the helpful neighbours out on a vacation and the full-time servant too had taken leave for a week. The part-time servant being absent that day I telephoned and took leave to look after my children who were both running high temperatures. At about 10 pm, I received a phone call and had to rush to the hospital to assist the doctors in an emergency operation. Though physically present my thoughts were concentrated

on my children lying sick in bed with no one to care for. Dawn signalled the end of a trying night and I felt relieved."

However, job satisfaction, the feeling of having cared for the sick and ailing, the joy writ large on their faces, especially on the day of the discharge more than compensates for all the rigours of night shift. Asked about the psychological impact on children, she said, "when they were young, my parents and in-laws took turns to help me bring them up; now as they are growing up, they understand the importance of their mothers job and are proud of me. I put in extra effort to fulfill their emotional and psychological needs when I am with them constantly nagging them about morals through stories in order to wean them away from the undesirable influences of peer groups. I believe that quality of time spent with them is more important than the quantity. Today they are bold, independent, responsible and rise to the occasion," she says with a maternal sense of pride.

The night shift with all its shortcomings has come as a boon to fiercely ambitious young women who wish to further their career. Rekha Rao, 20, who works as a telephone operator with the Post and Telegraphs, Bangalore, came out as a strong woman who doesn't consider night shift as a limitation. Rekha joined the service after completing her pre-university. "Night-shift poses no problems. The reporting time is sufficiently early, 7.30 pm. This enables us to travel by bus safely. In some areas, there are vans to pick us up. In my case, my brother drops me to office. Work-wise, on the local lines there is less traffic, but international call at night keep us busy. Night shift is convenient for me as I have to attend engineering classes in the morning. My colleagues too help me," she observed. Lalitha Jayaram, 28, is content with the night shift. "P & T offers lot of facilities for married woman like baby-care centre, canteen, pick up van, restroom, etc. My husband too has night shift at about the same time in his factory. So there are not many problems to tell you the truth," she explains. Last year, Lalitha completed her B.A. (Economics) privately with a first-class and intends studying further. All this with a two-year-old child at home is no mean achievement.

For a woman to take on the challenges of night shift a number of extraneous factors come into play. An understanding husband, helpful in-laws, co-operative servants, reliable neighbours, moral support from colleagues and friends at the office and most important, a human outlook with a sincere effort to solve genuine problems will go a long way in helping her face the seemingly endless night with courage & confidence. Otherwise it is just another nightmare.

H.C. Udayshankar

Women workers.

Medicos & their problems

Nurses: overworked, underpaid

By Ezra Daniel

Do you know that till the 1960s nurses were not allowed to marry? Ever since the English woman Florence Nightingale introduced the concept of nursing during the Crimean War, (1853) for nursing was looked upon as almost a religious mission of life. Dedicated women gave up ideas of marriage, children and families and devoted their entire lives to the bedside care of suffering humanity.

But with the winds of modernisation

sweeping the globe, wedlock became a part of a nurse's life. Modernisation also brought about a radical growth in health services and the death rate was brought down drastically. There was a significant growth in the world's population, most evident in developing countries like India.

Immense pressure

Both these changes — the marriage rule and the growth of health services — have put immense pressures on nurses.

First let us take a look at a married nurse's life style. She gets up at the crack of dawn prepares meals for the entire family, gets the children ready for school, looks to her husband's needs, does household chores and, by the time she reaches her hospital, she might just flop into a chair and say: "I'm exhausted. Let the rest of the world look after itself."

Since nurses also have night duties, most of the time they get after work is spent in doing household work and trying to catch snatches of sleep.

But the family commitments of nurses are only a small part of the problem. One has to look into the entire gamut of health services in our country to realise the magnitude of our lopsided planning.

At the time of independence there was only one medical college and two nursing colleges in the country. Today there are about 120 medical colleges and only 10 nursing colleges. Of course there are also 167 schools of nursing but these provide only 3.5-year diplomas.

In today's competitive society promotions and career advancements come easier with four year B.Sc. and two year M.Sc. degrees offered by the colleges of nursing. In 1971 there were

While the doctor is there for consultancy, diagnosis, prescription and surgery, patient bedside care is optimised by established norms of doctor-nurse-patient ratios.

only 574 graduate nurses in the country, in 1981 there were 2,214 and the projected figure for the year 2001 is only 6,778. But briefly, our country is today producing more doctors than nurses.

In the developed countries there are five to seven nurses per doctor. While the doctor is there for consultancy, diagnosis, prescription and surgery, patient bedside care is optimised by established norms of doctor-nurse-patient ratios.

In India, however, five years ago, there were 2.97 lakh doctors as compared to only 1.97 lakh nurses — a ratio of just 1:0.665 (the public sector ratio being marginally better with 1:1.5).

Growing gap

Look at the planning. While the Mudaliar Committee (1959-61) envisaged a ratio of three nurses for every doctor, the country today opens more medical colleges than nursing colleges and thus produces more doctors than nurses. The gap between nurses required and nurses available is a phenomenal 16.53 lakh (including graduates, diploma holders and auxiliary nurse midwives).

It has been found that the infant mortality and death rates in India and Pakistan are high because there are more doctors than nurses, and that these rates are lower in Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Thailand because there nurses outnumber doctors. This is taken as evidence to show how important bedside patient care is.

Specialised studies

As long as one is in doctor's one might add that doctors now go in for highly specialised studies and practice most of it abroad. Nurses have had little or no chance to keep up with scientific and technological advancements. This often creates professional friction and personal animosity between doctors and nurses.

So much for doctor-nurse relation. Let us now turn to the nurse-patient

equation and we will see the extent of the nurses' plight.

The Mudaliar Committee recommended that there should be one nurse for three beds in teaching hospitals and one nurse for five beds in non-teaching hospitals. However, in over 71 per cent of the teaching hospitals the ratio is one nurse to six patients. In most hospitals it is 1:20. Of course the ratio changes from day to night shifts — less nurses for more patients. There are hospitals in the country where a single nurse might have to look after 150 patients on two floors. It's that bad.

Auxiliary work

And there was a time when the nurses spent most of their time with the patients. Today they must devote a large segment of their time to doing auxiliary work, administrative and clerical duties and house-keeping. One research found that in a 750-bed teaching hospital with 506 nurses, 55 per cent of the nurses were on administrative/teaching and specialised jobs (O.P.D.s, I.C.U.s, operation theatres and clinics), 30 per cent were on leave reserve and only 15 per cent were left to look after 92 per cent of the 750 patients.

Surprisingly, the 500-bed Sector 16 General Hospital in Chandigarh has an appreciable 1:1 nurse-patient ratio, although the doctor-nurse ratio is still about 1:0.9. In the 807-bed PGI there are 800 doctors to 618 nurses, or 1:0.79, while on any given day, there is an average of one nurse to 12 patients.

Heavy load

Our General Hospital apart, the nurse-patient ratio puts an unbelievably heavy load on the nurses in most hospitals in the country. Too many doctors to prescribe and order, too many patients to look after and not enough nurses to do the job.

No wonder then that when you visit a hospital there are chances you will encounter an overworked and irritable nurse who will go about doing her work but will have very little time to give you individual attention. In fact she will tell you, if you are to be admitted to her ward, that you must bring an attendant. It is the attendant who will provide bedside care.

Poor infrastructure

And even if you do come across a devoted nurse she might not be able to provide adequate care simply because

the infrastructure for it is inadequate or just not available — cotton, bandages, soaps, disposable syringes, kidney trays, bedpans and medicines. Often a nurse faces the awkward situation of having to ask the patient to arrange for things which normally a hospital should supply. This often creates tension between nurses, patients and attendants.

The only silver lining to the nursing profession is that with education, especially science, becoming widespread there are more educated persons who are taking up nursing as a profession (once girls from Kerala formed 90 per cent of the admissions to the PGI's College of Nursing, today 50 per cent come from Punjab and the neighbouring States). Lack of space does not permit an in-depth examination of our lopsided planning of nursing education.

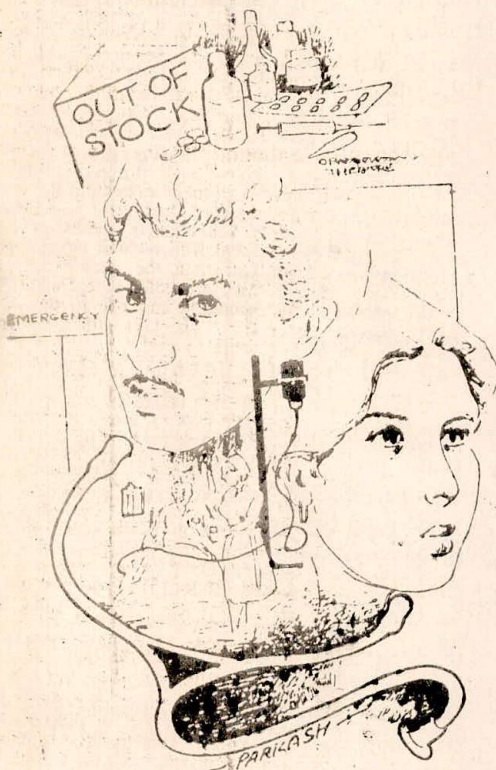
Poor salaries

As a career, nursing may not pay much. At one time there was parity between the salaries of nurses and house surgeons. Today the gap between nurses and doctors has widened. (Health is a State subject in our Constitution and pay scales vary from State to State.) But where there is education and unemployment there will be enough persons willing to take up even the minimum offered. Nurses today get a starting basic of Rs 1400, the same as primary school teachers, but far less than trained graduate and postgraduate teachers.

A nurse's life in India is back-breaking, hazardous and unrewarding. Those who do not go abroad (there is a high demand for them in the Gulf and Western countries) and enter the profession with a sense of compassion and dedication are soon sucked into a system where they must become immune to the stirrings of the heart and calls of the conscience.

In our country, it seems, nothing is achieved without unions and associations, strikes and agitations. These, and not reason and logic, make those at the top give justice. The nurses have their Trained Nurses Association of India and a journal. They have been on strikes and their salaries and working conditions have improved somewhat, but they have never been able to get as much as say doctors have.

The nurses have a long way to go before they can organise themselves into a powerful pressure group. Did you know that two nurses sit in England's House of Lords?



Sexual Harassment:

Ways to Obtain Redressal at the Workplace

by

Madhu Kishwar

In the weeks after we published the cover story on sexual harassment in *Manushi* No. 68 several additional cases of sexual harassment were brought to *Manushi's* notice. They provided confirmation for our view that this form of abuse is extremely widespread in every stratum of our society. The cases referred to *Manushi* involved, among others, school teachers and customs officers.

A persistent theme in all these cases was that those protesting against the harassment or those wishing to support and defend the victimised woman were at a loss as to how to proceed, how to seek redressal. For instance, a high Customs official sought our intervention in a case of sexual harassment involving a woman probationary officer. This official had been experiencing a great deal of frustration in his attempts to get disciplinary action taken against the officer who had molested the woman probationer. He was finally forced to seek the intervention of the Finance Secretary, the Finance Minister, and the Prime Minister in order to get an inquiry under way into the charge of sexual harassment, and to suspend the officer pending the enquiry. While we at *Manushi* were impressed by this official's care and concern for the welfare of the woman probationer who had asked for his intervention, we were also very disturbed to discover that even an officer as highly placed as he is did not have a well defined procedure or mechanism available which

he could set into motion to deal with such cases. This was true even though the aggrieved woman is very well connected. She is, among other things, the daughter-in-law of a high court judge.

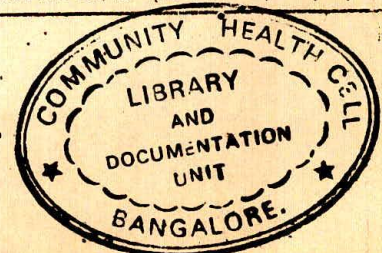
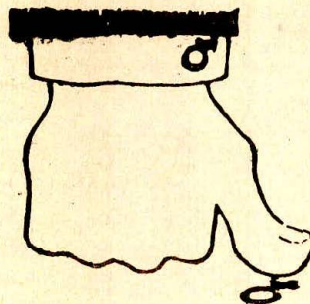
Hence, his only recourse seemed to be desperate appeals to the very top officials of the central government. However, very few people have the connections this officer had for getting a hearing at the ministerial level. Any procedure which is dependent on reaching the prime minister and other central government ministers to deal with each individual case of sexual harassment suffered by a woman, whether in Bombay or in some remote provincial town, is simply not feasible.

Considering how widespread the problem is and how serious its consequences for women, we need to begin by demanding that workplaces be made safer for women. Lack of security from sexual harassment adversely affects our fundamental right to work and earn a livelihood. Too many women are compelled to withdraw from earning their livelihood for fear of sexual har-

assment. A major prerequisite for making our workplaces less insecure is to demand that every workplace install and follow a rigorous set of procedures that make sexual harassment an offence that might even result in the harasser losing his job and being subject to court action.

Such procedures need not be elaborate or time consuming. As a possible example we present the broad outlines of a procedure. These stipulations will need to be refined and modified to make them appropriate for the requirements of particular work situations.

- In every work unit, be it a business firm, a university, or a government office, a carefully selected person should be assigned the task of listening to complaints of sexual harassment, recording them in writing, and taking official note of each of them.
- This person should be authorised and equipped with the necessary powers required to conduct enquiries either by her or himself, or to appoint a committee to assist in completing this task.
- Annually, the women in that unit should be asked to provide a confidential evaluation of the performance of this official in order to ensure that the person holding such a responsible job enjoys the confidence of the women in that unit. The official should not continue to hold the position if a majority of women don't have confidence in her or him.
- The employer should be responsible for ensuring that every employee



working in the unit is made aware that sexual harassment is unacceptable within the firm and is a punishable offence, both by the firm and in the courts. A written code of acceptable and unacceptable conduct should be provided to each employee, posted on the bulletin board, and carefully reviewed in training, orientation and re-training programmes. Punishments by the firm might range from censure, to loss of bonuses and other extra compensation, to punitive fines, and in more severe cases, to loss of job.

Building up an awareness that sexual harassment is unacceptable within the unit in itself would act as an important preventive measure. It would have a restraining effect on many of those who feel emboldened to try it these days because they feel they can get away with it.

- The woman complainant should have the option of deciding whether she wishes her complaint to be kept confidential or to make it public.
- If there is a strong prima facie case against the accused he may be temporarily suspended from his job forthwith, for the brief period of the investigation, so that he does not have the opportunity to abuse his official position to intimidate the woman or her supporters.
- It should be mandatory to complete the enquiry and take action within a specified period of time, no more than three months.
- It should also be mandatory to make the report of the enquiry committee public unless the woman complainant specifically requests them to keep it confidential. Not releasing these enquiry reports is a common way of shielding the culprit by covering the matter with a shroud of secrecy.

The Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, is already in the process of establishing procedures for dealing with sexual harassment. We invite our readers to send us their suggestions

and hope that they will ensure that such protective measures are taken in their respective workplaces.

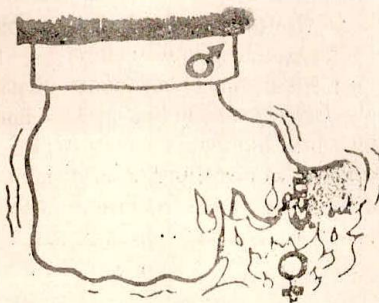
However, apart from demanding appropriate codes of conduct and a grievance redressal mechanism, women also need to learn to defend and protect themselves more effectively by taking their own measures.

The first bad habit that we need to reject is our own tendency to assume the attitude of a powerless victim. Too many women behave in stupidly passive ways in their relations with men, not saying a determined "no" to unwelcome advances as soon as they start occurring. We often let things go too far before we begin to reject advances and start to protest, by which time many others see us as having invited trouble or as willing participants in a 'flirtatious game.' Too many of us live and act in the belief that 'men will be men,' that is, men are always going to act sexually aggressive, however we try to indicate that their advances are not welcome. In this view, women just have to put up with such abuse because it's in the nature of things. This victim mentality is our worst enemy, for this stereotyped role suits the aims of the aggressive man best. We need to take responsibility for changing our ineffective stereotypical behaviors. In this regard it is important to act decisively as soon as possible, as soon as unwelcome advances are made. By moving quickly you will not allow the man to create the misleading im-

pression that his advances are acceptable to you. Some men consider themselves entitled to react in obnoxious and sometimes violent ways if they can convince themselves and others that they were led on by a woman.

Sometimes, not protesting early enough is in part responsible for women remaining silent about incidents of sexual harassment they suffer, because the longer such behavior continues, the more lurid are its manifestations and, therefore, the more embarrassing to discuss with others or to make a public issue of. We need to learn to talk about such experiences without shame, to protest against attempts at bullying or blackmail. Making this an open struggle is our best protection against further sexual harassment and sexual abuse because blackmailers have little leverage in an open atmosphere. They thrive on fear and secrecy. You have a chance of defeating them by being more direct and decisive.

It is also very important for women to learn to provide mutual support and protection to each other rather than, as so often happens, work against each other. In most units where bosses are prone to harassing women sexually, one of the common ploys they use is to offer crumbs and special favours to the 'chosen ones.' This causes resentments, competition and mutual hostility among women employees or students, who find it much harder to act with solidarity and support each other in case of need. As a result, the task of exploiting women becomes much easier. We need to learn to rely on our competence and dignity rather than seek favours through flirtations which are likely to alienate us from other women and deny us their respect and support. A woman not respected by other women is seldom taken seriously by men and, therefore, less able to resist being sexually abused or harassed. □



Follow Up Report on a Case of Sexual Harassment in Delhi University

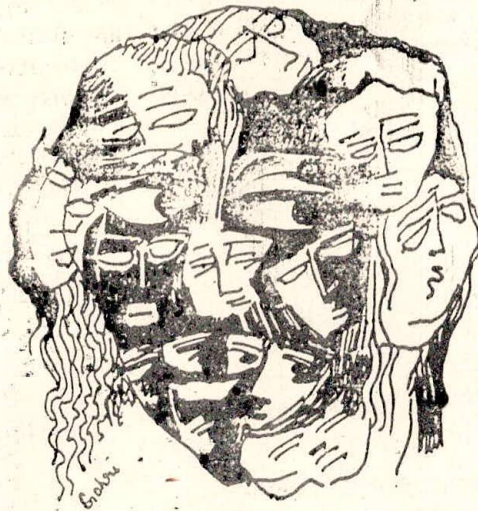
by
Madhu Kishwar

In the last issue of *Manushi* (No. 68) we reported serious allegations of sexual harassment against the Head, Department of Adult Continuing Education and Extension (DACEE), Delhi University: Dr S.C. Bhatia. Since then, in the last week of March the DACEE staff went on a relay hunger strike to protest against the non payment of their salaries as well as against the University's inaction concerning their charges of sexual harassment against Dr S.C. Bhatia. Delhi University Teacher's Association (DUTA) also joined with the DACEE union in demanding action against Dr Bhatia on the basis of the charges made against him.

On March 26, 1992, in a meeting of the Academic Council, the Vice Chancellor, Upendra Baxi, told those present that Dr Bhatia would be asked to go on leave and would also be removed as Head of DACEE, while retaining his position as Director. On learning of these developments, we assumed that Delhi University was beginning to take the necessary steps in this case. However, a few weeks later, Professor Shukla of Delhi University's Faculty of Education phoned to say that he was disturbed to find Dr Bhatia in attendance at a meeting of the Board of Research Studies in Social Sciences on April 9 and April 10, 1992. Professor Shukla subsequently wrote a letter to the University protesting that: "if the University has sent him [Dr Bhatia] on leave, as a matter of decency and discipline and out of legitimate concern for the

dignity of its women members, and, indeed, its own, it is not permissible for Professor Bhatia to be participating in meetings."

On receiving a copy of this letter from the author, we thought it necessary to find out from the University what action it had taken regarding the charges against Dr Bhatia. I phoned the Vice Chancellor and was informed he was out of Delhi. I was advised to



contact the Pro Vice Chancellor, Professor Nagar, to obtain information on the latest developments in this case. I phoned him several times and left messages asking him to call me back. He did not return my calls. Finally, after trying a few more times, I phoned him at his residence and spoke to him.

As soon as I mentioned that I was calling to find out if an enquiry committee had been established to exam-

ine the allegations against Dr Bhatia, he exploded: "You have been taking too many liberties and publishing a lot of rubbish. I refuse to tell you anything." That seemed a strange response from somebody who had been assigned the task of enquiring into the allegations.

I then asked him: "Since you are asserting with such confidence that the women's allegations are 'rubbish' does this mean you have already completed your enquiry?"

His response: "I don't need any enquiry to know that those charges are rubbish. You had no business to publish such nonsense."

I persisted: "Please tell me whether or not an enquiry has been instituted and whether Bhatia has been asked to proceed on leave."

He exploded again: "Why should I tell you anything? Did you consult us before you published that rubbish? You had no business to publish such nonsense."

I replied: "Do you mean that I should have sought the University's permission?" (I had sent an advance copy of the charges to the Vice Chancellor Upendra Baxi and had several lengthy phone conversations with him on the subject prior to publishing the article.)

Professor Nagar repeated angrily that he wouldn't tell me anything since I hadn't 'consulted' him earlier. He also cast aspersions regarding the veracity of the two women of DACEE who made the original complaints.

I then asked: "Does this mean that you see yourself as a defender of Bhatia rather than someone who is to investigate impartially?"

His final reply: "I don't want to talk to you since you did not consult me." That is where our conversation ended.

Professor Nagar's outbursts and vehement defence of Dr Bhatia are all the more disturbing as he has apparently been assigned the task of organising some sort of enquiry into the allegations. A day or two before my telephone conversation with him the two women from DACEE who had made the sexual harassment complaints against Dr Bhatia received letters from him saying that, "in order to investigate [their] charges, it has been decided to institute an enquiry." The two women were "advised to send [their] complaints... giving all details and any documentary evidence in a sealed cover to me [Professor Nagar] in confidence as soon as possible, but not later than 10 May 1992."

Having failed to get any information about the status of the enquiry from Professor Nagar, I phoned Professor Veena Das, who is serving as

temporary head of DACEE, and asked her the same two questions. She said she knew nothing about Dr Bhatia's having been asked to proceed on leave. Nor did she have any information about an enquiry committee having been set up. All she knew was that Dr Bhatia had resigned from the position of Head of DACEE, but not as Director, and that he continued to function as a Professor on the faculty.

In the meantime Dr Sushma Merh, one of the complainants against Dr Bhatia, in her letter dated May 4, 1992 in response to his letter of April 28 referred to above, has refused to submit any further evidence on the following grounds:

"I am afraid that after the experience of the... Baviskar Committee... I am rather sceptical about the honesty of the University in respect to such 'enquiries'... let the University properly appoint an enquiry clarifying the following points:

1. Nature of the enquiry
2. Composition of the Committee
3. Terms of reference of the Committee
4. Procedure of enquiry

Only when the above points are clearly stated by the University there can be any further correspondence on this count as I am not sure that this time also the University shall indulge in another scandalous eye-wash..."

Since the allegations in this case have a long history, are of a very serious nature, and the University's own efforts at investigation have not been vigorous and swift, we demand that:

- the University ask for an enquiry by a high court judge to look into the charges of sexual harassment and ensure that due process is followed.
- the terms of reference and structure of this investigation be made public.
- Dr Bhatia not be permitted to participate in the work of the University pending the completion of the enquiry.
- the charge of sexual harassment be investigated separately and independently. It should not be confused with the other charges of corruption and mismanagement, or any other long standing problems in DACEE, such as job regularisation.
- the enquiry be completed within three months and the report be made public soon thereafter. □

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Name of the Paper | THE TELEGRAPH

Published at | CALCUTTA

Dated | 18 DEC 1991

Women workers

Occupational diseases in Indian women on the rise

Indian women workers are becoming increasingly prone to occupational diseases, according to a recent survey.

Conducted jointly by the Industrial Toxicology Research Institute, Lucknow, and the National Institute of Occupational Health, Ahmedabad, the study points out that occupations involving excessive exposure to noise and vibrations can adversely affect the female reproductive system.

Occurrence of ovarian cancer has been considerably higher in women cosmetologists as well as those women working in the rubber industry.

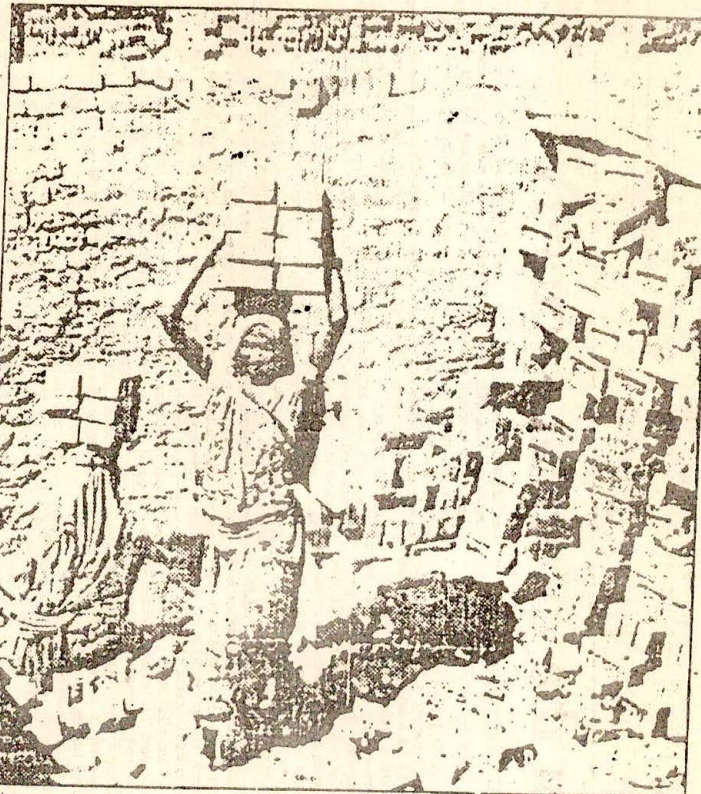
Though occupational cancer has not been fully assessed, women in the textile industry have been found to be prone to a higher incidence of the disease than others, says the survey, titled "Occupational and environmental health problems of Indian women".

According to the report, various socio-economic factors, combined with general ill health, lack of awareness and in many cases, inadequate technology, make Indian women workers unduly vulnerable to health risks, as compared to their counterparts in the West.

A team of scientists and researchers, led by Dr P.N. Vishwanathan of the ITRC, contacted women workers in various sectors, such as coir-weavers, agricultural labourers, carpet weavers, bidi-makers, brassware workers, chikan-embroiderers and construction workers.

It was found that women in the construction industry are susceptible to occupational stress due to constant shifting of fresh mortar. The strenuous job of rock and brick-crushing as well as carrying loads up improvised ladders also result in strokes, apart from the various physical factors such as fatigue, cramps and postural defects.

In studies conducted at Patna and Delhi, it was found



Women in the construction industry are susceptible to occupational stress due to constant shifting of fresh mortar

that 98 per cent of women construction workers were illiterate. Seventy per cent in Patna and 80 per cent in Delhi were below 35 years of age. Due to grave economical factors, 40 per cent of women continue to work upto the eighth or ninth month of pregnancy and 23 per cent upto the very last day. Absence of even minimum health protection during pregnancy as well as general malnutrition result in high infant mortality rates.

Women in the textile industry show a higher incidence of occupational cancer and chemicals used in dyeing, finishing, moth-proofing, flame-retarding and wrinkle-resisting could be responsible for it.

Agate-workers in Khambal,

Gujarat, were also studied. Here, the incidence of lung diseases was 70 per cent in the case of women and 55 per cent for men. The incidence of tuberculosis was 21 per cent for women and 11 per cent for men.

The health survey of 1,250 women coir-workers in Kerala showed that most of them were afflicted with skin and respiratory diseases as well as elephantiasis.

Agricultural workers are constantly exposed to the toxicity of pesticides and most women in rural north India to the smoke of cowdung cakes while cooking. This adversely affects the lungs and results in bronchitis, among other things.

In the chikan industry, a large number of women have to

wear glasses by the time they reach the age of 30 because of the intense strain on their eyes. Many of them, in fact, become incapable of continuing with their work by the time they reach 50. The most common affliction, apart from failing eyesight, is spondylitis which develops due to the stooping posture adopted at work.

In the brassware industry in Moradabad, working conditions are appalling and there is high morbidity related to respiratory diseases and heat-exhaustion.

Women involved in carpet-weaving and khadi-spinning in Mirzapur, Bhadoi, Agra and Shahjahanpur suffer from postural defects and backaches while 20 per cent have gynaecological complaints.

In the organised sector, out of the 42 women workers in the coil and insulation section of Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) in Bhopal, 71 per cent complained of constant headaches and 60 per cent had itching in the eyes. Also, the incidence of pain in the extremities, bodyache and muscle cramps was 56 per cent more in women than the men.

Apart from studying the various health problems, the survey also puts forth certain recommendations — one of the major suggestions being the designing of workroom conditions and effective tools to suit women workers. The researchers also urge that personal protection devices be designed and their use encouraged by demonstrations and subsidised schemes.

Another recommendation is that awareness be created about occupational problems in women workers about the safe handling of potentially dangerous substances. Female industrial hygiene experts being too few in India, training should be imparted to many more.

Manjul Misra

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Women workers

(City Edition)



Labour notes

Women in the informal sector-IV

By Kathyayini Chamaraj

A TORN plastic tablecloth held in place by two bamboo canes in front and a row of stones at the back, serves as a makeshift shelter. Zahedunnisa, a vegetable vendor, sits under pathetic canopy on a stone slab placed over the open drain at the side of the pavement, with the little piles of vegetables before her. Struck from the drain mingles with that of the rotting garbage nearby and flies fill alternately from the garbage to the vegetables.

Zahedunnisa, however, cannot afford to rent out a proper shop and even for this measly vending space, she has to pay Rs. 2 to the beat constable every morning and evening. She makes Rs. 15 per day on an investment of Rs. 50 to 100. There are 11 of us in our family, she says. "The ration shop gives us only 5 kg each of rice and wheat, whereas those who come in suit and boot are given 20 kg of each. I have to buy most of our requirements from the open market. How can I buy anything, when rice alone costs Rs. 7 to 9 per kg? I would like to have more cash to invest in more vegetables but I am told that I cannot be given a loan because my husband was a loan defaulter."

Ranganamma, a pavement vendor, says she invests a total of Rs. 150 daily on dals, capsicum, potatoes, oil and kerosene and makes about Rs. 10 to 15 per day selling wadas from 4 to 11 p.m. She too pays the maidool to the cop daily. "If I don't, he asks me to clear out," she says. Asked what would help her in her work, she

the State under Article 19(6) of the Constitution. That there is no fundamental right to occupy a particular place in any street for carrying on street trading, but "it is for the State to designate the streets and earmark the places from where the street trading can be done."

The court had suggested that "hawking" and "non-hawking" zones be created in such a way that free flow of traffic is not affected. However, no action has been taken in this regard in Karnataka so far. According to Mr. A.R. Infante, DCP (Traffic), Bangalore, the police, in light of the ruling, are not preventing anyone from vending their goods in roads or pavements which are broad enough for such activity to be carried out without obstructing the smooth flow of traffic. But, on narrow roads, where such activity constitutes a hindrance, police are still looking for ways and charging fines. But no effort to notify "hawking" and "non-hawking" zones has been made.

With the result that vendors are not aware where they may or may not carry on their business. Most of them are also unaware of the ruling so that they continue to consider themselves unharmed, wherever they are, and continue to pay maidools to beat constables, even on roads where they are not causing any hindrance. Mr. Infante wants the public to bring such specific instances in his notice so that action could be taken.

He also said that for him, the safety of the pedestrian, who can get run over by vehicles when he is forced to step on to the road because the pavement is obstructed by vendors, is of greater priority than the

need of the vendor to earn. It is a question of the right of the pedestrian to his life against the right of the vendor to earn his or her livelihood.

The Supreme Court had also ruled, in view of the fact that even electronic items are sometimes sold by street traders, that a "policy decision should be taken in regard to the articles which should be permitted to be sold on the pavements" and that help should be given only to the really needy, who cannot afford to pay rent for shops, by framing rules accordingly. By weighing out the vendors in this manner, it would be possible to give greater facilities to the really deserving. The court had also noted that hawking could be prohibited near hospitals or places where the security considerations so demanded, but no steps have been taken either by Bangalore City Corporation or the police in any of these matters.

The National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector recommends that the service performed by vendors be recognised and authorities specially, considering their greater need. The licence should carry a photograph of the vendor and therefore serve as an identity card as well. Urban planners should recognise the space requirements of vendors and the commission said. The practice of pulling down old and cheap market areas for putting up expensive supermarkets and shopping plazas should be discouraged. Rather, cheap roadside stalls, providing adequate shelter and hygienic

storage and display space should be planned in every newly-formed area to be within the reach of poor women vendors. The National Commission pleads for space for purely women's markets in every new developing areas.

The commission also recommends that every market complex have provision for pavement vendors and amenities like drinking water, washing, toilet, storage and creche. Market committees, with due representation to women vendors, should be in charge of managing these facilities. Vendors should also form their own association.

Regular training courses should be organised for vendors at the market place on sanitation and health, fair business practice and schemes of assistance and how to avail of them. In general, considering the small amounts of cash that flow through the hands of most self-employed women in the informal sector, their need for easy credit to expand their business is vital. However, since most of them want very small loans per day or per week, it is not possible for them to approach regular banks. Hence the commission recommends that alternative channels of a separate credit institution be set up for meeting the credit needs of self-employed women. Loans from these agencies can be routed through neighbourhood mandals, anganwadi workers or voluntary agencies.

Voluntary agencies, many of which currently concentrate on the "soft" subjects of creating awareness on better health, nutrition, baby care, etc., and whose skill training for women is limited to the "home-decoration" activities of making artificial flowers and dolls, need to take up many more schemes and tangible gain to women workers, such as the entire cycle of providing credit, raw materials, skills, technological and design upgradation and

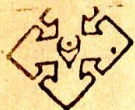
finally marketing tie-ups. Schemes in every conceivable format relating to all these aspects of women's development have been thought up and money provided for the same by the Department of Women and Children's Welfare, the Women's Development Corporation and the Social Welfare Advisory Board. They only need empowering women's groups to bring them to those in need.

Scientists also need to look at the actual tasks performed by women to devise better technologies for them. Designing a roadside bank for an ill seller or a sales clerk, taking into account all the operations involved and providing for hygienic and attractive display, would be one example. Or, how the ridding of mosquitoes or breeds can be made less hazardous and less wearous. Obviously, women at these tasks are earning a pittance because they do not possess a machine which can produce a greater number of stocks of beads in a shorter time, without the help of children.

But, even if such a machine was available, how could one ensure that its ownership would remain with the women and that it would not be used to throw them out of employment? Even if one could ensure that the women, the actual producers, retain ownership of the machines, would there be sufficient raw material available for feeding the machines? Would reserving a certain quota of raw material to the actual producers help? Marketing can, of course, be helped if the government itself buys the products which it requires on a large scale from the women producers. Also, the general public needs to cultivate the habit of buying products produced by poor women, which could be sold under a particular brand or name, in preference to those produced by large manufacturers on a mass scale.

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Voluntary Health Association of India

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Information and Documentation

Name of the Newspaper	Date DD/MM/YY	Subject	Copies sent to/ Follow-up
HINDUSTAN TIMES (Delhi)		<i>Women workers.</i> Public Policy Division Voluntary Health Association of India	<i>File</i>
ANSATTA (Delhi)			
STATESMAN (Delhi)	30/11/92		
EXPRESS (Delhi)			
NEER (Delhi)			
PH (Calcutta)			

Sexual harassment on the rise : ILO ^{30/11/92}

WASHINGTON, Nov 29. — Sexual harassment of women is acquiring a menacing dimension worldwide compelling many of its victims to quit jobs or suffer humiliation, says UNI quoting an International Labour Organization study.

Sexual harassment caused between six and eight per cent of women surveyed to change their jobs. Many of them were involuntarily dismissed. The proportion of one out of 12 women being forced out of a job after being sexually harassed could apply to many countries.

The ILO Director-General, Mr Michel Hansenne, says: "Research finding in two industrialized countries demonstrate that sexual harassment is a pervasive problem affecting a considerable proportion of working women."

These countries include the USA, Canada, France, New Zealand, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Japan.

According to the ILO study, between 15 and 30% of working women questioned in some surveys say they have been subjected to frequent, serious sexual harassment — unwanted touching, pinching, offensive remarks and unwel-

come requests for sexual intercourse.

These "offensive and demanding" experience often result in emotional and physical stress and related illness, it adds.

While expressing concern at these figures, the ILO cautions that the surveys, limited to 23 countries and using varied definition methods and sample groups, are not comparable and should not be interpreted as representing the global situation.

"The full picture is incomplete because a large percentage of cases go unreported in every country," Mr Hansenne comments.

According to one report, "some 60% of victims of sexual harassment ignore it, believing that complaining will not resolve the problem but instead will cause further economic and psychological harm".

But these surveys do reveal that concerned awareness of the problem — in the workplace and nationally as well as internationally — had come a long way in a short time.

Indeed, since the ILO report was prepared, new laws were adopted in Belgium and France.

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28 NOV 1990

Women

Public Policy Division

Voluntary Health Association of India

Strain, the bane of working woman

THE woman of today is determined, responsible and ambitious. Pragmatic like man, she too has accepted the common worship of a bank account to keep the kitchen fire burning.

A glance at the modern woman and you see inordinate hankering for money, an insatiable desire for possessions and a phobia of somebody being one-up on them.

Her ambitions are rising and she is steeping out to qualitatively meet increasing requirements, hence paying

artery diseases. Significantly more women smoke than ever before, thus quickly overtaking men in the incidence of lung cancer too.

The fatigue suffered is just not physical but could be psychological and mental as well. Feelings of tiredness can arise from physical exhaustion, boredom, frustration, stress and intellectual work too.

THE good news, however, is that most of these illnesses are preventable. Every woman can keep herself

and roller skating are excellent ways to improve the cardio-vascular system. The heart-beat becomes stronger, breathing becomes deeper and circulation improves. And with the improvement in circulation, you will find yourself with more energy and increased awareness. Also she should avoid skipping breakfast or having only coffee or some quick nutritionless food. She should also avoid eating meals on the run, again without much nutritional value. Skipping lunch in order to cut calorie intake and snacking on high-calorie items that have little or no nutritional value.

It is now very hard to develop nutrition habits. The only thing is that you have to keep in mind the three important points: variety, fresh foods and moderation. And now how do you know that your diet is well balanced? Each day, the body needs carbohydrates, proteins, fat vitamins and minerals.

A working woman requires energy which should come from complex carbohydrates as when you eat a variety of foods in their natural, fresh state, you can most effectively digest and assimilate nutrients.

By Chandershekhar Kumra

the price which is sometimes more than proportionate. Where the man was tension-ridden, burdened with the excesses of multiplying income, she now moves in and is a potential factor to reckon with. Current medical research reveals that degenerative diseases, particularly those associated with stress and sedentary living, are showing a dramatic upswing among women.

Resultantly most of the women today, are victims of high blood pressure, chronic fatigue, nervous disorders, low back pain and coronary

healthy, if she so desires by keeping her mind, spirit and body work together in harmony. Thus then the physical body is trim, toned and strong, the mind is effected positively resulting in a high self esteem, a positive outlook of life and confidence. The opposite is also true. Basics to fitness are physical activity or exercise, nutrition, positive thought, and rest and relaxation.

She should have an internal tune-up programme. Aerobics classes, brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming

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(City Edition)

Women Workers

Protect the working woman

EVERYONE wants women to work. Parents want the daughter to take up some job because it brings down the dowry bill. A groom wants a working bride to be able to pull through the economic hardships of life which have come to stay. But no one seems to bother about the woes of the working woman. She gets only bitter comments from her men colleagues (sometimes extra sweet which is worse). They attack women; they lampoon them; they lambast them. "She is always lost in the Max Factor culture, always insists on everything being spick and span around a dazzling bright table, a sparkling clean chair, all that would go with the shine of her sari". Such are the compliments men pay their women colleagues. But what is wrong with insisting on cleanliness around?

A woman would come late (are men always on time?). She has to pack her husband off to office and the child to school. She leaves in a hurry and often before time — the child is waiting for the mother. She would ask for leave more often, sometimes the husband is ailing, sometime the child and at times she herself (one hopes they do not resent her proceeding on maternity leave).

Maybe a woman would come late sometimes and even leave before time. But once she is in, she is never out. She is never seen at the roadside TV shop when a cricket match is on, never seen in a gossip session in a nearby coffee house. She works with greater zeal, devotion and honesty. She handles visitors gently, yet firmly. She is never discourteous, never rude. Cases of corruption have been rarely reported against women employees. Why should then men lambast their women colleagues? That, however, is only the bear-

able part of the story. Now look at the unbearable. Not long ago a top Maharashtra politician, while on board a plane, made ugly overtures towards an air hostess. A former Union Minister misbehaved with the women staff of the Janpath Telephone Exchange in Delhi. A Madhya Pradesh legislator outraged the modesty of a woman employee.

The story, does not end there. Not long ago, a top cop of Punjab misbehaved with a woman IAS officer at a party hosted by a top bureaucrat. As a Jaipur-based post-graduate student, I do not know what was reported by the local press. What I read in a magazine was nerve-shaking. A far more horrible case was reported in September, 1989, by a journal published from the capital.

women. But the fact is that all this is hollow talk, a vote-catching device that has been in use for years. Nothing has been done even when Article 15 of the Constitution arms the Government with the power to have special legislation for women and children.

Coming down from the high schemes, the Government could do a few small things for the women in offices, in the fields, in factories, in hospitals and elsewhere. A small beginning can be made by providing an adequate number of ladies' rooms in offices where women employees can sit together, eat together and talk on matters of common interest. Government-run creches near a cluster of offices and industrial units may be started to provide

BITTER HALF BRIGHTER

Sexual harassment of women at work reached the abyss when one May 18, 1989, the vice principal of a Bombay college, allegedly outraged the modesty of his junior colleague, a young girl from a lower middle class family. And the nadir was reached when the principal advised her not to press her complaint, lest the offending senior should spoil her confidential report, and laughingly asked her to forget the incident as "kissing is not a serious offence". And this is the attitude of teachers, the ones who are expected to lead mankind from "darkness to light".

Much noise has been made about plans for women and much more. In his Independence Day message, Mr V. P. Singh promised legislation to reserve 30 per cent seats in panchayats for

working women's children with the needed care at reasonable cost.

Local transport (in big cities) is yet another area which cries for attention. Buses are overcrowded. It is a horrible scene how women enter the buses. And even if they manage to get in, their plight in the midst of the crowd is beyond description. Many miss the right bus and get late only to invite uncharitable taunts from their men colleagues. Special buses should be run for women employees from convenient points, or adequate number of seats should be reserved for them where it is not possible to ply buses exclusively for them.

Above all, a stringent code of conduct with exemplary punishment for those who try to violate the honour and dignity of women.

— NEELAM AGARWAL

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Public Policy Division

Voluntary Health Association of India

Women
workers

Men take the cake, women get baked

MANILA, Dec 9

Women make up to 60 per cent of the total rural labour force in Asia, but they are almost totally ignored by governments in planning, agricultural development.

This anti-women bias in the planning process handicaps women who are already disadvantaged in most Asian rural societies, according to farm experts, Asian government officials and women farmers who met in a conference on "gender issues in agriculture" held here this week.

Although women perform almost all farm activities - from weeding, transplanting and harvesting to processing and marketing, to full range of their contribution... has hardly been documented and recognized," said the Philippine Agriculture Undersecretary Mr Bruce Tolentino.

This is a huge blind spot. Women farmers often do more work than the man. They work not only in the fields but also run the household.

In Indonesia, for instance, a study showed that women farmers spend about 5.5 hours a day on domestic tasks, mostly food production, and seven hours on income-earning activities.

That is a total of more than 12 hours compared to the men who only work less than nine hours on the average.

The problem starts with farming statistics. Normally women farmers are not counted since they are not listed as the head of the family. Instead, they are considered "unpaid family workers," or supplementary earners to their husbands.

This pro-male bias in the information gathering stage starts the process that results in rural development benefiting largely male farmers.

The men are the ones interviewed by agricultural researchers, they get

special training and equipment to improve farming and productivity. They get the loans from the banks.

Female farmers on the other hand do not have the same degree access to training, credit and other facilities, as a result, they get left behind.

Mr Thelma Paria, a scientist at the Philippine-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), said that "women have been bypassed as target beneficiaries of technologies, extension activities and support services."

In one rare Philippine research project that benefited women, Paria discovered that women lost a lot of time harvesting rice.

Another case is a project in Rawa Gragi, a village in Sumatra, Indonesia which started in 1982 with Dutch aid. The project boosted the farmers productivity and incomes in the area, but the women were totally left out.

It was only two years ago that women were included in several training courses to improve their productivity, this phase of the project was a quick success.

This pro-women shift in the agricultural planning started only recently, partly because of the increased interest in women by western donor agencies, women farmers are now defined as a special target group by rural planners and researchers.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), which together with the United Nations development fund for women (UNIFEM) organised the conference, announced recently that it was increasing its aid projects for specific women projects coming year.

The overall lot of poor rural people can be improved only if women are also included in development plans, stated Mg Yuriko Uehara ADB's women project specialist.

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Dated : 1 AUG 1990

Public Policy Division
Voluntary Health Association of

THE REVOLUTION at the work-

place has brought about changes in our lives and has left nobody untouched. One particular & noticeable change has been the entry of women in almost all professions. They have also risen up & proved themselves to be as competent if not better than their male colleagues in various professions & have excelled in the entrepreneurial line as well.

This revolution in the workplace has however really not reached the homefront and hence is a stalled revolution. Very often what we hear and see are images & stories of successful business women and entrepreneurs, but do we see the other side of their lives? While men & women work through the first shift who really works on the 'second shift'? Do men and women both bear the brunt of the work at home or is it really the woman who works the extra month in a year? What should a man & woman contribute to the family? How does each develop a 'gender strategy' to cope with work, home, marriage & life itself?

An interesting study done by Arlie Hochschild, a Professor at Berkeley, on the 'Revolution at home', where she lived with working couples in America, reveals the most women without children spend much more time than men on housework; with children they devote more time both housework & childcare. Just as there is a 'wage gap' between men & women in the

workplace, there is a 'leisure gap' between them at home. Most women work one shift at the office or factory and a 'second shift' at home.

How different is it in India? Interviews with a cross-section of working women and mothers revealed several interesting facts.

One of the peculiar features of our Indian Society is the Joint-family concept. Though a rarity these days, in the yester years when joint families were common the woman had not only a second shift but a third shift as well, says a chief executive of a successful management consultancy firm. That is looking after her in-laws and pandering to their likes & dislikes.

But in the changing Scenario of today, where nuclear families are more common place who really works the second shift? Invariably it is the woman. It is the woman who cooks, cleans, minds the house, who feels worried when the 'bhai' does not turn up, who sees to all the mitty gritty details of managing a house and with children it is she who bathes them, feeds them, who notices that a button needs to be sewn on the child's dress and if the child is keeping well or not.

It is surprising that though women naturally take the role

Pratima V.K.
in Bombay

of caretaker there is no evidence to prove that they have been biologically prepared for organising the family's social life & home. But the role stereotypes are so ingrained in us that despite the changes in the world we are still comfortable and stuck in our traditional roles. Though the woman today probably works harder than men at her workplace, she still comes back and takes charge of her home.

This has its roots in what Arlie Hochschild says the "Gender Ideology or Strategy" that men & women adopt. A gender strategy is a plan of action through which a person tries to solve problems at hand, given the cultural notions of gender at play, to pursue a gender strategy, a man draws on beliefs about manhood and womanhood, beliefs that are forged in early childhood and thus anchored to deep emotions. The same is the case with women.

Arlie identifies three types of ideologies - Traditional, Egalitarian and Transitional. The purely traditional woman wants to identify with her activities at home, and wants less power than the man. The tradi-

tional man as well concurs with this view. On the other extreme, the "pure" egalitarian woman wants to identify with the same spheres her husband does and wants to have an equal amount of power in the marriage. Some women want the couple to be jointly oriented towards home, others to their careers, or both of them to jointly hold some balance between the two. In between the two extremes, is the transitional woman who wants to identify with her role at work as well as home but unlike the egalitarian, she believes that

VIEWPOINT

her husband should base his identity more on work than she does. The transitional man as well is all for his wife working but expects her to take the main responsibility at home too.

The most prevalent gender strategy in the urban working class today in India is the Transitional type. While most working men and women of the middle & upper middle class believe that they are egalitarian in their ideas, this is only the surface ideology. Deep down they are still traditional in their thinking.

Many women find it difficult to get out of their traditional roles, and as a result find it hard

to share the power that they enjoy at home with their husbands. This is partly because of the eternal conflict a woman goes through of being torn between the need to manage her home well and the need to show the boss that she is "serious". Many women are not able to achieve a sense of balance and end up feeling quite powerless. In this situation home provides them the security and feeling that they are in control. In some cases it is a matter of fastidiousness borne out of an inability to relinquish traditional roles and antiquated ideas that the house should be kept in a particular manner. There are haunting memories of one's mothers' home which was always spick & span & smelt of freshly ground spices & which was filled with little little things that were homemade. Says a young lady executive "sometimes it is this image that drives the woman to keeping her house in a tip-top condition". It is this that puts an extra load on the woman.

The influence of roles defined by society is also so great that a woman automatically feels more responsible towards her home and her husband reinforces it. But the transitional man has also had to change, to keep up with the times. When the man has worn blinkers and

refused to change, the result has been tension between the husband and wife. As much as the woman may like to manage the home, it is physically quite impossible for the woman to manage single handedly the home as well as her work.

In some cases where the man is averse to the idea of helping out at home and where money is not a constraint the man seeks substitutes for his contribution. The couple have more servants. In India, unlike in other countries, the availability of a domestic help is a boon to the working woman so the tension of having to get household chores done is greatly lessened. But even this situation is changing in the metros and domestic help is no longer easily available.

The speeded-up society of today has forced the transitional man to accommodate and adjust to some extent to the concept of helping out at home. The younger generation of today is also more tuned & open to chipping in with the household chores. But the question to ask is that is it really an equal division of work at home and if there is any, what kind of a division is it? Invariably it isn't an equal division, as the woman tends to take on the routine jobs of cooking, cleaning while the men help at home on odd jobs like repairing,

paying the bills etc. So here again this division gives the man freedom to do the jobs at his convenience while it gets the woman stuck in a routine.

With children being born there comes more responsibility. In most nuclear families today the mother, whether she likes it or not, is the primary parent. Though men do play around with the children, it is the woman's job to look after them, bathe them, feed them etc. The man's role in helping to bring up the child is largely influenced by the roles his parents played. A helping father reinforces the positive role that the man will play in bringing up his child and a traditional unhelping father reinforces his attitude that women should bring up the children. Today most women from all strata would like the father to play a more active role than he is doing right now.

Even in a society like Russia where the communist ideology stresses equality of sexes the woman bears the brunt of housework as well as the job of bringing up the children. To help women cope, the society has extended help in the form of crèches etc. But with the revolution already gaining ground in the workplace it won't be long before more change will be called for from the men in the Russian

an Society.

In the American society evidence is emerging that fathers who actively participate in raising their children will be steering both sons and daughters towards healthier gender roles. Kyle Pruett, a Psychiatrist at the Yale Child Study Centre has been researching for 8 long years on the effect of the father as a primary parent on the gender identity of the child. He observed boys enjoying their nurturing skills; they knew what to do with a baby and didn't see it as a girl's job but as a human's job. Pruett doesn't argue that fathers are better at mothering than mothers, simply that two involved parents are better than one and a lump!

Many women are content with the fact that their husbands help out on odd jobs at home or play with the children. The question that we should ask ourselves is that are we content with this superficial change? Do we still want to be the transitional ideologists or do we want to be egalitarian in the true sense of the term? Are we prepared to share the power both at home and at work? If we really want the revolution to reach our homes, should not the first step be ours for the men to follow? These are a few questions among many more which would have to be answered if we want this stalled revolution to reach its logical conclusion of a truly egalitarian society

Clipping
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Women workers

Women construction workers

Living under grim conditions

VH
Our Special Correspondent

Chandigarh, May 8 — The working conditions of women workers in building and construction industry were worse and the existing legislative protective provisions were not only completely ignored by the employers but also fell short of their basic needs, said a study conducted by the Labour Bureau.

Emphasising the need for legislative provisions, the study has noted that there was no provision for providing them maternity benefit, prevent them from working during night or lifting heavy loads which were the peculiar characteristics of the industry.

The study conducted in the four metropolis Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and covering government, semi-government and other public sector work sites, has said that the daily wages of most of the unskilled female construction workers in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta cities were much less than those fixed under the minimum wages Act. In some cases women workers' daily

wages were even less than half or 60 per cent of the minimum wages.

In Calcutta, the daily wages of unskilled female workers varied between Rs 13 and Rs 16 as against Rs 18 and 20 for the corresponding male workers. In Delhi, however, the unskilled male and female workers were being paid wages unfirmly at the rates fixed by the Delhi administration.

A majority of the employers in Bombay and Madras were found to be violating the provisions of the equal remuneration Act. In Madras,

no employer was making payment for the weekly off days to the workers.

Provision of handgloves, uniforms or other safety devices were just unheard of, the maternity Act was simply not applicable and the prescribed labour records were not being maintained by most of the employers.

Ironically, not only almost all the women construction workers were found illiterate, but also as many as 68 of the total 79 children of the women workers in Delhi and 39 of the total 45 children in Bombay, the team met, were not attending schools. The situation was far better in Madras where two-third of the children were attending schools.

The study has noted that no male or female worker was reported to be a member of any trade union. There was a lack of consciousness among the women construction workers as almost all of them were not even aware of the beneficial provisions contained in the important labour acts, like the minimum wages or the equal remuneration acts etc.

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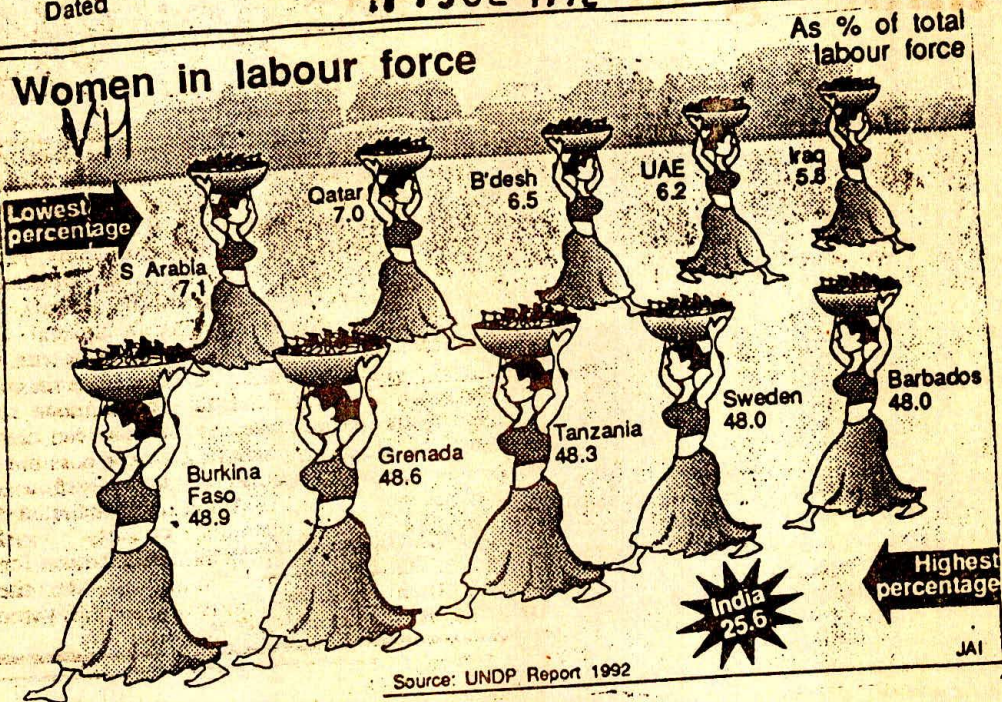
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Women workers

Women in labour force



Public Policy Division
Voluntary Health Association of India

WORKING WOMEN

More facilities required

By Neelam Agrawal

EVERYONE wants women to work. Parents want the daughter to take up some job because it brings down the dowry bill. A groom wants a working bride to be able to pull through the economic hardships of life which have come to stay. But no one seems to bother about the woes of the working woman. She gets only bitter comments from her men colleagues (sometimes extra sweet which is worse). They attack women; they lampoon them; they lambast them. "She is always lost in the Max Factor culture, always insists on everything being spick and span around, a dazzling bright table, a sparkling clean chair, all that would go with the shine of her sari". Such are the "compliments" men pay their women colleagues. But what is wrong with insisting on cleanliness around?

A woman arrives at her office late (are men always on time?) — she has to pack her husband off to office and the child to school. She leaves for home in a hurry and often before time — the child is waiting for the mother. She asks for leave more often, sometime the husband is ailing, sometime the child, and at times she herself (one hopes they do not resent her proceeding on maternity leave).

Maybe a woman does come late sometime, and even leaves before time. But once she is in, she is never out. She is never seen at the roadside TV shop when a cricket match is on, never seen in a nearby coffee house. She works with greater zeal, devotion and honesty. She handles visitors gently, yet firmly. She is never discourteous, never rude. Cases of corruption have been rarely reported against women employees. Why should then men lambast their women colleagues?

That, however, is only the bearable part of the story. Now look at the unbearable. Not long ago a top Maharashtra politician, while on board a plane, made ugly overtures towards an air hostess. A former Union Minister misbehaved with the women staff of the Jaipathi Telephone Exchange

in Delhi. A Madhya Pradesh legislator outraged the modesty of a woman employee.

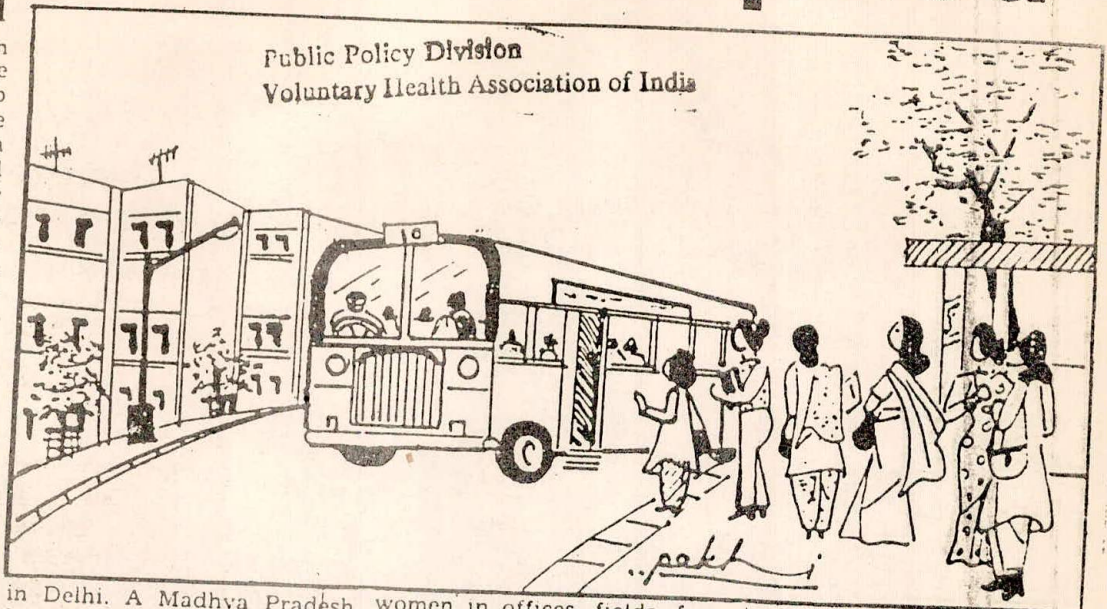
A top police officer of Punjab misbehaved with a woman IAS officer at a party hosted by a top bureaucrat.

Sexual harassment of women at work reached the abyss when on May 18, 1989, the vice principal of a Bombay college, allegedly outraged the modesty of his junior colleague, a young girl from a lower middle class family. And the nadir was reached when the principal advised her not to press her complaint lest the offending senior should spoil her confidential report. He even laughingly asked her to forget the incident as "kissing is not a serious offence". And this is the attitude of teachers, the ones who are expected to lead mankind from "darkness to light".

Much noise has been made about plans for women and much more. In his Independence Day message, a former Prime Minister, Mr V.P. Singh, promised legislation to reserve 30 per cent seats in panchayats for women. But the fact is that all this is hollow talk, a vote-catching device that has been in use for years. Nothing has been done even when Article 15 of the Constitution arms the Government with the power to have special legislation for women and children.

Coming down from the high schemes, the government could do a few small things for the

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women in offices, fields, factories, hospitals and elsewhere. A small beginning can be made by providing an adequate number of ladies common rooms in offices where women employees can sit together, eat together and talk on matters of common interest. Government-run creches near a cluster of offices and industrial units may be started to provide the working women's children with the needed care at a reasonable cost.

Local transport (in big cities) is yet another area which cries for attention. Buses are overcrowded. It is a horrible scene

how women enter the buses. And even if they manage to get in, their plight in the midst of the crowd is beyond description. Many miss the right bus and get late, and invite uncharitable taunts from their men colleagues. Special buses should be run for women employees from convenient points or adequate number of seats should be reserved for them where it is not possible to ply buses exclusively for them.

Above all, a stringent code of conduct with exemplary punishment for those who try to violate the honour and dignity of women is the need of the time.



"She love me. She wants a career. She loves me. She wants a career...."

Prakash CPAN

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(City Edition)

WORKING WOMEN

Dual Role

It's still family before job

FOR marketeers targeting their products at the 'discerning' Indian woman, the dependable stereotype has been that of a self-indulgent, financially independent, hard-headed careerist—someone who can easily afford to splurge on gizmos and goods, prefers to live in self-contained nuclear families and takes all her own financial decisions.

The almost mythical stereotype, a recent survey reveals, is all wish-fulfilling, advertising crock. Reality makes nonsense of this long-standing myth. A major survey conducted in the four metros of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras shows that, in sharp contrast to their more adaptable western counterparts, Indian working women are going through a complex act of trying to balance their traditional roles at home with the demands of their more 'modernised' workplaces.

This unusual—and for marketeers rather discomfiting—picture emerges from a syndicated study of attitudes based on group discussions conducted by Pathfinders, a market research organisation. The discussions comprised of both married and unmarried women ranging from the ages of 20 to 45 and from clerks to executives. The levelling factor was that all of them took home pay-packets of Rs 1,500 or above per month.

Says S. Sthanunathan, the Delhi branch manager of Pathfinders: "The response was enthusiastic. They opened out a lot during the discussions." What came through was a revelation of sorts: most working women attached precedence to family over their jobs, and preferred to live in joint families where their children would be looked after. And they still consider investment decisions an exclusively male preserve, despite their own pay-packets.

Although the number of working women is increasing every day—in

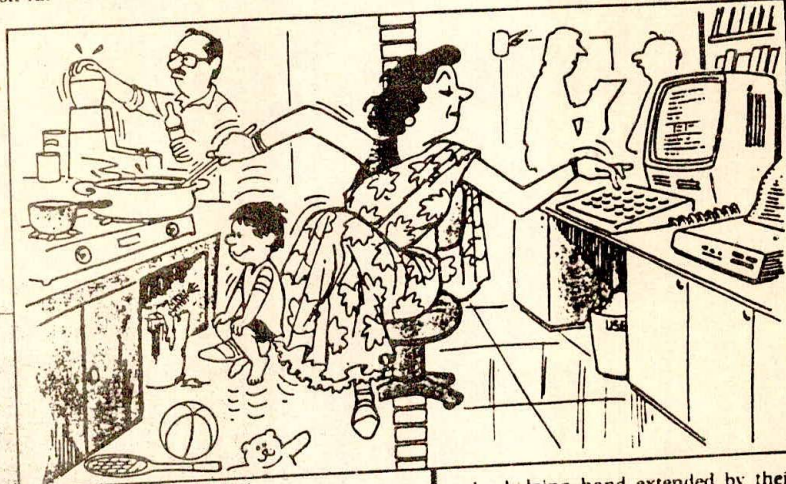
metros and mini-metros, nearly 12.4 per cent of households with incomes of Rs 1,500 per month and over have housewives who are employed—demographic data is conspicuous by its sketchiness. Says Preet Bedi, general manager of Lintas, an advertising group: "Previously, no one was ready to use working women as an advertising strategy. But today they are increasingly becoming a role model for the entire population of women. We have to know more about them." This attitude reflects the growing perception of many marketeers that this segment could well be a major target audience for many products.

The detailed qualitative analysis reveals three identifiable types of

sisters and are more aware of their social responsibilities. At least half of those interviewed had married late, between the ages of 21 and 24; as many as 34 per cent had their first child between 24 and 28; 98 per cent can read English; and slightly less than 50 per cent are graduates.

Few of them, however, are willing to gird up and leave traditional roles to surrogates, notwithstanding how efficient they may be. So ready-to-cook foods, which are perceived as compromising their traditional role, are out and jobs with flexible timings are in.

Time is undoubtedly at a premium. So shopping is done in marts halfway between home and office, and weekends are reserved for housework. And



Amazingly the survey shows working women would prefer to live in joint families so the children are taken care of.

the Indian working women:

- The "casual workers", often unmarried and generally in the clerk or receptionist grade, who are biding their time till marriage and motherhood take their toll;
- The "just-a-job" women—incidentally the largest category—who are likely to work all their lives, are not ambitious and who work to escape domestic drudgery; and
- The "career women", who derive their fulfillment from work and from little else.

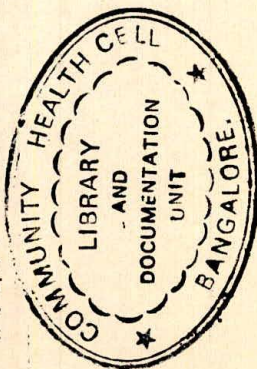
Yet there is a common trait which is shared by working women: they are more educated than their home-bound

the helping hand extended by their husbands is readily accepted. Although the male in the family is still the official big-budget spendthrift, the working woman is beginning to participate. And new-found financial independence gives them a lot of leeway. A separate income encourages them to indulge their family and friends.

Fashion came out with a negative, being regarded as frivolous. The stress was on elegance and dignity, with comfortable attire, like cotton saris, taking precedence. Cosmetics are used only by the younger generation, and that too in moderation. What is important is the latitude and confidence to mix freely with men, come home late and expound "new ideas".

The study confirms that the working women of today have a wider perspective and a greater sense of self esteem. So advertisers had better take notice. As the marketing legend goes: "You've come a long way, baby."

—SURAJIT DAS GUPTA



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Wanted: Better facilities for working mothers

Public Policy Division

Voluntary Health Association of India



The time has come for women's groups to shed their exclusivity and work out new methods to help ordinary working women cope with the myriad problems that plague them, says Manini Chatterjee

The Union finance minister, Dr Manmohan Singh's bonus to working women by giving them an extra Rs 3,000 relief on standard deduction from income tax payments may not have been universally welcomed by women (some of whom see it as a sop that takes away from the equality of sexes) but it is a significant gesture in itself.

For the first time perhaps, the working woman is seen as an entity by herself — a far cry from the pet image of the Indian woman as mother, wife, nurturer, housekeeper. Though women all along, at home and in the field, have done the bulk of the work, the 'working woman' refers to one who works outside the home for a wage/salary.

In the fast changing social and family circumstances of today, the working woman faces some unique problems which neither the govern-

ment/employers nor the women's movement has thought of addressing. The most pressing problem for most working women is the lack of institutional or social child care facilities for the children of working couples.

Unfortunately, the mushrooming women's action groups have so far not considered this an important issue. While child care must not be seen as a 'women's issue' but as an issue affecting all working people, the beginning has to be made by women's groups who can, in due course, exert pressure on labour unions and employers.

In the capital alone, there are a number of groups who work towards 'raising the consciousness' of women regarding their rights and organise them to fight against dowry, amniocentesis, neglect of the girl child etc. They also work at promoting women's literacy, crafts and art on the arguable assumption that there is a 'feminist' or 'feminine' perspective which has been oppressed by the mainstream male perspective.

Undoubtedly, a great deal of sincere work has been done by these groups in giving women the confidence to deal with a difficult world, but often enough, the women's movement has tended to ignore the basic problems of everyday existence. Organising charnas outside the home of a dowry victim or taking up the legal battle on behalf of a battered wife may have its uses, but it ignores the thousands of women

whose battles are of a less dramatic nature — women who have to or want to work outside the home but are bogged down by the multiple responsibilities of mother and housewife; women who are forced to or want to accept 'dowry' as a means of security in marriage; women who are influenced by the advertising blitzkrieg that promote the consumerist good life.

Women's emancipation may occasionally be brought about by the consciousness-raising efforts of their well-meaning 'sisters' but no real freedom of a non-metaphysical nature can come without economic independence. And it is here that the women's movement needs to provide the infrastructural and ideological support to enable more and more women to take up jobs or income-generating activity.

A woman with an independent means of income cannot be quite as much abused by the husband or in-laws and in the final life tough, she at least has the option of leaving. As more and more women work these days, the need for this infrastructural support also becomes greater. Joint families are already becoming an institution of the past in urban India and the 'ayaths' of yore are also passing into history.

Increasingly, working couples are being faced with the acute problem of child care — that when the children are too small to be sent to school and later in their after school

hours. Middle class women can still afford hired help when they manage to get reliable help at all but working class women have no such luxury and it is the daughters who have to drop out of school to look after younger siblings.

Unfortunately, the radical women's groups have been so taken up with fighting the 'patriarchal' system, that little attention has been paid in using their resources to set up crèches and day care centres. It is perhaps significant that the only women's organisation to set up a crèche in Delhi is the Union of Indian Women, which began as an 'sisterhood' group

and does not suffer from the exclusivist approach to the women's question. Besides running their own crèches, women's groups could play a crucial role in raising the consciousness of the government, employers and trade unions in providing day care facilities for the children of their employ at all but since we live in times far from idealistic, practical ways of alleviating the problem must be worked out.

In order to focus on these issues, the women's movement must be able to shed some of its idealisations and work out new methods and plans which will

help ordinary women cope better with the myriad little miseries that confront them. A militant exclusivist anti-male attitude is gradually being shed but there is still a long way towards everyday problems of ordinary women.

Many working women, outside the pale of the movement, have come to realise that the cooperation of male colleagues at work and of male relatives at home are a key to survival and contentment. It would be in the interest of women if the women's movement also viewed this fact with sympathy and helped the working woman in her multiple battles.

Rudhni Sharma

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its and reseat- blame for the i about leaving hind, mostly in es or creches. out with a find- s that children' reches' are per- ven before the ers can leave a mp her with evi- onary. On the ng infants in cre- agree even more e find that bab- than 20 hours a

week in creches generally run the risk of having an 'insecure attachment' to their mothers. They also point out that such babies are more likely to develop into uncooperative and aggressive children during their school years. But says US psychologist Carollee Howes, "We find that the quality of care makes much more difference than the age at which the child is enrolled." What most researchers do agree on is that during the first few months, babies appear to do best when tended to by one person, preferably a parent.

All the above presumes that there is a satisfactory day-care system, which allows women the freedom to work outside their homes. But the truth is far from it. Not only are qualified personnel scarce, they also come expensive, putting them automatically beyond the reach of the normal middle-class woman. The same goes for creches. Only government employees are better off, as several central government office complexes have well maintained, professional creches on their premises. Run mostly by the personnel of the Griha Kalyan Mantralaya, these creches have women who receive rudimentary training in childcare. The premises are large with facilities like toys, tricycles and individual cots for children. These creches cater to children in the age group of 3 months to 5 years. Says Shobha Mathur, supervisor in the creche at Shastri Bhavan, "When children come to us very young, they get adjusted to the environment of the creche faster. Moreover, at our creches, the caretaker-children ratio is very good. This helps us give better attention to the children." Mothers are happy with such creches too, since it enables them to go across to see their children several times during the day.

But these are the fortunate few. For the rest, it is mostly privately run creches and even neighbourhood women, who mind children for a fee. Many of these places are crowded, with no arrangements for playing or sleeping. The creche owners enforce strict discipline which gives the children scarce freedom. Often, when it is a school-going child he feels restricted throughout the day. There are even instances of caretakers mistreating the children. One mother says she found her two-year-old son in his soiled knickers, because he had been afraid of telling the lady running the creche to clean him. Apparently, she had rebuked him on

earlier occasions to 'do' it in his house before he came to the creche. This may be an extreme case, but such incidents are not uncommon.

So, is it really harmful for children to be left in creches? How important is a mother's constant care for the development of a child? And finally, is the guilt necessary?

Answers to these questions are not easy. But psychologists opine that a positive attitude on the part of parents, especially the mother, goes a long way in minimising the harmful effects of surrogate day-care. Says Dr Ira Saxena, child psychologist and writer for children, "I disagree with the theory that a mother should constantly remain with the child for proper development. What certainly matters through, is that she avoid any feeling of guilt and take a positive view of the whole issue. Children are most sensitive to the moods of the mother and often, sensing the guilt in her, make absurd demands

FEATURE

What is best for your child is an endless debate as Thangamand discovers.

DAY CARE DILEMMA

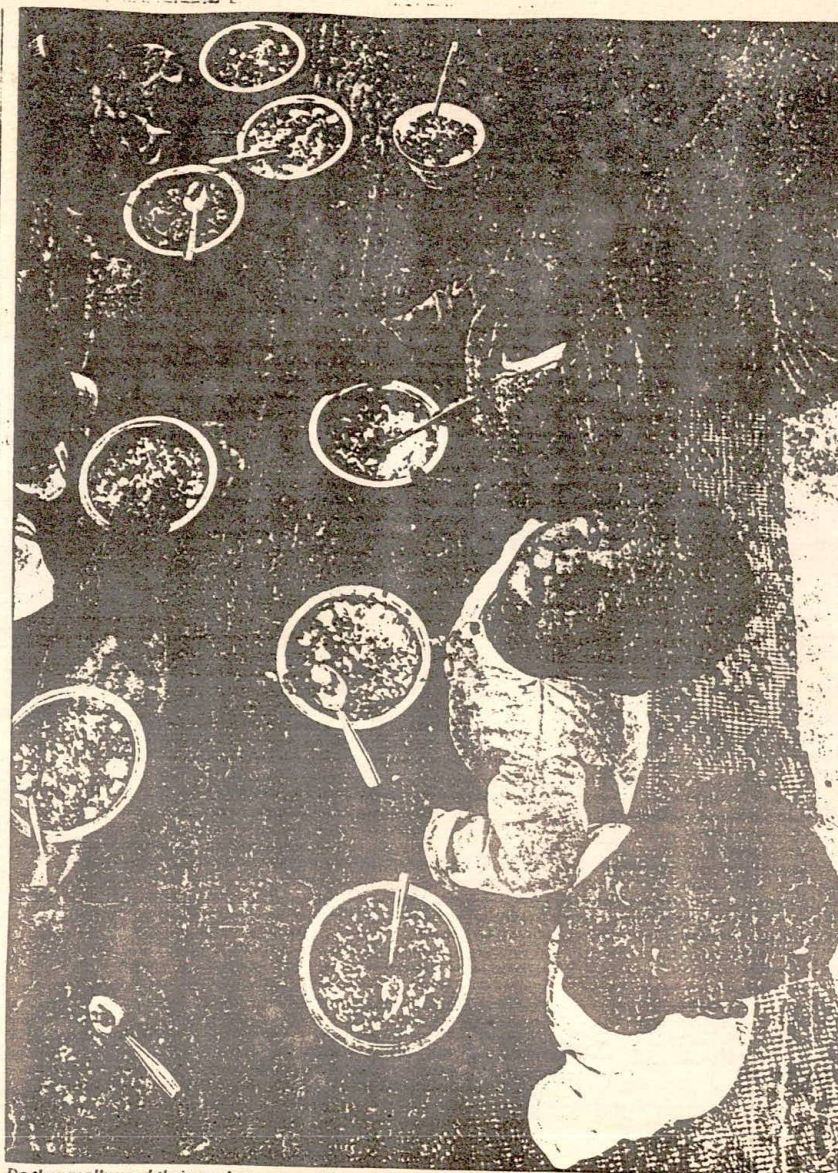
knowing well that they would be met. This will only prove harmful in the long run."

Should one then assume that day-care is fine with babies? According to Dr Vinay Khatri, child psychiatrist and counselor, this is not true either, as children do need a lot of nurturing. While it is true that a stay-at-home mother has all the time in the world at her disposal and can devote more time to the child, it depends to a large extent on her attitude and the child himself. "A working mother generally is more fulfilled and contented and hence, she has a richer experience to share with her child, it also stands to reason that a happy mother makes her child happy." Conversely, a woman who feels frustrated or even worthless for being socially unproductive may transmit these negative feelings to the child and may even unconsciously blame the child for her plight. "If only I were free to do what I want," is a constant refrain with such women. This explains why children of some stay-at-home mothers are maladjusted and

have more psychological problems than those of working mothers, who have a balanced view of things.

The quality of time spent with the child is more important than the quantity, though for very small babies, where touch stimulation matters a lot, this may not be very true, say doctors. But even here, a responsive babysitter can be a good surrogate. Unfortunately, our creche owners do not think so and restrict cuddling and touching to the minimum.

According to Dr Saxena, a mother should spend some time with the child immediately after returning from work, simply holding or talking to the child. If this is a shared experience with both the parents present, it becomes even more rewarding. She cites the example of *advait* children both of, whose parents go to work. In a study conducted on a particular tribe, it was found that the parents sat down with the children, holding them close in the evenings every day. This



Do they really need their mothers so much?

ensured that the children felt well cared for and there was practically no maladjustment among them.

One often finds mothers using the threat of a creche when a child acts difficult. This is a very dangerous thing, since small children have a fear of abandonment and the threat may prove

counter-productive with the child refusing to go to a creche in the future. Explains Dr Khatri, "Some children have the fear of their mothers going away, never to return or even die. To prevent this feeling of abandonment, a mother would take her toddler to her workplace to show him what she does there when

she leaves him, and let him have a look at the place. This reassures the child and makes him understand her job is equally important."

So much for children left in creches. What about those who are slightly older and stay by themselves at home?

Is staying alone for prolonged

periods to boys. There is no same reservation. children, a tors. But the lonely is natural. Why adults have alone for length. "On an average about three to hours alone with adult supervision. okay for not children, which what it would amount to, during school days. During holidays, it would be wise to get the child enrolled in some group activity or community projects. This will ensure that he or she is not drawn into undesirable company or habits," says Dr Khatri. By and large, as children grow older, they show more tolerance towards the working mother, even feeling proud of her.

A certain amount of freedom is very important for a child's self-esteem and confidence, avers Dr Saxena. "For those few hours the child feels that he or she is in charge of the house and this gives their ego a big boost. Moreover, everyone needs space to grow, more so children. It fosters creativity too," she says. She however cautions parents about the transition years of 12-13, when a lot of emotional and physical changes take place in the child. This period calls for better understanding between the parents and children to prevent any maladjustment.

Dr Saxena has the last word when she says, "I see the trend of working women in a very positive way.

Children are extremely adaptable and resilient. It would be much better all round if mothers take an equally positive view of their jobs and concentrate on giving their children as much of their time as they can spare. And I am sure we will succeed in building up healthy and responsible adults."

PHIL'S GRIHA FOTOLOCK

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Women
(Workers)
(City Edition)

by Usha Rai

THE MUCH awaited census report on women's participation in work is finally out. It's not exciting enough for women to cry themselves hoarse. But the 1991 census does show that 23 per cent of the women in the country are working as against 19.6 per cent in 1981. It has also come out with the startling revelation that Kerala has one of the lowest employment rates for women in the country. Just 17 per cent of the women in the model state of the country are economically employed.

In actual terms, the number of working women in the country - including those doing unpaid work - has gone up by 42 per cent in the decade. But there is little cause for elation, for statistics still do not reflect the true picture of the large number of women working in this country.

Mr A R Nanda, the registrar-general of India who worked closely with the Department of Women and Child Development, UNIFEM (United Nations Organisation for Women) and the SNDT University of Bombay to get a realistic estimate of the number of working women in the country says the percentage of working women would be considerably more.

Despite the special training given to enumerators to ask probing questions and the film spots with lyrics by Gulzar on "en do hathon ko

aadar do," (respect these hands), Mr Nanda says there were several cultural factors that stopped women from openly admitting that they worked, particularly in Haryana and Punjab. It was difficult for women and even the men to accept that the work they were doing in fields and in their homes were economically productive.

In Haryana, Mr Nanda entered a home where the woman of the house and her daughter were milking and looking after 10 cows. They were obviously selling the milk for a monetary return but told the enumerators that the milk sufficed for the needs of the family. The husband, a transporter, was out of work but the women insisted that he was the real bread-winner of the family. Similarly the work done by women in the fields is just not perceived as being economically remunerative work, especially if the women are working in their own fields.

There was even a former chief justice who when asked about his wife's work dismissed it as "house work." A little later the 'housewife' arrived with tea and gave a list of the things she did which included two jobs that brought her monetary returns.

□ Women are half the world's population.

□ They work two-third of the hours worked in the world, but only a third is registered as work.

□ For all this women earn a tenth of the world's income and are registered as owners of a tenth of the world's property.

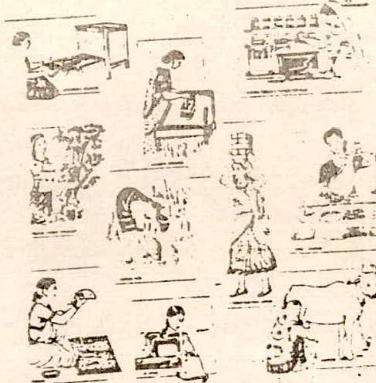
(Poster outside UNIFEM office)



1991 census on working women

Most literate state gives least jobs to women

THINK....



can you still say that she doesn't work?

The census has also revealed that while the women of Kerala are way ahead of women in the rest of the country in literacy, in limiting the size of the family and development per se, when it comes to gainful economic employment just 17 per cent of the women work. This is despite Kerala producing the largest number of nurses in the country.

Full marks to the north-eastern states of India which have highest employment rates for women. Sikkim heads the list with 53 per cent of the women economically employed. The percentage of working women in the other states of the region is Mizoram - 44 %, Arunachal Pradesh - 40 %, Nagaland - 39 %, and Manipur - 37.5 %.

Other states with a respectable number of women earning a livelihood are Andhra Pradesh - 35 %, Himachal and Madhya Pradesh - 33 % each, Tamil Nadu - 31 %, Karnataka - 29 %, Gujarat and Rajasthan - 27 % each. Way down in the employment ladder for women is Punjab, where just 6.8 % of the women are perceived to be gainfully employed. Haryana is a little better with 11.3 per cent.

One would have thought that West Bengal, with its Left philosophy of

equality and work-consciousness, would present a better picture of women at work. But alas in West Bengal the percentage of women working is the same as in Haryana. The backward states of UP and Bihar have more women working than in West Bengal.

The female work participation rate is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. It is estimated that over 27 % of the women in the rural areas work as against 10 % in urban areas. In rural areas the largest number of women work in the agricultural sector, followed by household industries - weaving, handicrafts, tailoring - forestry (collecting and carrying wood and minor forest produce) and sale of fish. There are not many women engaged in their own enterprise of manufacturing a commodity or running a shop.

In urban areas the largest number of women are employed in the construction industry, followed by those in government service as nurses and teachers.

Women are largely employed in low paying jobs and in manual labour.

Mr Nanda says despite their economic status, women don't have

decision making powers, except in Kerala and the North-east, where there are matriarchal societies and women have inheritance rights.

Though the percentage of men working in the country has fallen by one degree since 1981, over half the male population (51.6 %) is economically independent.

The 1991 census also tries to find out the number of male and female headed households. In the 1981 census just 10 per cent of the households were headed by women though in some areas like the North-east 30 to 35 % were headed by women. The 1991 figures of female-headed households has not yet been tabulated but women's organisations believe that at least a third of households today are headed by women. These statistics would be useful in studying the migration patterns in the country.

With all this vital data on women, the women's department can now hope to get a better profile of women in India. With the data available, UNIFEM with the help of a well-known demographer, Ms Mercedes Concepcion, and Ms Kathleen Cloud, an American expert from WISTAT (Women's Indicators and Statistics), has already run a course for those in government and outside on how to use the data to promote women's development.

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women workers

Fiasco over second maternity leave

The Times of India News Service

ALLAHABAD, July 4:

Justice Sudhir Narain of Allahabad High Court has issued an interim mandamus directing the state of Uttar Pradesh to provisionally grant a second maternity leave to Mrs Suman Srivastava, assistant teacher, for a period of three months with effect from July 1.

The petitioner was in the advanced stage of her first pregnancy at the time of joining as an assistant teacher in LT grade on 22.10.1990 and was granted maternity leave from 12.11.1990 upto 9.2.1991 according to rules. But the petitioner became pregnant again soon after and applied for a second maternity leave from July 1, 1992, which was refused by the head mistress.

The provision for maternity leave for female employees working under the state government are contained in the UP financial hand book in rule 153, which has been amended by the UP (subsidiary amendment rule 1983).

PROVISIONS: By the first proviso it is prescribed that maternity leave would not be granted for more than three

times during the entire service, including temporary service.

The second proviso provides that no maternity leave would be admissible until a period of atleast two years has elapsed from the date of expiry of the last maternity leave granted.

The provision with respect of maternity leave enforced by the Central government is identical except for the fact that the second proviso is not there.

ARBITRARY: The counsel for the petitioner argued that the second proviso is arbitrary, unjust and unreasonable and it disproportionately and excessively infringes the petitioner's fundamental right to liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

It was argued that since the second proviso is also applicable to the cases of miscarriage including abortion, it has absolutely no concern with the policy of family planning comprising in restricting the family to two or not more than three or the policy of spacing childbirth.

IMPERFECT FP: It was argued that the total scientific development available in India with respect to family planning

(FP), is imperfect, and therefore the second proviso has punitive effect on account of reason, which in a large number of circumstances are beyond the control of the employees concerned.

In spite of scientific methods to prevent pregnancy, the petitioner conceived and had only two options. Either to have the child or terminate the pregnancy. Even if she resorted to the latter, rule 153 second proviso would deny her the right to avail of maternity leave close on the heels of the first, and she

therefore decided to have the child.

LATE MARRIAGES: It was also argued that in a very large number of cases, as in the case of the petitioner, there are late marriages and for this reason also the question of spacing between child births cannot be converted into an absolute value. It is generally advised in such cases by sociologists and doctors that the normal spacing of two years should be relaxed so that the child becomes a major in time and settles in life before the retirement of the employees.

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Working women's need: part-time jobs or day-care centres?

By G. V. Joshi

THE Government of Maharashtra has put up a proposal for part-time employment for its women employees. Part-time work means division of jobs of full-time workers. One full-time job will create two part-time jobs. This will increase the number of women workers, enabling working women to contribute to household expenses to some extent and at the same time, they may find more time to spend with their children.

Apart from the government's difficulties in splitting the jobs and distribution of responsibilities, there are many aspects of this proposal, which will create new problems for women employees. Splitting of some jobs like teachers, railways booking clerks, bank assistants, stenographers working in pools is very easy and can be done in all cases where the present employees are willing to take up part-time or half-time jobs. But at higher echelons where women take part in policy making and its execution, splitting is not so easy.

One part of the proposal will allow them to work part time for two to three years after the birth of a child and suitable adjustments will be made in pension and gratuity. This is favoured by a majority of women as these are very difficult years. Quality child care at the infant stage is hard to find. Care and attendance in sickness, breast-feeding and maternal attention at such a tender age make the presence of a mother at home an asset. A mother can never be replaced, by any one, including the father, in the first two years.

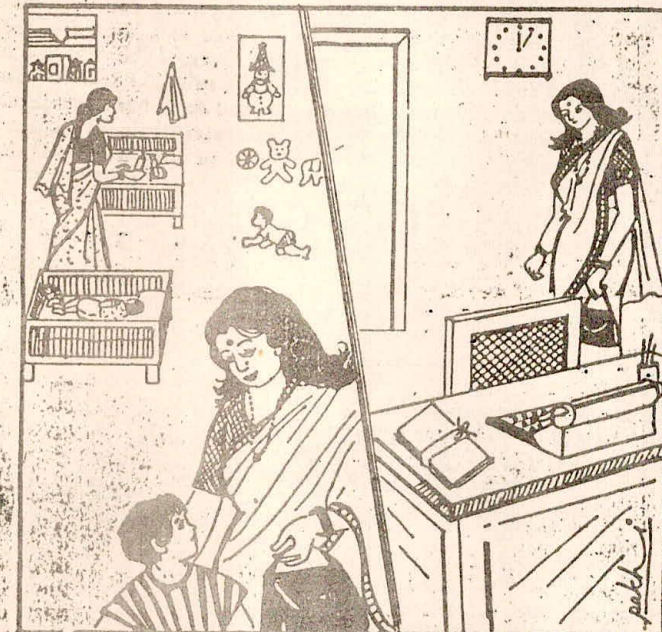
Penelope Leach, author of "Your Baby and Child", a most influential child-rearing handbook, says, "Babies need individual care for at least the first two years". She is totally opposed to the trend of young mothers who go to work immediately after delivery leaving their infants in day-care centres. Burton White, the author of "A Parents Guide to the First Three Years" says, "After more than 30 years of research on how children develop well, I would not think of putting an infant or toddler of my own into any substitute care programme on a full-time basis. Unless you have very strong reasons, I urge you not to delegate the primary child-rearing task to any one else during the child's first three years of life. Babies form the first human attachment once and only

once".

Are there any alternatives which employers can take up so that the problem is solved to some extent? One way of assuring full-time jobs to women is to arrange for creches and day-care centres for infants and toddlers up to the age of five in offices and factories. Employer-sponsored child-care programmes are gaining popularity in many countries. Many women now prefer to work for employers who offer on-site day-care centres.

Some companies offer day-care services free, while in other cases employees pay for them, nominally and some assistance comes from municipal committees. A few companies have formed day-care cooperatives to reduce the high

cost of doing it alone. Such centres accept children from infancy through kindergarten (KG) years. Such centres should be organised by the Government and private industrialists so that infants to KG children can be looked after by trained hands.



Employers can also take recourse to a wide range of less expensive measures. Nursing breaks for new mothers wherever it is practicable, liberal leave in weather emergencies, sick leave to care for ill children, are a few of them.

It is also not necessary that these centres should be in the work centres of mothers only. Fathers should also be taught the ABCs of child care from the infant stage. Day-care centres at the sites of parent's work place are favoured among various child-care programmes.

because they encourage more interaction between parents and children during the day. Knowing that you can get to your child in an emergency within minutes, and you can see them if and when you want during the day relieves a lot of tension and anxiety. The children also seem to like it that way. Many parents spend a part of their lunch hour with their children. They just want to make sure that they are fine and adjusting.

On-site child-care centres can be a powerful tool in recruiting employees. Many employers say that offering on-site child-care services leads to less absenteeism and better productivity, improved employee morale and enhanced employer image. There is less anxiety among parents where children are in one-site child-care centres. Retired couples can help a lot. They can look after two to three infants in their homes as a social service as well as a means of adding to their incomes. This will reduce their loneliness and resulting boredom. These experienced parents of yesterday can substitute for the real grandparents and can shower their love and affection on the children, if not in the best manner at least better than servants can.

But finding a good day-care centre is not the end of all problems. It is just a beginning of the problems that parents may face in the years to come. In 1987, a child psychologist, Jay Belesky, expressed concern over accumulating evidence that contradicted his earlier view that day-care did not

adversely affect child development or give cause for alarm.

He found that infants brought up in day-care centres were likely to develop insecure attachments to their parents. They showed more serious aggression, less cooperation, less tolerance, more misbehaviour and at times social withdrawal. It was found that many infants interpret daily separation for 10-12 hours from the working mothers as rejection, with which they cope by withdrawal. One-year-olds in full-time day-care displayed greater avoidance of their mothers than did parent-reared infants. Five to eight-year-olds who had spent most of their first two years at a day-care centre were more likely to hit, kick, threaten and argue than those not in day care or who started late.

Another psychologist examined 110 one-year-olds from affluent families. Half of them were cared for full time by the mother. The other half had stable but hired caretakers. Substitute-cared infants turned out to have significantly less secure relationship with their mothers. The findings were confirmed by another study of middle-class children. It was found that one-year-olds in full-time day-care centres displayed greater avoidance of their mothers than did parent-reared infants.

According to another child psychologist, regular absences by mothers can be very damaging for children under three. Only after the age of three up to six, they profit from a half-day in a high-quality day-care centre. She further adds, "There is a consensus among pre-school children that the benefits of a good pre-school programme diminish or are even eroded when the hours in a day-care centre go beyond six hours."

According to psychologists, a paid relationship can never substitute for the natural parent-child bond without seriously harming children today and society when they grow up.

Therefore, there is no clear-cut single master key type solution to the problems of day care. Working parents are a reality in the present days of rising prices. The problems are too many and difficult to resolve. However, part-time jobs is a good beginning in the right direction and employers and society can also help working women by looking after their children in their infancy. - (ANF)

Victory for women-power ★ Only empowered sathins fight Govt and win

by Vasa Rai

Patasi Bai, Geeta Bai, Jhuma Bai, Nausar Bai, Nandou Bai and Kiran Dubey (the *prachetas*), were sacked. Confident and articulate after years of work as *sathins*, the women went to court. They did not require the support of any women's organisation. They also continued to work in the village though were not getting paid for their services. The case of the *prachetas*, is still on in the High Court.

The manner in which the women ran off to Calcutt without getting government approval could be termed a case of indiscipline. But dismissal was indeed unjust retribution for women who had not only preached emancipation and empowerment but had actually practised it. Arguing against their arbitrary dismissal, the women pointed out that their services could be terminated only when the women of the village lost confidence in them.

In Delhi, the dismissal was discussed by Shakti, the Joint Women's Programme, Action India, the Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat Sangam, Sabla Sangh and Shakti Shalini. The organisations decided to critically review the efforts of women to reach out to women through government-run development programmes and assess their impact on the women's movement. To this effect a team was despatched off to Jaipur and Ajmer.

The team's 30-page report declares that "the ability for reaching out to large numbers of rural women from deprived sections of the population was the most positive outcome of the programme. However, the very process of



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empowerment has raised its own nemesis of conflicts and contradiction." The 14 women who make up the team feel that the programme which began on a positive note worked well for two or three years. But thereafter the government began using the network for pushing its own programmes. *Sathins* were asked to fulfill family planning targets and failure to do so meant dismissal.

The Rajasthan programme, started in 1984, stems from the premise that for too long men have been entrusted the responsibility for women's development - in the family, government and society - and that a decisive shift is necessary in order to entrust these responsibilities to women at all levels. A village

level worker called a *sathin* is selected and trained for her responsibilities which include the formation of women's forums at the village level. The work of a cluster of 10 *Gram Panchayats* (totally having 10 *sathins*) is coordinated by a *pracheta*.

The work done by the *sathins* has become legendary - organizing empowerment of poor and backward women to ensure installation of

hand-pumps in Harijan and Gujjar settlements; protecting village grazing land from encroachment by upper castes; detecting false entries in registers showing sale of sugar to women and starting a dialogue with corrupt primary health centre doctors who would only attend to patients for a fee.

When the names of 11 women were removed from the list of

famine workers because they would not undergo sterilisation, the *sathin* of Kalesara village intervened and with the help of the government the women were given work.

The report is however critical of the manner in which the *sathins* and *prachetas* were pressured to bring family planning cases so that targets could be met. The women were coerced into supporting the government despite the "excesses" being committed under the family planning programme. Persons were forcibly sterilised for the second and third time; loans to dig wells, build houses, buy cattle were given only to a sterilised person, because of the unsafe and unhygienic conditions of operations, there were complications and even death on operating tables. Women were publicly humiliated and asked to show the scars of their operation.

Then let our strength fuse with that of our million sisters and surge to the moment of change

Moving always towards another time another place of our own making

Let our newly blossoming anger assault unrelenting the injustice that women and every oppressed class live daily

— Esther Ramani

In March last year the *sathins* in Ajmer district had to take an oath in front of the collector of Ajmer to make the population control programme a success. Their salary was stopped for two months because they could not achieve the targets given to them. What has antagonised the women's groups is not the involvement of *sathins* in the family planning programme but the manner in which they were coerced, used and humiliated.

The report also lays the "unstable" honourarium of Rs 200 a month given to the *sathins* who form the backbone of the village level programme. How can a programme that has as its prime objective, empowerment of poor and backward women, under-value, underpay

the necessary for women to accept the government's population control programmes and other schemes. But the programmes do not tolerate women trying to control every aspect of their lives, including control of their fertility and quality.

The woman's ill-paid, insecure work

RISHNA PARIDA

The number of women working in the unorganised sectors has increased steadily over the years. And yet they remain by and large scattered and isolated. Because of inadequate employment opportunities and resource mobilisation programmes, they are forced to go for unskilled and ill-paid jobs.

To improve the status of unskilled women, laws have been amended, policies formulated, programmes chalked out and funds allocated, but very few of the benefits have reached them. Laws relating to women like the Factories Act, 1948, Mines Act, 1952, Plantation Labour Act, 1951, Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, and the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 are often obeyed more in breach than in compliance.

According to the National Sample Service Organisation (NSSO) report (1987) on the "Status of Women in India," 94 per cent of women are engaged in the unorganised sectors of the country, 81.4 per cent in agriculture and the rest in non-formal sectors.

A great majority of programmes initiated by the Government have failed to achieve their target largely due to the bureaucratic red-tapism. The IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) has failed to reach its target of 30 per cent of women. In fact, it only benefited 9.87 per cent in 1985-86 women and 15.13 per cent in 1986-87. Under the NREP (National

Rural Employment Project) women's participation ranged from five to 20 per cent.

The rapid mobilisation of workforce from the organised to the unorganised sector has started after 1959-60. As the National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000 notes, the whole move towards modernisation in coir, bidi, matchbox, textiles, tobacco plantation, coal mines, pharmaceuticals, etc. has resulted in a massive displacement of female labourers in the country.

Here a woman makes, 1,250 bidis at the rate of Rs 11.60 per 1,000 a day.

The plight of women labourers working in the ginning factories of Tamilnadu is equally miserable. Some of them continued to work more than 16 hours.

Women working in the garment and textile industries on the piece rate basis Delhi produce for 60 per cent of the total garment export from India. Of the 100,000 workers in the industry women constitute 25 per cent. Here a woman earns Rs 4 for stitching a dozen of hosiery garments which mill-owners sell in the market for Rs 90 to Rs 100 per dozen.

In agriculture, the disparity be-



hind. Now the further we go, the greater the role of every member of the world community in the community itself. This progress towards the natural scheme of things. The USSR and the USA together make up only some 10 per cent of mankind. And they have no right, nor are able physically alone or jointly, to determine its future. However a special responsibility devolves on both powers. A great deal depends on them in averting a nuclear threat, and in other matters. The future of humanity can be safeguarded only if besides demilitarisation there will also be democratisation of international relations.

Views on other aspects of security were changed against this background of understanding modern realities. Having realised that security has become predominantly a political rather than a military issue, we also draw another conclusion: security today cannot be acquired at the expense or to the detriment of the other side — security can only be mutual, and speaking of the world as a whole — universal. Security encompasses not only military, but also political, economic and also humanitarian spheres.

The USSR has in recent years come up with constructive ideas in each of these spheres. This made the Soviet stance more active and at the same time more open. An example is changed views of the country's place in the world economy. For a long time our main concern has been to ensure our complete independence of the surrounding world. This dictated our course towards autarchy.

It is now understood in the USSR that one cannot successfully develop in conditions of autarchy and that it is necessary to take a more active part in the international division of labour, proceeding from the fact that economic interdependence in the world will grow. And we must take a certain responsibility upon ourselves, provided, of course, that the USSR is granted a fully equal status in world economic ties.

The author is director, Institute of the USA and Canada Studies.

Between 1974 and 1981, 28-64 lakh workers, of whom 14 lakh were women, got displaced by powerlooms. As a result, the total employment of women in the textiles and jute industries declined from 60 to 30 per cent. During 1959-60, thousands of women labourers lost their work when the textile and jute mills of Gujarat, Calcutta, Bombay and Ahmedabad installed new machineries. Today, very few women are working in reeling, winding or in sacking departments.

In 1984, almost all the tobacco centres of Andhra Pradesh retrenched about 25,000 women workers after the "green threshing plants machine" were installed. In the coal mines wagon loading is largely done by the women employees. With the installation of pay-loading machines, all women workers lost their jobs. The Haveja Committee appointed by the Central Government has recommended to the coal industry retrenchment of 50,000 wagon-loaders.

In electronics, pharmaceuticals and heavy industries, the percentage of women employees has gone down by nearly 50 per cent. A similar trend may be now emerging in the railways, banks, insurance and posts and telegraphs in the wake of computerisation.

In the matchbox industry of Sivakasi, the total percentage of women labour is around 70. Even bidi-binding is largely done by the women. The total hours required for binding 1000 bidis range from 12 to 16 with an income of Rs six to eight. Here, even pregnant women work from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. In Tamilnadu, in the town of Vellore, there are 20,000 home based bidi workers

tween man and woman is very acute. Women always do the harder types of work. Their work gives them no chance to earn actual amount they require. In the single crop area there is no additional facilities for other works. So during the off-season months, they run from village to village with their husbands and relatives in search of work. The village economy has undergone a sea-change over the years.

Drought, cyclones and floods have made them homeless and dispossessed of their land. For lack of infrastructural facilities and job opportunities, the poor villagers are forced to quit their land in search of jobs and migrate to urban and semi-urban areas for their daily bread.

A study of the existing work status of the migrants reporting for employment shows that women are far worse-placed than men. Of the 22.2 million persons who reported employment as the main reason for migration, only 2.7 million i.e. 12.6 per cent were females.

Among the female migrant workers reporting employment as the main reason for migration, 43.9 per cent were main workers, 3.6 marginal workers and the rest non-workers. The corresponding figures for the male workers are 91.3, 0.3 and 8.0 per cent respectively, according to the 1981 Census report.

In the big cities women are rag-pickers as well. In Ahmedabad itself there are 10,000 women who start at 5 a.m. in the morning. In Calcutta, Bombay, and Delhi thousands of women do this type of work for their daily living. The traders in the paper collection give different rates to women from Rs 2 to Rs 4 per day.

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Women
workers.

US working mothers

By Mohinder Singh

A working mother has two clusters of duties, household and job, both of which were traditionally considered full-time occupations. And the question is not solely one of the amount of time and energy needed for the two: there are special conflicts when the woman has simultaneous responsibilities in her home and at her place of employment. Even a different set of behaviours may be called for; competitive and assertive in the office, cooperative and nurturant in the home.

Considerable concern has therefore been evinced about the health and well-being of the working mother. Numerous surveys and studies have been carried out, especially in the US, about the effects of this dual role on the working mother. Some of the findings from such studies and researches are discussed below.

Employed mothers as a group appear healthier than housewives. Possibly the difference may be due to selective recruitment of healthier mothers into employment or a tendency of those whose health is poor to leave employment. Still the difference favouring the employed suggests that the dual set of role responsibilities is not typically damaging to the health of the mother — the earlier apprehensions about it have proved ill-founded.

Concern about combining full-time employment with adequate performance in the child-care and housekeeper roles seems to have been extremely widespread among employed mothers. However employed mothers are not the only ones to have problems with anxiety

and guilt. Some studies showed that the full-time college-educated housewives were actually more anxious and overall concerned about their children than comparable women who combined a professional career with motherhood.

Again whatever anxiety and guilt working mothers may have experienced, it was rarely translated into symptoms like sleeplessness or nervousness. In fact, some studies have revealed the opposite. Employed mothers are more likely to be free of such symptoms; good mental-emotional health is reported for a larger proportion of professionally employed wives than equally able full-time housewives. And employed mothers having a more positive image of themselves than do housewives.

Studies, particularly of American working mothers, however, showed that neither the family recreation (except TV viewing) nor commercial recreation (except golf) were appreciably affected.

The earlier view that maternal employment had a great many effects on the child, all bad, is not supported by recent research. Yes, effects it has but these depend on the nature of the employment, the attitude of the mother, her family circumstances, social class, the age and sex of the child, the kind of child-care arrangements, and a host of other conditions. Juvenile delinquency, for example, increased in lower classes with maternal employment, but remained unaffected by maternal employment in the middle class. Incidentally, the working mother is milder in discipline because of conscious effort to compensate or because of higher morale. Part-time maternal employment seemed to have a positive effect on adolescent children, although this was

not equally true for younger children.

Both male and female students with employed mothers perceived significantly smaller differences between men and women. Daughters of working women particularly saw women as competent and effective. They viewed work as something they will want to do when they are mothers. "It is women whose mothers have not worked who devalue feminine competence", says a researcher. Daughters of women in high-status occupations held the most forward views about male-female equality.

The idea that maternal employment brings emotional deprivation to the school-age child has not been supported in most studies. Of course, the absence of negative effects does not mean that mother's employment is irrelevant to the child; possibly mothers have been sufficiently concerned to effectively counterbalance any ill effects. Studies suggest that the working mother who obtains personal satisfaction from employment, does not have excessive guilt, and has adequate housekeeping arrangements is likely to perform as well as the nonworking mother or even better for her school-going children.

The effects of maternal employment on the infant depend on the extent of the mother's absence and the nature of the substitute care — whether it is warm, stimulating and stable. However, while studies of maternal employment and the school-age child offer reassurance to the working mother, no such reassurance is forthcoming concerning the effect on infants.

Employed wives tend to have greater power than nonemployed wives. Whereas housewives relative to working

wives are more powerful in internal household affairs, working wives have relatively greater external power, particularly with regard to economic affairs. The most consistent finding from the studies in which various decision areas were examined is the positive association between the wife's employment and her power concerning financial matters.

Studies indicate greater marital happiness for those wives who take employment voluntarily because such opportunity extends their freedom of choice. Contrariwise, being "forced" into taking employment reduces their autonomy and results in lessened marital satisfaction.

There is evidence of more conflict, arguing, quarrelling, living apart or even considering divorce among the employed mothers, but not necessarily more of permanent separation or divorce. Despite more conflict, no more employed mothers than housewives are dissatisfied with their marriages. Apparently, the advantages associated with employment compensated for the higher levels of conflict characteristic of their marriages. Yet, on the composite score, nonworking wives of high income groups ranked the highest in marital satisfaction.

Most of the research findings are consistent that in the 1960s and probably early 1970s, the full-time employment of mothers contributed, if only slightly, to more conflict and tensions and less marital happiness. By the late 1970s and thereafter this effect seems to have disappeared in the middle classes. However, there is evidence of more conflict and less marital satisfaction in lower-class couples in which the mother is "forced" to seek employment.

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Women: A workforce to reckon with

IN the context of the economic reforms introduced by the Government, it would be pertinent to consider their likely impact on various sections of our society. In this instance we take up the case of women. A brief recapitulation of the existing literature on the conditions of women in countries which have gone the same way would help us to draw inferences.

The burgeoning discipline of women's studies has, as its raison d'être, the building up of a feminist perspective into every branch of academics. By unmasking the role played by women in the survival and maintenance of society and taking them out of their 'invisible' and subaltern existence, it is hoped, a way would be paved for according them a position of equality in society. However, this naive assumption gets belied by the frequent tendency to consign areas of women's concern to the 'separate' discipline of Women's Studies and close the chapter thereafter.

The new reforms bear resemblance to the policies followed typically by those South-east Asian countries which were able to take advantage of the expansion in world trade in manufactures - electronics, garments and textiles being the main employers. Since the sixties, labour-intensive, export-oriented industries (especially, though not always, based on multinational investment) have emerged as a significant new source of female employment in Asia. Women's employment in electronics is noted to have grown from nil to 50,000 between 1971 and 1980 in Malaysia, and increased over six-fold in Singapore in the same period. In South Korea, one-third of the entire industrial labour force consists of women below 25 working in electronics, textiles and toy making.

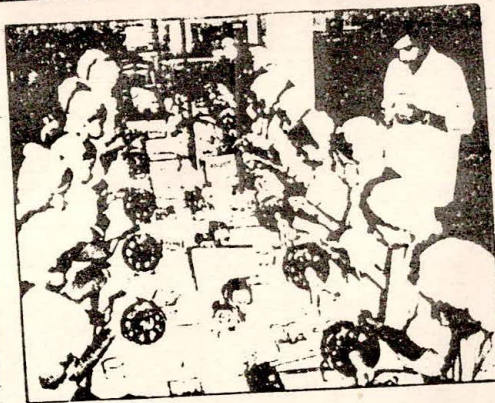
Studies revealed that the demand was for young, unmarried, relatively educated women, assumed to have the manual dexterity (fumble fingers) and docility needed for the tedious, repetitive and monotonous nature of the work. Given the comfortable gender disparity in wages,

women could also be recruited at relatively low cost. Such employment, while enabling a greater improvement in the material well-being of the women and their families than possible in other available jobs, also involved long hours of work, low pay relative to men, easy retrenchment, little scope for skill acquisition to enable easy job shifts, unhealthy work conditions, and strict supervision. Most of those employed in micro-chip factories reportedly reached near blindness by the time they were 24 years of age. Also women who migrated directly from the protected social environment of rural families (as in Malaysia) were an easy prey to sexual exploitation by young men in the cities, and suicides following unwanted pregnancies from premarital attachments that did not lead to marriage, were frequently reported among certain ethnic groups, such as the Tamils in Malaysia.

Two decades have, however, elapsed since this form of industrialisation was initiated and most South-east Asian countries are today entering what some have termed the second phase. The substantial differences between countries in the overall labour market demand has made for a significant difference in the work conditions and wage rates commanded today by women workers.

In Singapore today, in contrast to the sixties, women's work conditions have improved radically. A tight labour market has led to a considerable increase in female employment, a narrowing male female wage gap, State subsidy for childcare in some cases and State support to both male and female workers for upgrading their skills. It has been pointed out that family support for childcare in Singapore has been crucial for women to continue working after marriage by enabling them to acquire the necessary skills and tenure for moving up the industrial hierarchy, and hold their jobs when the industry moved towards more capital-intensive and skill-oriented production. In South Korea, by contrast, even in the second phase of industrialisation beginning in the

The 'miracle' of South-east Asia has been based upon gross exploitation of female labour. Given the preference of export-oriented units for women workers, the South-east Asian experience could show us what our new export-oriented strategies portend for our women. Alpana Verma takes a look.



Gaining ground

mid-seventies, women workers still form a floating and peripheral workforce, having short industrial working lives, usually extending only up to the time they have children.

The disadvantaged position of South Korean workers relative to those of Singapore has been explained by the continuing slack in the labour market despite rapid industrialisation, their lack of family childcare support, given their rural-based families, which compel many to give up factory employment and take up domestic service jobs on marriage; and the virtual absence of State facilities for childcare, and for upgrading skills and educational levels, with private sector opportunities for vocational training and skill upgrading being concentrated on men. Indeed women export factory workers in Singapore and Hong

Kong today are noted to enjoy a considerably higher standard of living and better work conditions than their counterparts in most other Asian countries. In Singapore, recent observers have also found that workers are now able to defy management by carrying radios to work and taking frequent breaks.

Multinational relocation

At the same time, however, the rise in labour costs is reported to have made both Singapore and Hong Kong less attractive to multinationals, leading to relocations in the garment industry to other parts of South-east Asia and the Third World. The regional non-specificity of inputs and the ease with which they can be relocated, underlines the basic long-term instability and insecurity of the employment they

offer.

In contrast to South-east Asia the penetration of female-intensive, export-oriented factory production is very recent and limited in South Asia. In countries such as India, import-substitution rather than export promotion has been the thrust of industrial policy, although there have been some shifts in direction recently. Also, unlike say Singapore where the industrial sector absorbs 40 per cent of the female labour force, and Hong Kong where it absorbs 60 per cent, industry in general provides employment for a much smaller percentage of working women in South Asia (only 10 per cent in India) where much of the expanding workforce in general, and female workforce in particular, is still dependent on peasant agriculture and the informal sector. However, export-oriented factories as a new and growing source of female employment in the region warrant closer examination.

In Sri Lanka, for instance, free trade zones (FTZ) are of growing significance as employers of women workers who constituted an estimated 88 per cent of the total workforce in 1984. Here, in a situation of persistently high unemployment, with limited alternative job openings for women, the workers, typically under 25 years of age, single, mostly from rural origins migrating for a first job, brought up in a relatively protected and conservative social milieu, face a much harsher economic and social climate than existed in the first phase of such employment in much of South-east Asia. Emerging studies indicate a higher incidence of illness among workers of FTZs than those in other industries, strict work supervision, susceptibility to sexual exploitation by supervisors, low wages that allow for little saving after deducting boarding fees (for heavily overcrowded dormitory facilities) and other expenses, and frequent imposition of fines for absence due to sudden illness or shortfall in production. Equally grim conditions of work and employment for women are reported in the Kandla FTZ of India.

At the same time, as in South-east

Asia where various laws and enactments have curbed or banned labour agitation, in South Asia too the State, in its attempt to create a climate attractive to (especially foreign) investors, has effectively prevented unionisation in FTZs in India by using methods such as depriving women of transport facilities and even by police action. Indeed with an upbringing where obedience and an unquestioned acceptance of authority are emphasised, the fact that it is their first job, limited alternative job opportunities, the lack of an exposure to trade union activity, and time constraints in attending meetings after work, all serve as barriers to unionisation. Frequent complaints of illness and spontaneous mass work stoppages are reminiscent of the mass hysteria and fainting fits resorted to by the South-east Asian women workers in the early seventies. But given the overcrowded labour markets in South Asia and the virtual absence of State welfare facilities such as childcare, there appears to be little short-term likelihood of any significant improvement in these conditions as occur in parts of South-east Asia.

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German firms want sterilized women

From IAN MURRAY

BONN: Women in eastern Germany are being sterilized to escape the dole queue. With almost twice as many women as men out of work there, employers can pick and chose. According to Editha Beier, special women's commissioner in Saxony Anhalt, many are prepared to

offer them jobs only if they cannot become pregnant.

"The employers ask: 'Is this woman going to be available for a long or a short time?' before they choose," she said last Thursday. "This is a dramatic symbol of the living conditions here."

She said that unmarried mothers, desperate to earn money, were particularly vulnerable. Some had told her that they had been offered work but only on condition that they could guarantee they would never have another pregnancy. One electrical worker reported that she had been told, "throw your man out and you can have a job". She then had herself sterilized and was offered work.

Government regulations provide for up to six weeks' paid leave for a mother-to-be. It is up to the woman's discretion when it is taken. They are also permitted to take up to a year of unpaid leave after the birth during which time the employer is obliged to keep the job open.

Frau Beier said that the problem existed all over eastern Germany, where 63% of women are out of work. "The shortage of jobs is putting single women into a predicament. If they have children they cannot

get a job to feed them. There is just no work for unmarried women who might have children."

Similar evidence has been collected by Sybille Richter, Equal Opportunities Commissioner at Stendal in Brandenburg. She said that women had been required to provide written medical proof that they cannot have children before they were accepted to fill a vacancy. She said, however, that clinics she had contacted assured her that they had refused to carry out sterilization of younger women who had no partners or children.

But the women's clinic at the medical academy in Magdeburg has seen the number of sterilizations there rise from a maximum of 400 a year before unification to 1,200 last year, the first full year of unification.

Wolfgang Weise, who heads the unit, insists that the operation is performed only on women over 30 who have had at least one child. Before she can be sterilized, a woman has to convince the clinic that she has taken a rational decision and will not regret the act a month later. According to Dr Weise, no patient has said that she wants the operation just so as to obtain a job.

However, Frau Beier has

come across cases of women as young as 19 being sterilized. Werner Munch, the Prime Minister of Saxony Anhalt, agreed in a radio interview this week that the affair was a scandal. Werner Schreiber, the State's Social Services Minister, condemned the companies as of the lowest category and called on employers to guarantee women's rights to have a family and a career.

Frau Beier last week published a statement asking women to come forward in confidence to give details of any company making sterilization a condition for employment. With women frightened of losing their jobs if they report their employer, she is not confident that many will comply.

"Women see sterilization as the only way in which they can cope with the situation," she said. — From The Times, London.

Public Policy Division

Voluntary Health Association of India

Sexual Harassment At Work

by S. Selvarani

AN ugly phenomenon lurks in our workplace — sexual harassment. It's a silent scourge that affects many women, but is still a taboo subject to the Government, management, unions and even some victims themselves.

Sexual harassment at work is not a personal or merely a woman's matter. Because men are the perpetrators in most cases, it is a shared work issue.

But this occupational hazard is not being treated with the importance it deserves.

WHAT exactly is sexual harassment? Basically, it includes unwanted and repeated verbal advances, sexually-loaded comments or jokes, lewd remarks, sexually suggestive looks and gestures, unnecessary touching (eg. knee-patting, grabbing, bottom-pinching), or demand for dates or sexual favours.

According to Puan Rohana Ariffin, a senior lecturer in the School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, sexual harassment is any male action that is unwelcome, offensive and repeatedly done, therefore infringing on the woman's right not to be disturbed and her right to a pleasant working environment.

How Prevalent?

- Out of our total workforce of 7.05 mil in 1990, one-third were females.
- In 1987, females comprised 48.5% of the manufacturing sector.
- 95% of our electronics workers and 50% of plantation workers are women.
- In industries that have a high percentage of women labour, the risk of sexual harassment is always present. Studies by the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) in 1988 showed that the

electronics industry and the public sector have the highest incidence (*Malay Mail*, 30.8.88).

In Britain, a newspaper survey found that nearly 2 million working women, or one in six of the total, have experienced sexual harassment at their office, shop or factory (*Star*, 2.11.91).

Why It Happens

Why does sexual harassment-on-the-job occur? It's not because men generally find women attractive. Rather, it is the basic attitude of men to women. Sexual harassment is a lack of respect shown to women as a person and as a worker.

Puan Rohana gives the following reasons why sexual harassment exists, and persists at the workplace:

- **Male-dominated management** — They tend to tolerate or ignore the problem, thus perpetuating it.
- **Power relationship** — Men feel they are superior to women, especially if they hold positions of authority and women are their subordinates.
- **Media and ideology** — Portrayal of women as sex objects in advertisements, cartoons and television programmes is a major cause.



- **Sexual double standards in society** — Society may not condemn a married man having an occasional fling. But if a woman, though single, behaves in a similar manner, she's immediately labelled a "loose" woman. A woman also gets the blame for the "weaknesses" of men. A sexually harassed woman would thus, prefer to keep the problem under wraps.
- **Women not assertive enough** — Because of this and lack of support from their other women colleagues, women usually blame themselves for what

happened.

● **Occupational structure** — The majority of decision-makers in most occupations are males while the auxiliary staff are females. Having more sympathetic women in management might help men be more respectful of women.

Debunk These Myths

● **Women "ask for it" by the way they talk, walk, dress or behave.** — This is not true. How can you explain sexual harassment of properly attired working women or even those who observe strict religious conduct in their dressing?

● **Sexual harassment is fun to women.** — Tell that to a victim who is distraught and agitated by the persistent, objectionable advances.

● **Women find sexual harassment complimentary.** — Most women find it demeaning and disrespectful.

Why Victims Keep Quiet

A victim may keep quiet because she may be forced to resign and this may affect her income, seniority benefits and job prospects. Or if she stays, her refusal to comply may cost her in the form of negative evaluation of her work, no pay increase, no promotion or a demotion, no overtime, heavier tasks, longer hours, and a denial of other rights or perks.

The strain of harassment and the penalties for refusing can cause her physical and mental problems such as headaches, migraine, depression, sleeplessness, digestive problems, loss of job satisfaction, poor work performance, nervous breakdown, and so on.

Despite this suffering, most victims do not lodge a formal complaint for fear of public shame, being labelled a troublemaker, accused of lying, being blamed for what happened, or losing their jobs.

Some are afraid of the resulting traumatic questioning and challenge to their moral character, and worried about the attitudes of their spouses, family, colleagues and friends. There are also those who are ignorant of their rights.

Some victims also fear retaliation and loss of job for complaining. This is especially true for female plantation workers who are relatively poor and who live in quarters provided by their management. Therefore, not many come forward to complain to the authorities.

It is thus not surprising for some plantation workers' unions

to announce that sexual harassment is limited to only a small figure and exclaiming surprise at the claim that most victims are reluctant to lodge a report. Their reaction shows a lack of understanding towards the whole problem.

Union's Role

Unions should support the victim and take the matter up with the management. It would help to have a women's group within the Union to handle complaints and provide emotional support.

Unions should also have guidelines against sexual harassment incorporated in the collected agreements with the management. They should negotiate for a workplace policy that identifies sexual harassment as a serious punishable offence.

Unions should also educate women on sexual harassment and encourage them to actively combat sexism within the workplace. Workers must be encouraged to speak up and challenge the language and behaviour of others who harass women at work.

Management's Responsibility

The management can influence the work climate so that it discourages sexual harassment. A management that takes a serious view of the offence and takes prompt action against the offender, will convince workers not to sexually harass female colleagues.

Management should also set a healthy tone through their own behaviour, the pin-ups put up, or through the way they portray women in their advertisement.

The management should have a strict policy against sexual harassment (eg. loss of promotion or pay) and inform workers of this policy. They should also incorporate changes in the work environment so that it's not conducive to sexual harassment — such as female estate workers working in pairs, or being attended to by women hospital assistants.

Legislation Needed

In the United States, the Equal Employment Opportunities regulations specifically forbid sexual harassment at work. Employers are responsible for any harassment in their units and have to pay compensating damages to employees who have been sexually harassed. If they refuse, they are liable to court action.

In Canada, employers are also held responsible for the behaviour of their employees.

In Britain, under the Sex Discrimination Act, employers are liable for any discriminating act done by their employees, whether or not the employer was aware of the practice, unless they can show they took reasonable practical steps to avoid the situation.

Malaysia however has no legislation on sexual harassment at the workplace. But any indecent behaviour to female employees may constitute the offence of outraging of modesty, which carries a penalty of maximum imprisonment of 10 years or so with whipping. (*NST*, 7.11.91).

Now that more and more women are entering the workplace, the Government should seriously consider drawing up laws on sexual harassment to protect their rights as workers.

Catalogue Of Harassment

- A female clerk-cum-typist alleged, in her complaint to the Labour Department and Police, that her boss, a construction company manager, hugged and kissed her on two occasions in his office. He claimed he kissed her "without any intention of hurting her". He received a one-year jail sentence for outraging her modesty (*Star*, 28.3.86).
- Four female production operators complained of unfair dismissal as they claimed they were fired for rejecting the advances of their male supervisor and production manager. One operator claimed that the supervisor often groped her body while she was at work and that others have similarly suffered but were afraid to complain (*NST*, 25.3.86).
- Some female trainee clerks alleged that a senior officer of the National Electricity Board (now Tenaga Nasional) molested them during an orientation programme at the training centres in Selangor and Terengganu. They lodged a report with NEB which then started investigations (*NST*, 19.6.90).
- A 38-year-old rubber tapper claimed being offered a small loan by her *kangani* (male supervisor) in return for sexual favours, which she refused. However, he grabbed at her breast while she was working one day but she managed to scare him away with her tapping knife.
- She and her husband reported the matter to the management, and an inquiry was held where the *kangani* finally admitted his guilt. He was put to work on a contract basis and after a few months, resumed his former job.
- When the victim and her co-workers protested, the senior officer insulted her as promiscuous. She angrily attacked him with a broom, for which she was suspended and later dismissed.
- At her inquiry, the officer publicly alleged that she was having an affair with the *kangani*.

IF YOU ARE A VICTIM

- Don't stay silent. This gives the impression that you don't mind the harassment. State your displeasure immediately and ask him to stop. If you wait too long, he may claim you enjoyed it.
- Confide in a colleague, family member, a friend you trust, or social groups like CAP.
- Keep a diary of events for possible use as evidence later on. Note down the time, place and kind of harassment you suffered, any witnesses, and any effect on your health. You may use witnesses or tapes of conversation to support your claim. Note down also any comments about your work performance.
- Take a colleague or friend along and ask the harasser to stop. Warn him you'll make a formal complaint if the harassment continues. Note down what happens. Or you may ask someone outside work to write to him to stop. He may stop if he realises that others know about his behaviour.
- Find out if other women have been harassed by the same man. You may form an informal group to act together and to support each other in your allegations.
- Inform your Union, or complain to the management. A word of caution — you may find yourself closely supervised or be dissuaded by others to drop the complaint. Don't give up. In any interview you have with management, take a friend along for support and to be a witness.
- If an internal inquiry is held, produce all your written evidence and witnesses.
- If nothing is done by your management, report to the police.

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Gender-based tyranny

WHEREAS the voice of women's liberation movements all over the world is soaring sky high for emancipation and advancement of their fellow women, there exists a small group within this already discriminated and exploited lot, whose privation and misery are multitudinal and monstrous. The widows, divorcees, separated, abandoned wives and single mothers — all of whom live under the label of female-headed households, suffer not only the usual gender-based tyranny but also their social isolation or exclusion from the male counterparts.

While the presence of males as prime bread winners may not be a matter of special significance for the male-headed households, the

*The number of households
where women are the sole
bread winners of the
families is steadily growing.*

absence of such men in the female-headed households certainly matters in various ways. Waging virtually a silent social war against a galaxy of forces, these women not only tide against the undercurrents of our patriarchal society but most often, and paradoxically too, against their own fraternity which contradicts the claim of women activists in fighting against female subservience by males.

Nearly 35 per cent of households in the world are now estimated to be headed by women, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). In many developing countries, notably Africa, women head three in every ten households. But this is likely to be a conservative estimate. Recent studies by the ILO have shown that the number of families in which women are the sole supporters is on the increase. Many such women are very poor, earning their living in urban informal markets or struggling for survival among the rural unemployed and marginally employed. They face serious hardships supporting themselves and their children.

In India, the proportion of female-headed households was put around 10 per cent according to the 1961 and 1971 Censuses. Pravin and Leela Visaria (1985) found 16 to 22 per cent of the female-headed households in some parts of the country, while Hemalatha Dandekar found 23 to 26 per cent of such households in a Maharashtrian village. Ranjana Kumari (1989) found up to 19 per cent of such households in four Uttar Pradesh villages. Tamil Nadu ranks fourth in terms of high percentage of female-headed households and 20 to 25 per cent of the households are estimated to be female-headed both *de jure* and *de facto*.

The number of such households, therefore, is likely to be much larger than actually recorded in the Census. The Department of Women and Child Welfare in the Ministry of Welfare has

estimated that the number of female-headed households where the women earners are the only bread-winners of their families is steadily growing.

Poverty within poverty: Researchers have found poverty to be a predominant cause of the incidence of female-headedness. Often these women own little or no land, are in the higher age group, depend on wage labour, have a low education level and large families. They are also concentrated among the Scheduled Castes. The most affected are the children who are circumstantially coerced to sacrifice their precious childhood and sell their labour for a pittance. Ranjana Kumari's study shows that the incidence of female-headedness was more among the Scheduled Castes (46 per cent); most of these women were below the poverty line (72 per cent). In more cases the children actively supported their mothers and so very few children attended school.

Studies done by the Gandhigram Rural University in Tamil Nadu shed light on a different dimension. Accordingly, social problems confronting those families are to be considered as critical as that of their economic problems and that both kind of problems are found to exert countervailing pressure on the deprivation or development of these households.

One woman said: "I would rather live peacefully as a married woman, albeit separated, than being insulted as a divorcee in this superstition-ridden society. I can live with suffering, but not sacrileges. I can face tortures but not taboos. As a typical rural woman, I would prefer to die with a social identity as some one's

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wife and preferably as a *sumangali* (woman whose husband is living), rather than a divorcee."

The concept of 'single mother's is relatively new to India but is not an unknown phenomenon. Sporadic instances of unmarried women with children could be seen both in urban and rural areas. However, in countries like Africa, the number of single mothers is significant and rapidly growing as more young men become fathers but not husbands. When a man crosses the border to work in South Africa, he must migrate alone, for the law prohibits his family from living with him. In Botswana, 80 per cent of all unmarried women above the age of 25 have children. While in most cases, says the ILO, the fathers have left villages to find work in cities, others prefer to stay single to avoid polygamy, to retain their freedom, or because they cannot rely upon the financial support of their partners.

Confronted by the canker of poverty and illiteracy and sandwiched between the scorns of society and demands of dependents, these women put up a valiant struggle earning and sustaining their livelihood in the local community.

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Women workers

Whither equality at the workplace?

There is as yet no law in India dealing with sexual

harassment and discrimination at the workplace.

On the occasion of International Women's Day,

it is appropriate that women's movements should

focus on this issue and demand a comprehensive law

to cover the same.

SEXUAL harassment at the work place is a common experience of most working women. In India where legislations abound in almost every other field it is amazing how there is no law to deal with a serious problem of this nature which affects one half of the population. The Constitution of India guarantees equality between sexes among other things. But this equality would become meaningless unless it is translated into something which the people can actually make use of. As far as women in this country are concerned the equality guaranteed by the Constitution has remained an illusory right, even at the workplace where women are competing on an equal footing with men.

It is against this background, that a recent decision of the Court of Appeals in the United States assumes importance. In the case of Ellison vs Brady (1991) the court held that sexual harassment amounts to sex discrimination.

In this case Kerry Ellison was working as a revenue agent with the Internal Revenue Service. A male co-worker started harassing Ellison by writing love letters to her and loitering around her place of work. Ellison complained to her employer and the man bothering her was warned and transferred to another place. But later the man sought a transfer back to where Ellison was working. The employer agreed to the same. Ellison objected to this and filed a complaint against her employer charging him with sexual harassment.

The court upheld her charge. More or less similar to the Equal Remuneration Act in India, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the U.S.A., prohibits employers from among other

things, discriminating against a person "with respect to his or her compensation, terms, conditions, privileges of employment, because of such individuals' sex." In an earlier case Meritor Savings Bank vs Vinson the U.S. Supreme Court while interpreting the above clause held that where sexual harassment created a "hostile or abusive work environment" it would amount to

be viewed from the point of view of a woman. The court observed that "asking what a reasonable employer would do runs the risk of reinforcing any prevailing level of discrimination by employers and fails to focus directly on the best way to eliminate sexual harassment from the workplace". Thus by interpreting the word 'sexual harassment' to include 'sex discrimination' the court had given effective remedy to the woman who had complained of sexual harassment.

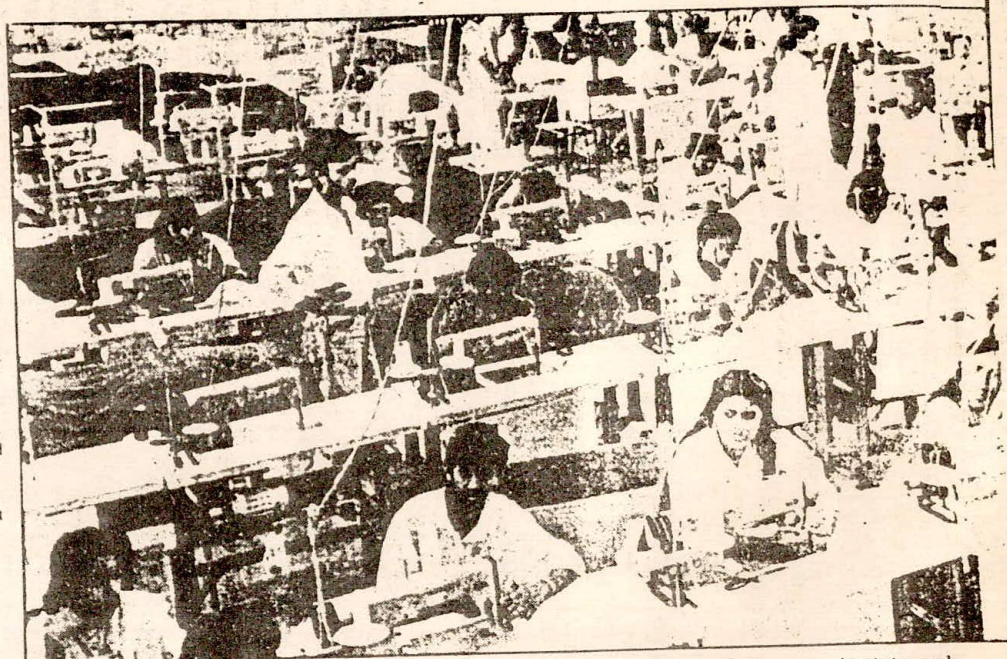
In contrast to the imaginative and effective interpretation adopted by the U.S. courts on the issue of sexual discrimination, the rather conservative attitude of the Supreme Court of India stands out in the case of Madhu Kishwar vs State of Bihar (1992). In this case sections 7 and 8 of Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act 1908 were challenged before the Supreme Court. Under this Act succession to property was through 'descendants in the male line' and the 'male heirs in the male line' alone were entitled to the property. These provisions of the Act were challenged as being opposed to the equality guaranteed by the Constitution. The Supreme Court in its proceedings recorded that

LEGAL FILE

discrimination. Applying the Supreme Court's reasoning to Ellison's case the appellate court said that such situations of sexual harassment should be examined from the perspective of the woman who is the victim and not from the perspective of an average person. The court noted that as a result of experience peculiar to the female sex, "many women share common concerns which men do not necessarily share, such as fear that sexual harassment may lead to violent sexual assault." The court concluded that the act of the employer amounted to discrimination because a woman of average constitution or in other words a 'reasonable woman', would find the actions of the male worker so 'severe and pervasive' that it would alter the condition of employment and create an abusive work environment.

On the question of remedial action the court held that the employer should act in a manner so as to put an end to the harassment. Here again the test of effective remedial action should

on an earlier occasion when similar writ petitions were being heard by the court, time was given to the Government of Bihar "to consider the feasibility of carrying out an amendment in the offending sections and to clearly provide that succession was not confined to the male in the male line." A committee was set up by the Bihar government to examine this question. The committee came to the conclusion that by custom prevalent among the Scheduled Tribes a female heir is excluded from succession and in case the law was otherwise interpreted or changed and property was allowed to go into hands of female heirs, there would be great agitation and unrest in the area among the scheduled tribe people who have custom-based living. The Supreme Court observed that exclusion of women from inheritance was inappropriate. It held that Scheduled Tribes were as much citizens of India as others, and they were entitled to the benefits of the guarantees of the Constitution. Having seen the



Cases such as discrimination and harassment should be examined from the perspective of the woman, the victim, and not from that of an average person.

attitude of the Bihar Government in this matter the court instead of deciding the constitutional validity of the section challenged once again, directed the Bihar Government to reconsider the matter. Presumably a new committee is to be set up as the Committee's report has been directed to be submitted to the court. One wonders, how constituting one more committee is going to change the attitude of the Bihar Government. And again Committees are the best way to delay decision taking.

In the meantime the case has been adjourned for a further three months. This case is of the year 1982 and it is difficult to understand why the court is reluctant to decide issues like this which are clearly discriminatory. Let alone expanding the existing law, the courts seem to

be reluctant to even give effect to the existing provisions of law.

A judgment of the Allahabad High Court, however stands out in contrast. In the case of Urmila Devi vs State of U.P. and others (1992), the Allahabad High Court held that a rule which made women ineligible for appointment to ministerial posts in the Civil Courts went against the provision of Art. 16 of the Constitution which provides that no citizen shall be discriminated against or made ineligible on grounds of sex (apart from religion, race, caste, descent, place of birth residence).

In this case Urmila Devi applied for a Class III posting in the Civil Courts at Gorakhpur on the basis of an advertisement issued by the District Judge, Gorakhpur. On the same day as the

advertisement was issued, i.e. April 5, 1990, the District Judge sent a communication to the Regional Employment Officer informing him the eligibility conditions required from the candidates. One of the conditions was that no woman candidate was eligible for a Class III post. This was based on rules framed under the Government of India Act, 1935. Hence Urmila Devi was denied a chance to apply for the post.

Thankfully, the High Court in a prompt manner struck down this rule as being violative of Art. 16 of the Constitution and directed the District Judge, Gorakhpur to issue a communication informing that women can appear for the posts advertised before.

D. NACASAIL
V. SURES

Sexual abuse a fact of life for Kuwait's Indian maids

INDIAN EXPRESS
7-3-93

15/23/93
KUWAIT CITY - Indian maids are an exploited lot in Kuwait. The maids, numbering between 35,000 to 40,000, are in many cases subjected to molestation, beating, solitary confinement and even sexual assault at the hands of their Kuwaiti employers.

Inquiries with Kuwaiti authorities and members of the Indian community here revealed that on an average one such "exploited" Indian maid was seeking refuge at the Indian embassy daily.

EMBASSY'S BURDEN: The Indian embassy has hired a permanent accommodation in the Dasma area of the metropolis for the upkeep of such harassed maids at an exorbitant price of Kuwaiti Dinar 600 (Rs 60,000) per month.

Inquiries also revealed that at any given time 25 to 30 such maids were always lodged at the hired accommodation, situated near the local police station, for safety reasons.

Both Indian embassy officials and the Kuwaiti authorities were unanimous in that the figure of "exploited" maids was not very large given the sizeable population of Indian maids here.

WARPED LABOUR LAWS: The sources told Kuwait's "un-

que" labour laws, completely tilted in favour of the Kuwaitis, were mainly responsible for the maltreatment meted out to members of any expatriate community.

"Anybody coming to Kuwait for employment was at the mercy of his or her employer as under the existing system he or she is not permitted to leave the country unless the exit visa was signed by the employer", the sources said.

"Not only maids and domestic servants, but even top professionals like doctors and engineers and technical hands come under these regulations," the sources said.

Acting Charge d'Affaires at the Indian mission J.S. Sapra, when confronted with the allegations, conceded that the problem was there and that the embassy was seized of it.

He, however, categorically stated that the attitude of the Kuwaiti Government and authorities directly concerned was "very, very positive and good and that they spared no efforts whatsoever to resolve the matters to our best satisfaction."

MORE CASES IN DESERT AREAS: Kuwaiti authorities, while conceding that such cases existed, said "it is not as if they are all happening right under our

nose in Kuwait City." Most of these cases take place far off in the desert areas where close monitoring was not always possible, the Kuwaiti authorities said.

However, they claimed that "all possible measures are being taken to do away with the problem."

A group of Indian journalists, which visited the Dasma centre and interviewed some of the maids there, found that a majority of them hailed from either Andhra Pradesh or Kerala.

Most of them complained that not only were they manhandled but even their paltry salaries Kuwaiti Dinar 35-40 (Rs 3,500-Rs 4,000) were not paid by the employers for months together.

"When we complain to the recruiting agents in Kuwait about non-payment and other problems, we are pacified and told that things will improve soon," most of those interviewed said.

GAGGED AND RAPED: Among the 30-odd maids present at the centre, a 22-year-old from Rajampet in Andhra Pradesh alleged that she was gagged and repeatedly raped by the sponsor's son.

The girl has been at the centre for four months and gave birth to a boy about a month back. "My

plight became worse... the lady of the house... dence and told her that... become pregnant," she said.

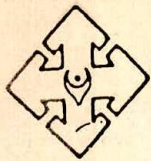
"I ran away one day when there was no one in the house and went to the embassy and have been at the centre ever since," she said.

The embassy is pursuing the matter. Most of the girls claimed they had taken loans or sold their jewellery to pay for their expenses between Rs 20,000-25,000. Agents in India to obtain jobs.

SOLD OFF BY SPONSOR: Annamma Abraham of Kollam in Kerala has a different story to tell. "I will have to commit suicide if I have to go back because I will be left with no alternative," she said sadly. She was allegedly sold off by her sponsor but she somehow managed to free herself, she claimed.

The embassy is trying to do things with her sponsor and an alternative employment has been found as she has a 90-year-old father and several other family members to support back home.

However, both the Kuwaiti and the Indian authorities categorically denied this trend is on the increase. •UNI.



VOLUNTARY HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

PEHA-PP 10(5)

ACTION ALERT

SUB: RAPE OF BANWARI
A 'SATHIN' IN RAJASTHAN

Dear Friend,

The rape of Banwari, a 'sathin', who is the grassroots health worker for the Women's Development Programme (WDP) sponsored by the Rajasthan government, has been widely condemned by womens organisations as well as a number of voluntary organisations across the country.

Banwari, a Kumhar woman who is about forty years old was trained as a 'sathin' in 1985 and ever since has been working in Bhateri, a village in Bassi tehsil which is located 45 kilometers from Jaipur. Over the last seven years she has taken up several issues related to land, water, public distribution system, literacy and payment of wages at famine relief works. Early this year Banwari had started a campaign against child marriages in her area. This was in the context of a public appeal issued by the Chief Minister, who had written to all district collectors to conduct a campaign in this regard. Infact Banwari's alienation from her villagers and her subsequent rape is very much linked to her attempts to address and stop a child marriage in her village. Some influential families belonging to the Gujjar caste (a middle level caste group which is both economically and politically a powerful group in Rajasthan) were planning to perform child marriages in their families. Banwari requested one of the Gujjar families not to get their one year old daughter married but received a hostile and aggressive response. In response to the appeal of the District Collector on child marriages planned for this year, a list was prepared by all the 'sathins' in the district, which included some of the Gujjar families in the village. The SDO and Deputy Superintendent of Police started making hectic rounds of the villages in order to prevent child marriages from taking place. On May 5th 1992 the SDO and DYSP came to Bhateri to stop the marriage in one of the Gujjar families, however the state machinery failed to stop the marriage and the marriage of the one year old girl was solemnised at 2 a.m. on the next day. Most people in the village connected Banwari's effort to stop child marriages with police action, as a result of which the overall atmosphere in the village and surrounding areas was very tense. Subsequently the

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Gujjar community decided to "teach her a lesson". Banwari was boycotted socially and the entire Gujjar community in the village was instructed not to sell milk to her family and not to buy any earthen pots from her. On another occasion Mohan, Banwari's husband, was beaten up by one of the members of the Gujjar family. As a response to the hostile environment the 'sathins' from neighbouring villages as well as the Project Directors used to visit Banwari at brief intervals and it appeared as if the tension had eased and during this period the villagers were also interacting with Banwari.

However, all the semblance of well being was shattered with the rape of Banwari on September 22nd, 1992. A group of five men belonging to a Gujjar family, gang raped Banwari and beat up her husband badly. Subsequently, Banwari went through a harrowing experience from lodging the case with the police to trying to get a medical examination. The police were indifferent to the issue because when Banwari and the Pracheta went to lodge a FIR at the police station, the Dy. SP expressed skepticism and added that: "Due to personal enmity people sometimes make false allegations". After much questioning by the police a FIR was lodged and the ASI was deputed to accompany Banwari and the rest to the PHC, Bassi for a medical examination. When they reached PHC, the male doctor present there refused to conduct the examination and neither of the two lady doctors posted at the PHC was available. Therefore, she was referred to the hospital in Jaipur. It was later revealed that the PHC doctor had requested for a medical examination for confirming the age of the victim rather than for rape. When Banwari reached Jaipur, the Medical Jurist refused to conduct a medical examination without orders from the Magistrate. By the time the Magistrate was contacted it was past 5 p.m. in the evening. The Magistrate refused to give them any orders, saying that they should return next morning and meet him in his court. Meanwhile, the police left Banwari and Mohan at the Mahila Thana for the night. After the intervention of senior officers of the WDP, a vaginal swab was done after a gap of 48 hours after the incident.

Several activists from women's organisations, civil liberties groups, voluntary organisations as well as from research organisations have come forward to support Banwari. The rape of Banwari raises some very important issues for the future of women who are grassroot workers as well as women's development programmes all over the country. Here, one is not merely talking about state supported programmes but also a large number of women workers involved in voluntary organisations across the country. The Rajasthan Voluntary Health Association has been actively involved in the defence of Banwari as well as the future of women's development programmes in the state. The struggle for justice in the Banwari case is continuing in Rajasthan. On October 10th and 11th a team from the National Commission for Women met Banwari as well as local leaders and the Chief Minister and this has definitely strengthened the case since it has put pressure on the Rajasthan government. On October



11th and 12th, a joint meeting of the Sathins was organised where more than 100 sathins came to express their solidarity. They expressed their anger against the government for not ensuring speedy justice and booking the criminals in this case. They also expressed concern regarding the future of the WDP programme as well as their own safety in carrying on with the development programmes. The next step in this campaign is a mammoth rally on October 22nd in Jaipur to mark a month since the day Banwari was brutalised. Groups from all over the country have been called and even those who will not be able to be present physically, can still express their solidarity by sending telegrams on the specified date, to:

The Chief Minister
Rajasthan Central Secretariat
Jaipur, Rajasthan.

We are sending a copy of this note to all state VHAs in order to appraise them as well as their member institutions regarding this issue. We are sure that many of the women grassroot workers have been harassed in the field and we feel that this incident needs to be shared and discussed among health workers, both men and women, so that, we are not caught unawares and we build up support networks in the areas we work.

Ms. Fiona Dias
Programme Assistant
Public Policy Division

Ms. Rama Baru
Programme Officer
Public Policy Division

MEETING OF THE BHATERI CASE - A REPORT

ON 22.10.92

After the action was chalked out to do something about the Bhateri Rape case where a 'sathin' was raped because she tried to stop a child marriage, the women's groups decided to have a public meeting on the 22.10.92. Ms. Fiona Dias from the Public Policy Division, VHA1 attended this meeting held at Jaipur, Rajasthan.

At 10 a.m. 'sathins' from Ahmedabad, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan along with women from Delhi and neighbouring states met at Ram Nivas Bagh. Many men, who were sensitive to the issue also joined the women. The crowd comprised of activists, social workers, health workers, journalists, doctors, lawyers, teachers, women from rural areas, some government officials and an MLA. There were about 3000 and more people.

The crowd left Ram Nivas Bagh and went around the main city of Jaipur till it reached a major junction and sat on a 'dharna', thus blocking the traffic and disrupting the flow of normal activity. Later the morcha carried on till one reached the central circle opposite the Secretariat the supposedly "saction" of people's dignity and rights. The crowds sat on the lawns outside and sang songs and verses specially prepared for the occasion. All throughout the morcha the people shouted slogans and the air was filled with different voices. It was a very touching and meaningful sight to see people of diverse cultures rising above the barriers of caste and status coming to seek justice unitedly.

A public meeting was the next item on the agenda. Ms. Mukulika Singh an ex IAS officer compered the meeting. She called upon Ms. Mamta Jetly the co-ordinator of Vishaka to say a few words. Ms. Mamta Jetly was the person to organise this meet. She spoke about the entire episode and how justice was not meted to out to Bhateri upto the 22.10.92, one month after the incidence. Later another 'sathin' Mohinibhai spoke on the issue of sexual harrasment at the workplace of which she was a victim of some years back. After her another 'sathin' spoke about her experiences and how she had to combat with them. Then Bhaveri the sathin who was gang raped by members of the Gujjar community spoke. At first she gave a jist of the state of affairs and then lashed out at the system.

Bhaveri Bhateri was noticed by the people working in her village as a good change agent and she was trained and performed her role diligently. Later she used to train other as 'sathins'. The whole village looked at her as a respectful person. The Government decided to do something about the rise in child marriages and hence she did her duty as a 'sathin'. Today Bhaveri asks what has been her 'mistake' and is this the way she should be rewarded. The same government who on one hand encourages 'sathins' to be instrumental in changing people's attitude on social issues, today, is doing nothing about the injustice meted out to her due to this duty, which she fulfilled. She lashed out at the police who are hand in glove with the

rapists, she questioned the government for pretending this incident never took place at all. She challenged the government and the entire machinery that she will fight the issue till the rapists are punished. Bhaveri appeared full of rage at the humility she had to go through despite her efforts to do all she can for the people. She failed to understand the intense need for police around the gates of the secretariat. After Bhaveri spoke the crowd got very emotional and 'Bhaveriji zindabad' and 'Nari Ekta zindabad' filled the air. Later another 'sathin' spoke about the demands that they want as soon as possible and the memorandum was signed by the people present there.

Finally the crowd wanted to meet the Home Minister but was not allowed to do so. A delegation went to meet the Minister, he agreed to set a CBI inquiry but refused to arrest the rapists until the report ascertaining the above is available. He refused to see reason and the crowd was disappointed that despite the agitation the Home Minister was so adamant about his stand on the issue.

The women then decided to break through the police cordon and get into the secretariat, there was a mild lathi charge due to this and one MLA was injured in the confrontation. The women then sat on the lawns of the Central Circle and had a dharna till 8 p.m. This was followed by a decision to carry on and intensify the agitation at the Central level.

The next day a meeting was held to discuss the further plan of action but it was not finalised. I left Jaipur feeling good and proud that women are coming out with their problems and braving the stigma attached to issues like this one. I was proud that VHAI decided to express its solidarity with another health worker who needed this much for her struggle towards justice.

FIONA DIAS SAXENA
PUBLIC POLICY DIVISION, VHAI.

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