Women Power Connect Obituary Mrinal gore: Vibhuti Patel

Professor Vibhuti Patel

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Dear friends,

Greetings from WomenPowerConnect!

On reaching another quarter of this year 2012, WomenPowerConnect (WPC) would like to reflect its work, challenges and achievements of the following months starting from June to September 2012. WPC as an Advocacy body continues to partner with many organizations to accomplish our policy level goals in relation to several areas of concern for women. This quarter we have focused on the Implementation of Gender Friendly Legislation (with NCW); Enhancing Mobile Populations’ Access to HIV & AIDS Services Information and Support (under CARE EMPHASIS project); Women’s Land Rights (with Oxfam); and Addressing Child Marriage (with Ford Foundation).

WPC is working in association with the National Commission for Women to facilitate national consultations and state level regional meetings. These meetings address the strengths and weaknesses of India’s legal framework and how, as concerned bodies and stakeholders, we can advocate for the effective implementation of legislation in order to ensure women’s rights and safety. We hope that with efficient organizing we can come together and take the discussion and action to a new level.

We would also like to share our work in partnership with the CARE India EMPHASIS project. This project works with the mobile populations crossing borders from Bangladesh and Nepal into India. The project addresses Health and HIV & AIDS related human rights; access of cross border mobile population (at source, transit and destination) towards HIV/AIDS; Violence against Women; and other vulnerabilities within the legal framework and the International commitment of the countries. WPC acts as CARE’s “Strategic Advocacy Partner (SAP)” and provides policy briefings, evidence based advocacy with key stakeholders, networking and developing methods for the assessment of advocacy and alliance-building efforts.

WPC, in association with Oxfam India, is addressing the inequalities existing in current land rights practices and legislation in India. Together, we advocate for the realization of women’s land rights and their right to hold independent or joint title over land.

Further, our work in the States of Jharkhand, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (with support from Ford Foundation India) will generate positive actions in communities to significantly reduce the incidences of child marriage. Consequently, we hope such projects will enable district and community-monitoring systems at various levels to sustain these actions.

I am also exceptionally pleased that the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill 2010 has been passed by the Lok Sabha. This issue of Sexual harassment of women has been a priority issue for WPC since its inception.
WPC is very determined to continue working on the issues concerning women and in advocating for the development and effective implementation of Gender Friendly Legislations. We hope that with the support of our graceful partners and concerned stakeholders we will successfully realize our goals, which is to fight for the concerns of women at the policy level and be a part of the process of strengthening and empowering women’s rights throughout our country.

We thank each one of you for your continued support and encouragement!

Ranjana Kumari
President
In 2011, WomenPowerConnect (WPC) with the support of National Commission for Women (NCW) initiated a three year project to create a conducive environment for ensuring effective implementation of women friendly laws through advocacy and civil society participation. The main objectives of the project was to organize regional meetings with the State networks which would be attended by representatives of State Women’s Commission, Government officials, experts and civil society representatives.

The main activities organized during the first year of the project (2011) were five regional consultations. These regional consultations were planned according to the strengths and weaknesses of the existing laws for the purpose of advocating for proper implementation of women friendly laws with focus on the Pre-conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex selection) Act (PCPNDT 2003), Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA 2006), Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDV 2005). The objectives of these regional consultation being: to identify limiting factors which hampers the effective implementation of women friendly laws; to prepare recommendations and a plan of action for advocating with State and Central Governments; to generate awareness on Acts among community through active involvement of civil society groups; and to create and strengthen issue based civil society networks. These regional consultations were held in the following regions:

1) Western Regional Meeting held in Udaipur, Rajasthan. 31st March 2011.
2) Eastern Regional Meeting held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. 31st Oct 2012.
3) Southern Regional Meeting held in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. 25th Jan 2012.
4) North-Eastern Regional Meeting held in Guwahati, Assam. 14th Feb 2012.
5) Northern Regional Meeting held in Chandigarh. 9th April 2012.

The previous newsletter covered the Regional Consultations that were held in Western Region in Udaipur, Rajasthan; Eastern Region in Bhubaneswar, Odisha; Southern Region held in Chennai, Tamil Nadu; and North-Eastern Regional Meeting held in Guwahati, Assam. These regional consultations deliberated upon the strengths and weaknesses of the existing laws and to advocate for proper implementation of the women friendly laws with focus on Pre-conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex selection) Act (PCPNDT 2003), Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA 2006), Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDV 2005). The meetings helped the organization in evolving a policy on looking at gender based violence as a health issue.
Northern Regional Meeting held in Chandigarh, 9th April 2012

The Regional Consultation was held in Chandigarh on the 9th of April 2012 and was facilitated by WPC members, Haryana Nav YuVak Kala Sangam. The workshop had around 70 participants from Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh. Participants included civil society organizations, individual activists, governmental officials, State Women Commission Chairpersons & Member Secretaries, advocates, academicians. Discussions on the State’s scenario with regards to women’s issues and contribution towards developing a comprehensive understanding of friendly laws for women and to consolidate advocacy efforts for effective implementation of these laws were discussed.

The way forward open session allowed for recommendations to come about. The recommendations are as follows: To initiate a network of CSOs on women friendly issues and form pressure Groups; the need to involve women organizations in the committees formed by the Governments; create awareness among women at the grass root level with the involvement of all other stakeholders; the need to involve youths and the existing SHGs, PRIs by the CSOs to address the issues of women; the need for an understanding of the local acts/policies/schemes in conjunction with the national laws; the need to identify and bring into notice of the concerned officials and authorities of the stereotypes made of women in school books; execute campaigns to spread awareness for the existing laws that benefit women; and review of Customary Laws and other laws that are indirectly related to women issues and bring them in convergence with the women related laws.

National Consultation

As a culmination of the regional meetings held in the first year of the project a National Consultation on “Strategizing Advocacy for Effective Implementation of Women Friendly Laws”, was organized by WPC with support NCW on the 12th July 2012 at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

Smt. Mamta Sharma, Chairperson of NCW was the Chief Guest. The National Consultation had diverse range of participants starting from twenty-four State Commission for Women, fifty Government Officials, Six hundred and nine Civil Bodies, and twenty-two media persons.
The National Consultation focused on three pieces of legislation that addresses women’s rights violation i.e. the PCPNDT Act, the PWDV Act, and the PCM Act. 27 representatives from Government Agencies and around 104 representatives from legal bodies, academics, non-governmental organizations and media partners, came from different parts of the country to participate and discuss the implementation and to develop strategies for effective implementation of these women friendly legislations.

The Objectives of the National Consultation were as follows:

1. To do a follow-up on the recommendations made at the regional level consultation.
2. To strategize action plans both at the national and State Levels.
3. To foster closer collaborations with different stakeholders.
4. To ensure proper implementation of the three Laws: PCMA, PC&PNDT and PWDV.

Topics of Discussions:

The National Consultation had various discussions. It was discussed that there is the need for allocation of budget at the State Level to ensure the implementation of the three Laws. It is also important to identify target groups in communities for building awareness on gender issues and to address the different sets of problems and challenges that exist among varied groups in the community; the need to sensitize Judges, Police Personnel (with focus on women police) and college going girls and boys towards women issues and vulnerabilities (the issues of sex-determination, sex-selective abortions and consequences of declining sex ratio); the need for proper infrastructure, training of law enforcing agencies and other service providers and adequate monitoring and evaluation of the Acts; the need to sensitize the frontline workers such as Anganwadi workers, ASGA’s and ANM’s on the issue of sex selective elimination; the need for innovative campaigns like the development of gender manuals in easy cartoon formats in order to sensitize the general public on issues related to mother and child care; and the need to create awareness among women.
on the PWDV Act which will enable them to get relief in the form of counseling, police assistance, shelter homes, legal aid and temporary custody of their children.

Recommendations from National Consultation:

A number of recommendations came forward from the National Consultation. The recommendations that were made are as follows: the need for setting up of monetary commissions for the purpose of funding to undertake various initiatives and schemes; the need for all State women groups to organize seminars on problems faced by women in their respective regions; the need to conduct an annual conference between NGO’s all over the country to address the various issues relating to women; the need for the appointment of full-time Protection officers; the facilitation of training and awareness generation programs for all for all stakeholders; the need for improvement of medical facilities and the need for school syllabus to address the issues of PC & PNDT in the school curriculum for class 10 and above.

2. Ensuring women’s access to and control over land, with support from Oxfam India

In continuation of last year’s project, WPC is implementing the second year project with the aim to address the deep-rooted problems of women farmers who are being denied of equal land rights in India.

The project will work towards identifying and projecting best practices in effective implementation of women-friendly legislations related to land rights. Additionally, it will present case studies where women have either individually or collectively overcome challenges in asserting their rights.

The project will focus on Odisha, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand and Andhra Pradesh.

It is estimated that women constitute approximately 50-60% of labor in the nation’s farm production. Additionally, according to OXFAM India, nearly 84% of all working women in the country are employed in the agrarian sector. However, women workers tend to have very limited access and control of the land that they work on. Women farmers’ lack of access to land, limits their access to other agriculture inputs such as seed, agriculture credit, government schemes and programmes. It is because of the patriarchal and patrilineal structure of the Indian society; that women have been unable to enjoy equal access to land and also control of land, like men.

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1 Dashora, Kavya (July 2010). Women Farmers: from Seed to Kitchen.
Hence, this Project seeks to assess social equity, empowerment and inclusion of women with regard to land rights and its entitlements.

**Activities undertaken:**

WPC with the help of Oxfam India, organized an Alliance building meeting, on 18th September 2012, in Oxfam India office where more than eight INGO and NGO’s were present. The meeting was focused on the overall women’s access to and control over land. The discussions were centered on the need to build an alliance on women land rights in order to deliberate on women farmer entitlement bill 2011; and to highlight the best practices of women farmers across the country and felicitate them at Panchayat level as well as at national level. An e-group has been created as an initiative of this meeting. This e-group will enable WPC to share all the necessary information related to women land rights and farmers.

WPC is currently collecting case studies to capture and document the best practices related to women farmers. For this purpose WPC is networking with different media groups and organizations such as Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR), Amar Ujala and Oneworld South Asia.

Under this project, a Media Fellowship will be given to some journalists to document the successful women farmers’ cases and feature in the print media. Orientation training will be organized at the beginning of the fellowship period to orient fellows on women farmers’ issues.

WPC has also developed Q&A for Hindu Succession Amendment Act 2005, for trainers at the grassroots level and Q&A booklet on Land Rights and Policies for trainers. These IEC booklets have been developed in three languages: Hindi and English.
EMPHASIS is a regional project implemented by CARE. This project is a 5-year project (August 2009 - July 2014). EMPHASIS is implemented in three countries of Bangladesh, India and Nepal under respective CARE Country Office Teams and partner NGOs. The central feature of the project is evidence-based advocacy on prevention of HIV with its purpose being to address and reduce the vulnerabilities to HIV & AIDS among the mobile populations’ crossing Bangladesh and Nepal to and from India. The project pilots a cross-border approach to increase access to prevention and treatment services; to strengthen capacity of civil society, government institutions and policy makers to address the needs of mobile populations; and to create an enabling environment for safer mobility, stay and repatriation.

WPC is CARE’s Strategic Advocacy Partner under this project. WPC supports the project with advocacy strategies by providing policy briefings, evidence based advocacy with key stakeholders, develop methods for assessment of advocacy & alliance building efforts at source and destinations, networking, collaborations, communication resources and direct interventions to address the health and HIV & AIDS related human rights and access of cross border mobile population at source and destinations towards HIV/AIDS, Violence Against Women and other vulnerabilities within the legal framework and the International commitment of the countries.

As part of this partnership SAP has completed a set of activities during the time period of 1st June - 31st August 2012. The activities undertaken within the stated time period includes WPC’s participation in the EMPHASIS Annual Review workshop in Bangkok which was held on the 4th-7th June 2012; a field visit to the partner NGO’s implementing the EMPHASIS project was undertaken by SAP staff in the Delhi NCR region on the 10th and 11th of July 2012.

The purpose of the visit was to understand the ground realities of the problems and challenges faced by the migrant population, especially women migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh; a meeting with International Organization for Migration (on the 1st August
2012) and Dr. P.M Nair, Director General, National Disaster Response Force & Civil Defence (on 28th September 2012) was carried out to discuss the issues concerning women migrants and also to learn of the laws and policies that the country has for its migrant population and to also inquire about the problems and challenges faced at the border by migrants and also by the border authorities.

4. ‘Empowering Girls by Addressing Child Marriage’ with support from Ford Foundation

To address the important issue and work towards elimination of child marriage, WomenPowerConnect with the support of Ford Foundation in undertaking a three year project in three states; 1) Bihar 2) Jharkhand and 3) Madhya Pradesh through an innovative, civic-driven and public accountability approach to social change. The focus would be on;

1. Ensuring that the gaps in the PCMA 2006 are addressed and related laws, such as those regulating dowry and prohibiting trafficking, are implemented by creating conducive environment for empowering girls and women to benefit from the existing women-friendly laws and policies.
2. Facilitating the much needed mindset and attitudinal change towards child marriage with a focus on girl children.

The project seeks to generate positive actions in communities that would trigger significant reduction in the incidences of child marriage, and enable district and community-monitoring systems (mechanisms) at various levels to sustain these actions. Additionally, the project will pay due attention to highlighting and assessing the unique challenges related to the practice of child marriage within different communities and caste groups.

As part of this project WPC and its partners have carried out interventions at national, state and community level. As part of advocacy, the strategy has been to provide information on ground realities and advocating for necessary policies, administrative interventions, preparing and submitting well researched advocacy documents, inviting concerned ministers/officials and elected representatives for state/national level workshop, conducting media workshops, analyzing the state budget and advocating for allocation of funds in the budget for specifically addressing the issue of child marriage. The approach at the local level has been to go through local government functionaries and elected representatives.

With regard to the Community Awareness and Mobilization, the activities by the partner have been predominantly through inclusive partnership building and outreach methods of education and sensitization of the key stakeholders, such as the youth, religious leaders, opinion leaders, local governance and forming community pressure groups to keep a watch on the community and to influence the mindset change in the society.

Baseline survey has been conducted in the 85 project villages which will serve as an Evaluation tool, whereby an assessment can be made regarding the effectiveness of the project activities in reducing the number of child marriages in the project states.
Other Activities

- **Training program on: Gender Sensitization** at Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)
  WPC conducted a 2 hour training program on “Gender sensitization” at CISF on the 21st July 2012, New Delhi.

- **Gender Equality at the Work Place to Improve Enterprise Competitiveness- Corporate Initiatives.**
  As part of international commitment to mainstreaming gender, the Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) have been adopting policies and practices to address the different levels of needs of women employees. To facilitate this process, SCOPE drafted a guideline for promoting gender equality in PSEs in 2000 with an objective to further develop and implement gender policy in each PSE. In this context, a workshop was organized by SCOPE on August 22, 2012 in collaboration with ILO; and WomenPowerConnect (WPC) as resource partners for the formulation of gender policies at PSEs.
  The workshop was followed by presentations on “Gender Equality at the workplace and Role of Employers”; Gender Issues; Presentation on key findings of the study (carried out by WPC); and Group Work on New Gender Guidelines/Action Plan.
  There was also an Open Discussion on Prevailing Gender Policy & Practices for Developing New Gender Guidelines; a Group Work on Shared Commitment for New Gender Guidelines/Action Plan.
  Some of the recommendations which were raised out of the group work and discussions are as follows:
  - Maternity leave should be uniform for 180 days as well as some days should be granted for Paternity leave. At times of pregnancies there should be provisions for preferential work profile, non hazardous and light physical work for women.
  - 2 years child care leave should be provided for; one year for men, one year for women where both spouses are working with the PSEs
  - Flexi timings/ working from home should be allowed for women employees.
  - Strict legal compliance e.g. crèche facilities, canteen, restroom, sexual harassment committee should be adhered to.
  - MOU of the company should include implementation of gender policy, gender sensitization program, and gender sensitivity trainings.
  - Career path growth especially skill training for women is important to note.
  - Mandatory positioning of women in Board levels either through DPE/ legislation, mandatory representation in board, recruitment body and interview panel.
  - Nominations for foreign assignment training, Induction training should be specifically targeted towards women employees.
• Transportation facility options should be provided especially for women employees.
• Posting preferences to women is given in several PSEs. We’d like to see reverse posting preference, where men are posted to the towns/ place of job of their partners/ wives.
Migration

As we realize, categorically there are two factors of migration – the push factor being such that people leave their geographic location due to internal problems and the pull factor where people are attracted by the opportunities being offered in another place. Aspects such as jobs, education, safety, living standards are most common reasons for migration efforts mostly witnessed.

There has been a steady increase of female migrants over the last five decades. According to the UNPD data, the stock of female migrants has actually grown faster than the stock of male migrants in the most important receiving countries, industrialized as well as developing. According to the ILO, women now constitute more than half of the migration population worldwide and between 70 and 80 per cent of the migration population in some countries. While migration can lead to female empowerment this does not always occur. Women’s opportunities to migrate legally have been more limited than men’s often because legal; official recruitment efforts are frequently aimed at male-dominated employment in construction and agriculture. Women are more exposed to forced labour and sexual exploitation than men and also are more likely to accept precarious working conditions and poorly paid work. They often work in gender-segregated and unregulated sectors of the economy, such as domestic work, entertainment and sex industries.

Initially international migration was a male phenomenon, however today the gender distribution of migration is fairly equal, however each geographical locations triggering migration are different. More than 2 million Filipina women migrate to countries such as Singapore and the U.A.E mainstreaming maid-service related jobs. Whereas, Thai women account to more than 80,000 plying in the flesh trade in neighboring countries. In Pakistan, it was discovered that in a 1998 survey, women recorded more internal migration than men and these movements were marriage prompted migration. And China experienced internal as well as international migration due to family bonds and relations.

Migration and Women

Women face many issues during the process of migration and immigration. There have been many notices of tormenting journeys made by migrants, which have led to great suffering and death. Traumatic travels made in unventilated trucks and containers through the deserts or at sea already take a weight of effort and survival from women. As many as 250 people die in border crossings into the United States between the US and Mexico every year. As they experience such journeys, crossing borders is not as easy either. Women face acts of xenophobia and racist violence on a daily basis at many border immigration centers. In a resolution on the Human Rights of Migrants in 2003, the UN Human Rights Commission expressed its deep
concern “at the manifestations of violence, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance and inhuman and degrading treatment against migrants, especially women and children, in different parts of the world.”

Though both men and women migrate generally for similar reasons, women often have a very different migration experience. During the migration process, they are frequently at a much higher risk of gender discrimination, violence, human trafficking and sexual abuse. Usually during arrival in the host country, they often are pressed to certain gender specific occupations such as working as prostitutes or employees in sweatshops, according to UNFPA. Women are particularly vulnerable as the spread of HIV/AIDS is higher among migrants than non-migrant populations and therefore women who are sexually abused at immigration channels are infected.

Women continue to face extreme difficulties in many countries during the immigration process. Reasons can range from general violence, racial discrimination, and even a male dominated superiority complex of host countries. It is essential for governing bodies and the society as a whole to identify such problems and implement control factors.
Inception
VASAVYA MAHILA MANDALI (VMM) is a non-profit secular voluntary organization that was established in the year 1969. VMM is inspired by the Gandhian ideology of truth, nonviolence and humanism and works in the rural as well as urban areas of Andhra Pradesh. VMM works with a vision to promote comprehensive social, economic and political development for women, children and youth in vulnerable situations, thereby empowering communities in A.P. to improve their quality of life, and build a better civil society in India.

Focus of VMM
The focus of VMM in the initial years was on adult education with gender inclusivity and skill development for women. However over the four decades VMM has ascended to address many issues related to women in life cycle, such as health, nutrition, economic development, education, human rights and environment.

VMM: Partner of WPC network
WPC as a network body has given VMM the opportunity to participate in various meetings at the National level and State level. Through these meetings VMM has been able to learn of the various issues and policies that concerns women in India, thus enabling VMM to include such issues and policies into our ongoing
programmes. This has paved ways for VMM to strengthen and empower women coming from different backgrounds and status through various forms of awareness making and information giving.

As a focal point to Women Power Connect in Andhra Pradesh, VMM conducted a Southern Regional Level Meet “Garima: Promoting Dignity of Women and Girls. A review of policies, legislations and programs” on the 14th of February 2011, in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh; and a “State Level Seminar on Strategizing to Effectively Address Concerns Faced by Women in Andhra Pradesh” on the 5th August 2011 in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.
On 17th July 2012, Mrinal Gore passed away. With her demise, an era of women freedom fighters with feminist sensitivities in praxis is over.

Inspired by Quit India Movement under leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, 14 year old young girl Mrinal became active in the freedom movement. Drawn to political and social causes, she gave up a promising career in medicine in order to organise the poorest and most powerless.

She married her comrade, Shri Keshav Gore and when he died at a young age in 1958, she founded Keshav Gore Smarak Bhavan which provided democratic platform to progressive forces for debate and discussion, meetings and public gatherings, documentation and institutional base for Samajwadi Mahila Sabha, Bombay Nurses Association, Anganwadi Workers Union, Swadhar and innumerable issue-based action fronts involving liberals, socialists and left groups.

In the sixties she worked as corporator and then as legislator. Her agitations were always related to basic issues — water, kerosene, inflation — and they were always fierce. But there was no violence ever, neither in her actions nor in her words. Even friends weren’t spared, if she was convinced they were wrong. She was revered and respected by the ministers and chief ministers of her time.

Making of a Legendary Political Persona:

In the early seventies, she along with her coworkers formed Yuva Kranti Dal that fought against vested interests in rural, urban and tribal areas as well as caste based oppression, injustice and violence. She believed in transparency and social accountability in public life.

She brought the issue of safe drinking water in the political agenda of local self government body of Mumbai and earned a title of “Pani Wali Bai”. A political reformer by instinct, Mrinaltai helped to set up in September 1972 the Anti-Price Rise Committee, which mobilised the largest-ever turnout of women on the streets ever seen since the Independence movement. At the same time, Mrinaltai also worked within the Socialist Party and outside, to get the government to focus on drought in rural Maharashtra.

The year 1975 was an eventful one for Mrinal Gore. It saw Indira Gandhi's government impose an internal Emergency and suspend the constitutional rights of the people. Mrinaltai went underground to guide the protests against the Emergency. She was arrested in December that year and placed initially under solitary confinement. Once the Emergency was withdrawn in 1977, she was elected on a Janata Party ticket to Parliament, winning by the highest margin of votes in the entire state of Maharashtra.

She supported renaming of Marathwada University to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathada University. When I led a team to 48 riot torn villages in Marathwada in connection with renaming issue and our team
prepared report on atrocities committed on Dalits, she suggested my name to several social organizations and journals so that our report got due publicity.

In 1979, when I was staying at Borivali, we had an acute problem of water and transport, we invited Mrinaltai and we started getting supply of water and later on bus service also. She was always sure of herself and her action. She made rapid appraisal of the ground reality, surveyed pros-n-cons of the scenario, collected documentary evidences and acted after doing lot of homework. Her demand of community based day care centers for working women’s children was preceded by survey of working women who reported that it was extremely difficult to carry infants in overcrowded suburban trains.

**Champion of Women’s Rights**

Since 1977, every year women’s rights activists of all hue choose a common theme for commemoration of March 8. Mrinaltai was always there. Now we will miss her the most on International women’s day. Whether it was in 1980-anti rape struggles, in 1981-movement against domestic violence, in 1982-solidarity and starting of community kitchens for Textile workers who were on strike, in 1983-Ant dowry movement, in 1984-Dharmandhata Virodhi Mahila Kruti Samiti (women’s Front against Communalism), in 1985-Campaign for Housing rights (Nagari Nivara Sangharsh Samiti), in 1986-fight against draconian population policy, in 1987-campaign against Sati, in 1988 introduction of bill for Regulation of Pre Natal Diagnostic Test Act; Mrinaltai took active interest in the discussion and participated in action along with her colleagues. At times, she invited us to discuss the technical details of new issues such as amniocentesis, legal reforms, and harmful contraceptives so that she could effectively argue the points in the legislative assembly.

The 1980s found her working with the emerging feminist groups and participating actively in protests against rape and dowry, caste atrocities, sex selection and communalism. A natural organiser, Mrinaltai employed a large spectrum of protest action to get the issue across - from street marches to sit-in and fasts. Not only did she set up a support centre for women survivors of domestic violence, she founded a workers' association - the Shramjeevi Mahila Sangh - expressly for women employees and played pivotal role in getting 65 acres of land for building housing complex for evacuated pavement dwellers during 1980s.

Till late 1980s, she used to commute by local train in women’s compartment. If trains were crowded, she would stand quietly in train without making fuss. Once, I saw her boarding the train in which I was sitting with my 5 year daughter in my lap. Out of respect for Mrinaltai, I got up. My daughter, Lara asked me, “Why are you getting up? I told her, “We must give seat to Mrinaltai.” Lara said, “Is she your sister?” I told her, “Mrinaltai is every woman’s elder sister.” All women in the compartment started smiling.

The first ever bill in the country on sex-selective abortions of female fetuses was moved by Mrinaltai as MLA in a Nagpur session of the Maharashtra Assembly in 1987.

I received Citation and Memento from Mrianltai in a huge function of social activists on 2nd April, 2010. For me, it is most valuable award in my life.

**Secular Humanism**
While talking about secular humanism of Mrinaltai, Ramlath, a feminist activist states, “I had met Mrinal Gore few years ago in her house for a photo shoot. Since she always had a few activists by her side, I asked would it be possible not to have anyone in the room while doing the photo shoot. She laughed and took me to a room upstairs and asked me to close the door. I must have spent some 45 minutes with her....She became a lot more relaxed .... started talking about less serious stuff.... asked me about photography/lighting, wanted to know about the light- meter I was using and of course, some personal questions...during our conversation I mentioned about the problems women like me face while finding a house in Bombay because of my Muslim identity, she said she had no idea brokers in Bombay had started asking for passports /pan cards and other documents in order to establish one's religious identity. She immediately called someone and asked whether he could help me find an apartment to rent....one could see pain in her eyes when she talked about the greed and hatred in this city....”

The huge Nagari Niwara Parishad Project in Goregaon East is a living memorial for Gore and her work. She persuaded the state government to offer land it had acquired under the Urban Land Ceiling Act to the really poor and needy. Local politicians who feared that Gore will get a readymade vote bank delayed the project. Yet, when the homes were ready after two decades, they were still the most affordable. They were not big flats, but self-contained spacious units built neatly atop Dindoshi Hills. While the younger generation may not remember this, their parents will remain grateful that they could finally own a home in Mumbai, thanks only to Gore.

Reverence of Feminists for Mrinaltai

Veteran feminist Ammu Abraham (of Women’s Centre-Mumbai) who, like Mrinaltai, gave up a promising career in medicine to plunge full time into organising the poor and the marginalized in the 1970s, has this to say about Mrinaltai, “I remember her with affection. As one of the activists in Mumbai who met her at various meetings at the office near Mantralay, I interacted with her quite a lot, on March 8th leaflets, Maharashtra State Women’s Commission and other campaigns. While there was a lot of common ground between us, we did not always agree entirely on issues, but she was never one to take that personally. One of the most generous spirits associated with the women’s movement in Mumbai and Maharashtra has passed away. Hard to say goodbye.”

I had known Mrinaltai from my college days in the early 1970s and she inspired us, social activists of Vadodara to start Anti Price Rise Women’s Committee I 1974 when I was an undergraduate student. When I relocated to Mumbai in 1977 and was active in the united front of women’s organisations, I had to visit Mrinaltai’s residence-cum office regularly for preparation, translation, cyclostyling, posting of circulars, resolutions and leaflets. She always welcomed me with warm smile. While working, if I told her that I wanted to go out for short time; she would immediately retort, “I know, you are hungry.” And she would announce, “Make poha, Vibhuti is starved.” And I would get poha and sometimes Jelebi also. I was so touched by her hospitality, sensitivity, generosity of heart, open door policy and decent sense of humour.

Mrinaltai always respected collective wisdom of women’s movement. She invited young feminists to discuss contemporary issues and introduced best practices of new groups in her organization. To provide institutional support to women in distress, she started Swadhar in mid 1980s at Keshav Gore Smarak Pratisthan formed by her after her husband who was a socialist leader and died at a young age. Here she provided child care centre, library for poor students, counseling centre and meeting place for all progressive forces. She was the first one to launch struggle against sexual harassment of nurses in hospitals and formed trade union of nurses under leadership of Kamaltai Desai.
Prof. Lakshmi Lingam, Deputy Director, TISS and member of Consultative Committee of Sophia Centre for women’s Studies and Development avers, “Mrinaltai is a truly powerful inspiring woman. She came across as a person with determination in thought and tenderness in the heart. She spoke in feminist meetings whether it is the sex determination tests, violence against women, 73rd & 74th amendments, women’s policies of the Government or the support for working women, with so much of clarity and sense of humor. She truly represented to many of us a person who had the ability to straddle the old and the new and reach across generations with sense of sisterhood and modesty. I did not have any personal rapport with her, but met her in various meetings and shared a hand shake or a glance of acknowledgement. These are impressions that will stay with us for a life time and also provide a beacon as to how we conduct ourselves with fellow sister travelers in the movement. Long live Mrinaltai and her like!”

**Legendary Leader with Mass Appeal**

In 1988, her sixtieth birth anniversary programme attracted thousands of social activists, trade union workers, women activists with their children. By then, her health had deteriorated due to cancer and all of us who supported her work had made contribution to purchase a car for Mrinaltai.

In 2002, we invited her to inaugurate Workshop on Sexual Harassment at workplace and Round Table on Women Empowerment Policy, 2001. In 2003, Mrinaltai invited me at Swadhar to conduct a session on Gender Audit of Budgets. In 2007, when she came for Mahila Milan programme at at TISS, Mrinaltai had become really weak. But she was as spirited as ever. She attended rally of women’s organizations in solidarity with the victims of rape and massacre of Dalit girl, Priyanka Bhootmange and her family members in Kharalanji.

Mrinaltai was a principled politician, honest to the core and great organizer. She stuck out her neck in the midst of adverse circumstances because courage of conviction. Her name was synonymous with any fight for justice and social accountability in public life. She provided her visionary leadership in the area of political struggles, civic amenities, dalit rights, women’s rights, housing issues, Narmada Bachao and innumerable social movements of the marginalized and voiceless sections of society. She was a politician with genuine concern for masses. Her towering personality became more affable due to her humility and love for humanity.

The chairperson of the Greenpeace International, Lalita Ramdas avers, “Mrinal Tai epitomised a generation of feminists who were able to mobilise around an extraordinary range of social and political issues, and thus command attention in mainstream debates. As women and feminists we need to be far more vocal and visible in the public, and political domains and dialogues than we are today.”

Mrinaltai always encouraged women to be self dependent. For her, the concerns of Dalits, women, workers, farmers, and tribals were indivisible and demanded a holistic approach. Her politics, consequently, was always inclusive rather than divisive. This was why she could win the affections of diverse sections of people and come to be universally called "Mrinal-tai", or elder sister. As veteran feminist and recipient of coveted award “Daughter of Maharashtra” at the hands of Mrinaltai, Manisha Gupte states, “She lives on, especially through her tireless commitment to the people residing in the slums of Mumbai city, and her empathy with women struggling to survive through sky-rocketing prices of household commodities.”

Mrinaltai will remain a constant source of inspiration and role model for many generations of social activists.
CM promises land to all landless tribals

Times of India, 29th September 2012

Bhubaneshwar: The state government on Friday said it would provide land to all landless tribals living in tribal sub-plan (TSP) areas of the state within five years, official sources said. Addressing a meeting of the state-level Tribes Advisory Council (TAC), which comprises tribal political leaders and social activists, chief minister Naveen Patnaik said, "My government has decided to provide land to all landless tribals in TSP blocks over the next 5 years (2016-17) covering all 19,016 villages, so that no tribal family in TSP area would remain landless." About a quarter of the state's 4.19 crore people are tribals belonging to 62 different groups.

In Odisha, 118 of the total 314 blocks come under TSP. The TSP areas, spread over 12 districts, is more or less co-terminus with the schedules area in the state. Official sources said the government has so far given 1465.18 acre of land to 33,090 homestead-less tribal families. Sources said the remaining homestead-less tribal households would be allotted land in a phased manner covering 7,136 villages in the first phase, 3970 villages in the second phase and 7910 villages in the third phase.

“We have already begun work on the project. A land coordinator will be appointed through NGOs for every three villages in the TSP blocks to expedite the land distribution process," said secretary, ST and SC development, Santosh Sarangi.

At the meeting, TAC members, who include ST and SC development minister L B Himrika, MPs Hemananda Biswal and Jayaram Pangi and 15 MLAs, expressed displeasure over certain provisions of the Orissa Reservation of Vacancies (ORV) Act and sought amendment, sources said. Talasara legislator Prafulla Majhi (Cong) said to protest the interest of tribal youths the law should be amended forthwith.

Official sources said some TAC members want amendment of the ORV Act and introduce reservation for contractual employees. Te members also demanded filling up of all backlog vacancies expeditiously. Further, the government representatives told the council that to increase enrollment and reduce dropout of ST students, over 2000 hostels having 100 seats each have already been made functional, while another 1400 hostels are under different stages of construction. The government would open six new B.Ed. colleges in Kandhamal, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Raygada, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh districts to allow more ST and SC students to undergo B.Ed. training and address the trained teacher deficit in the tribal areas, sources added.

Sexual Harassment at workplace Bill passed

Times of India, 4th September 2012

New Delhi: The Lok Sabha on Monday passed the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2010, without discussion amid uproar over 'coalgate' scam.

The Bill, introduced by women and child development minister Krishna Tirath and approved by the Union Cabinet in 2010, covers women workers in the unorganized sector that employ less than 10 people where service rules are not applied. This includes domestic helps.
Sexual Harassment may mean loss of business licence

Times of India, 4th September 2012

Bill makes it mandatory for all workplaces to have internal redress mechanism

An important bill that seeks to protect women, including domestic workers, from sexual harassment at workplace was passed in the Lok Sabha on Monday, even as the House witnessed din and disruption over coal blocks allocation for the ninth day.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2010, was passed without discussion, as BJP members stood in the well, shouting slogans demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister over coalgate.

According to the bill, piloted by Women and Child Development Minister Krishna Tirath, sexual harassment includes any unwelcome act or behaviour such as physical contact and advances, a demand or request for sexual favours or making sexually coloured remarks or showing pornography. The acts or behaviour — direct or by implication — will also include any other physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature.

Non-compliance with the provisions of the law will be punishable with a fine of up to Rs 50,000. Repeated violations may lead to higher penalties and cancellation of licence or registration to do business.

The bill defines domestic worker as a woman employed to do household work for remuneration. A Parliamentary Standing Committee, which examined the bill, held the firm view that preventive aspects had to be strictly in line with the Supreme Court guidelines in the 1997 Vishaka case. The judgment not only defines sexual harassment at workplace but also lays down guidelines for its prevention and disciplinary action.

The bill makes it mandatory for all offices, hospitals, institutions and other workplaces to have an internal complaints redress mechanism.

The Lok Sabha passed by voice vote, amid pandemonium, a bill to bifurcate the civil services cadre of Manipur and Tripura — The North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Amendment Bill, 2011. At present, the two States have a joint cadre of the Indian Administrative Service, the Indian Police Service and the Indian Forest Service.

Tripura raised the demand for bifurcation in 2004. A meeting in January 2009 of the Department of Personnel and Training, the Home Ministry and the Ministry of Environment and Forests — which are in charge of the all-India services — recommended that the cadre be bifurcated. The Centre considered the proposal after consultations with all stakeholders.

The other Bill passed by the Lok Sabha, without discussion, is to expand the National Highways Authority of India.

At present, the NHAI consists of a Chairman, up to five full-time members and up to four part-time members. The National Highways Authority of India (Amendment) Bill, 2011, seeks to increase the strength to six full-time members and six part-time members, besides the Chairman. At least two of the part-time members should be non-government professionals with knowledge of, or experience in, financial management, transport planning or any other relevant discipline.
Role of women in agriculture highlighted
Times of India, 8th August 2012

Varanasi: A seminar on 'Model women parliament on addressing agricultural workers concerns' was under the aegis of Yuva Grama Vikas Samiti, Varanasi, Youth for Action, Hyderabad and department of social work, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth (MGKV) on Tuesday.

Chipko Movement leader Padma Vibushan Chandi Prasad Bhatt said that women played a major role in agricultural sector, but they were not given the status of farmers. YFA president E Venkatramayya said that many countries had formulated satellite account to identify the contribution of men and women in different fields. India should also develop such account.

The programme was presided over by the director of Nehru Study Centre Satish Rai. As many as six women were felicitated for their outstanding works in different fields.

Rajasthan boy refuses to marry minor, moves court
NDTV, 22nd July 2012

Jodhpur: An 18-year-old boy approached a court in Jodhpur against his parents, who he claimed were forcing him to marry a minor girl against his wish, police said on Saturday. Complying with the court orders, police on Saturday slapped restraining orders on the parents of the boy as well as those of the girl and warned them not to go ahead with the child marriage.

"Prakash filed a complaint with the chief judicial magistrate in Jodhpur on Friday that his parents were forcing him to marry a girl. The girl was 16 years old. The boy said that as both of them were minors, the marriage was illegal," said a police officer.

Prakash is a resident of Maderna Colony in Jodhpur city.

The officer added that the court took cognizance of the complaint and asked police to serve restraining orders against the parents of the girl and the boy.

"Acting on the court's directions, we have legally restrained the parents from organising the marriage that was to take place July 22," said the officer.

"As per the orders, if the parents still forced the children to get married, they will be booked under sections of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act and arrested," the officer added.

Why Rekha from Jodhpur is a bonafide braveheart
NDTV, 19th June 2012

Jodhpur: Rekha Kumari's bedroom is like that of any 20-year-old. She has college books scattered around, a reminder of the college exams she has just taken. Dressed in an onion pink salwaar-kameez, she still appears tense. It's not the results of her 2nd year BA exams that worry her. She has received threats from others in her home town, Peepar, in Rajasthan's Jodhpur district.

Rekha decision to reject her child marriage has provoked hostility. Her parents support her decision to move court and have her marriage annulled. When she was five, her grandfather got her engaged to a nine-year-old boy, related to a man he knew. Rekha was married to him in 1997. She has met him just twice since then.
Rekha says she cannot imagine a life with him. He is a school dropout, and rides buses as an assistant to the driver. "He drinks a lot and he's constantly threatening my daughter that he will not only abduct Rekha but even her mother. And since he is hardly educated he has no professional future," says Rekha's father, Ram Lal Chaudhary. "When I go to college, he follows me, abuses me and says he will get me abducted if I don't marry him," she says.

It's not just their incompatibility that is a matter of concern. Despite strict laws, child marriages continue to take place in this part of Rajasthan; families are expected to honour them.

The local panchayat is pressuring Rekha's family to give up its court case. "We have warned the people in the village not to pressurize this family. We have specifically warned the boy and his family not to try to pressurize Rekha or her family. Despite our warnings, if anyone indulges in any kind of criminal activity to force them, we will take severe action," says Om Prakash, the head of the local police station.

Woman earns panchayat's wrath for annulling child marriage
IBN Live, 12th June 2012

Jodhpur, June 12 (PTI) A 23-year-old woman, who was a victim of child marriage, today moved the Rajasthan High Court alleging that a caste panchayat has threatened to expel her family from the village and slapped a fine of Rs nine lakh on them after she tried to get her marriage annulled.

On the plea of Shobha Chaudhary, the high court has issued notices to the Secretary (Home) and Jodhpur Police Commissioner to ensure her safety and that of her family. Shobha, a resident of Rajwa village of Keru, about 25 km from here, was married as a nine-year-old in May 1998 and only lived for a couple of days in her marital house. Inspired by Laxmi Sargara, a child bride, who had taken an initiative to annul her marriage on the day of Akha Teej, a day infamous for child marriages in Rajasthan, Shobha decided to follow her example. "It was not my decision to get married. The boy is hardly able to put his initials whereas I am a graduate, a computer literate working in an institute and preparing to do my B.Ed. I am also preparing for state services. I am a grown up now and can decide my fate," Shobha said. "She approached us some time back expressing her willingness to annul her marriage, which was solemnized when she was just nine years old and studying in Class 3rd," said Indu Chopra, Deputy Director, Women & Children Development Department. But her step drew the wrath of the caste panchayat, which threatened to ostracise her family and imposed a penalty of Rs 9 lakh on them. "We were then left with no alternative but to seek the court's interference," said Kriti Bharti, a rehabilitation psychologist.

Justice Sandeep Mehta of Rajasthan High Court has ordered authorities to provide protection to Shibha and produce an inquiry report against the seven persons mentioned by the girl in the court, her aides said. Meanwhile, Shobha's husband could not be reached for his reaction. "We had a joint counselling session with him, but he disappeared later and has been intraceable perhaps on account of the pressure from the village panchayat," Kriti said. The court has also appointed a lawyer Rekha Borana as amicus curie and has listed the matter for hearing on 4 July.
As the world is becoming more connected, its relationship with information is changing in a fundamental way.

Three nations once divided by the KLI (now a common technology) can see themselves as part of a common market, while people from the northeast of India follow news and comments from different sources.

The incident suggests that the role of information, however widely circulated and easily accessible, can be used to create a certain type of ignorance that can serve as a source of advantage in a larger sense. In so far as the world is divided into parts, the information is divided into different parts, and this division is in the same way as the division of information.

The incident suggests that the role of information, however widely circulated and easily accessible, can be used to create a certain type of ignorance that can serve as a source of advantage in a larger sense. In so far as the world is divided into parts, the information is divided into different parts, and this division is in the same way as the division of information.
5L refugees in Assam India’s biggest internal exodus?

Dark Conspiracy Theories Do The Rounds In Camps

Kokrajhar: There are just three people in Salam Choudhury’s house. He, his wife of eight years and a little daughter who he sayspuh her in 20 years. “But,” he adds, forcing a smile on his face that his five years, “We can’t think of a single day without them.” In the third week of July, he went away for two weeks to his relative’s place for safety. “That killed him,” he adds, looking at a few others in a refugee camp in Kokrajhar crowded around. Then, looking at the families of those who have left, he says knowing.

NORTHEAST BURNING

FULL COVERAGE: P14 & 15
➤ Fear or infiltration? P15
➤ BJR blames intel lapse, P15

A view in Digtal, “Kinnu-chhillo (It was destined to happen).”

What Choudhury doesn’t understand, however, is how so many people materialized almost overnight in refugee protection centres that have popped up all across Assam’s three districts hit recently by communal violence. Kokrajhar, Chillagh and Tilil.

The unprecedented magnitude of displacement — 45 lakhs, to be precise — by the government’s own reckoning has not only taken people by surprise, but triggered a host of dark, insidious conspiracy theories. The estimates of 5 lakhs is indeed correct. We could be seeing the first signs of the biggest refugee movements within the country in modern India. Certainly the flood of refugees in 1947 and 1981 would have been larger, but that marks a human flow across, not within borders.

Confusion as govt orders limit of 5 SMSs a day

Shinde rings Malik for action against 8 websites

Mumbai: Mobile users were in confusion on Sunday, as rumours went viral on whether the government would extend its SMS ban to all districts that have been extended to a cap of five messages per day. Some said the cap was only for prepaid customers, while others spoke of getting messages from their operator mentioning a Related report, P15
Government considering salary for housewives from husbands

It’s impossible to implement

A necessary and welcome policy

For decades, housewives have been doing demanding work for which they are not paid. The gender imbalance in wages for such work is one of the reasons why women are paid less than men. Even in Western countries, women are paid less than men for the same work. In India, the situation is even worse. The government should consider introducing a scheme to pay housewives a monthly salary.

The times view

M.K. Pugazhenthi

The government is considering a proposal to make housewives from husbands. This is a welcome policy as it will help to address the gender imbalance in wages. The proposal will ensure that women are paid for the work they do. However, the government should also ensure that the scheme is implemented properly. The government should also consider providing training and education to women so that they can have a better understanding of their rights.

The counter view

M.K. Pugazhenthi

The proposal to pay housewives a monthly salary is a welcome step towards addressing the gender imbalance in wages. However, the government should also ensure that the scheme is implemented properly. The government should also consider providing training and education to women so that they can have a better understanding of their rights.