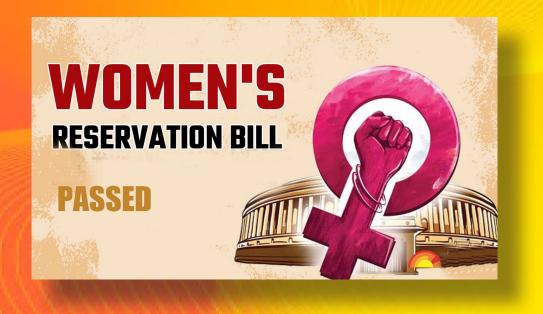
Roshni

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2023





ALL INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

Half-yearly Conference July , 2023



Office bearers and the Chief Guest in the Inaugural session of Half-yearly session in Balasore



Presiden Mrs Kalyani Raj & Vice President Mrs Gopamudra with AIWC HO staff





Participants at the Conference

Zonal Meet of North Zone, Pathankot September 23, 2023





President Mrs Kalyani Raj & Zonal Organiser Mrs Sumi Chopra

Meeting in progress



Participants of the meeting

ROSHNI

Journal of the All India Women's Conference **IULY-SEPETEMBER 2023**

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ROSHNI Editorial and Business Office:

All India Women's Conference

6, Bhagwan Dass Road, New Delhi-110 001 Phone: 011-43389100, 011-43389101 E-mail: aiwc.roshni@gmail.com

Website: www.aiwc.org.in

The views expressed in the articles published in Roshni are those of the authors only and not of All India Women's Conference

Subscription Rates:

Domestic: Yearly: Rs. 250.00 Quarterly: Rs. 70.00

Printed at: IG Printers Pvt Ltd, 104, DSIDC,

Okhla Phase-I, New Delhi-110020

Regd No. 26969/74

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From the Editor's desk...

Dear sisters,

A momentous touchdown on the lunar surface, or, to put it differently, the launch of lunar mission Chandrayaan-3, was a historic moment for all women, as the women scientists played a crucial role in ensuring its success, and without their contribution, the achievement was just not possible. Even the landing spot on the moon was named "Shiv Shakti," a name derived from the concept of feminine energy in Hindu mythology and a tribute to the women scientists who worked on the mission.

The world was high in praise for these accomplished women scientists at ISRO, and everyone acknowledged their indispensable contributions to the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the Lunar South Pole. The acclaim came for these women from across the world as the mission envisioned their legacy as a beacon of inspiration for generations yet to come, igniting the flames of curiosity and ambition. With this notable moment, there is no space remaining where women have not hit the big time, be it the Earth or outer space.

But, within the political arena, there is still an underrepresentation of women in legislative bodies. *India is among the bottom group of nations in the world in terms of representation of women in* legislative bodies. Women's representation has always been less than 10% in Lok Sabha and 5% in the State Assemblies.

This democratic deficiency poses a significant hindrance to the attainment of rapid economic development. Consequently, it becomes increasingly imperative to accord utmost importance to this issue, aiming to fortify a political decision-making process that is participatory, responsive, inclusive, equitable, and accountable.

The newly passed Women's Reservation Bill, also known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, aims to bring gender parity into the political domain by encouraging more women to participate in politics. As per the 128th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2023, a third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies are proposed to be reserved for women.

You will get to know about the nuances of this issue in the article by Dr Manju Kak, secretary general of AIWC, and a deeper insight into the bill by Smt Jyotika Kalra, a former member of the Human Rights Commission and an advocate on record in the Supreme Court of India. Apart from that, there are many informative write-ups and reports on innovative programs by our esteemed members and the AIWC branches.

I wish you an enjoyable read and look forward to your contributions and comments for Roshni!

Meenakshi Kumar **Editor** July-September 2023



Women's Reservation Bill

Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam

by Dr Manju Kak, Secretary General, AIWC

You have all read the headlines and are aware that, for the last 27 years or so, this bill has been in demand. The issue of political reservation for women in India has a deep-rooted history dating back to the days of the Indian national movement. In 1931, prominent leaders Begum Shah Nawaz and Sarojini Naidu wrote a letter to the British Prime Minister advocating for the absolute equality of political status for Indian women. The letter read," To seek any form of preferential treatment would be to violate the integrity of the universal demand of Indian women for absolute equality of political status.

Fast forward to 1971, when the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in India highlighted women's dwindling political representation in the country.

The National Perspective Plan for Women recommended reservations for women at all levels of governance, from panchayat to parliament. Consequently, the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution were enacted, mandating one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions and one-third of chairperson offices at various levels, with additional reservations for scheduled caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in these seats.

In the simplest terms, the Women's Reservation Bill has sought to reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women, addressing the underrepresentation of women in Indian politics. Since then, demand for the same in Parliament has been made. Now we have this historical legislation.

Highlights of the Bill

· The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies. The allocation of reserved seats shall be determined by such authority as prescribed by Parliament.

- · One third of the total number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be reserved for women of those groups in the Lok Sabha and the legislative assemblies.
- · Reserved seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the state or union territory.
- · Reservation of seats for women shall cease to exist 15 years after the commencement of this Amendment Act.

Key Issues and Analysis

- There are divergent views on the reservation policy. Proponents stress the necessity of affirmative action to improve the condition of women. Some recent studies on panchayats have shown the positive effect of reservation on empowerment of women and on allocation of resources.
- · Opponents argue that it would perpetuate the unequal status of women since they would not be perceived to be competing on merit. They also contend that this policy diverts attention from the larger issues of electoral reform such as criminalisation of politics and inner party democracy.
- · Reservation of seats in Parliament restricts choice of voters to women candidates. Therefore, some experts have suggested alternate methods such as reservation in political parties and dual member constituencies.
- · Rotation of reserved constituencies in every election may reduce the incentive for an MP to work for his constituency as he may be ineligible to seek re-election from that constituency.
- · The report examining the 1996 women's reservation Bill recommended that reservation be provided for women of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) once the Constitution was amended to allow for reservation for OBCs. It also recommended that reservation be extended to the Rajya Sabha and the Legislative Councils. Neither of these recommendations has been incorporated in the Bill.

Opposition objections (Ref. Indian Express)

The Opposition parties have raised questions and concerns regarding the linkage of the implementation of women's reservation with the periodical delimitation exercise. The implementation of this reservation provision is not immediate and hinges on two critical processes: a delimitation exercise and a census which could cause a significant delay in the bill coming into effect.

The most recent delimitation order was issued in 2008. However, there is currently a freeze on any further adjustments to the number of seats in state assemblies and the Lok Sabha. The primary concern raised by the opposition is whether this freeze on delimitation would result in the women's reservation not being implemented until the 2031 census figures are available and the delimitation process is completed. The census, originally scheduled for 2021, was delayed due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The exercise is yet to be started.

Rhetoric vs Reality

Indian politics has long been characterized by the rhetoric surrounding women's empowerment and the announcement of various schemes and policies aimed at uplifting women across the country.

Both the centre and the state governments try to woo the other 50 per cent of the voters with socialist and welfare schemes aiming to improve their health, education, safety, and economic empowerment.

Despite the proliferation of schemes and promises for women, the participation of women in Indian politics remains significantly limited.

As it stands, women occupy a mere 15% of seats in the lower house with 78 elected members of the total 543, and a paltry 12% in the upper house. A 2015 report by the ministry of women and child development highlighted the dire representation of women in parliament and state assemblies, particularly in high-ranking decision-making roles.

In its entire post-independence history, India has seen only one woman Prime Minister and two female Presidents. Just 15 women have served as chief ministers of Indian states. The Women's Reservation Bill is a much-needed remedy to address this gender disparity in Indian politics. In

fact, out of 70 seats, only eight comprise women MLAs in the Delhi legislative assembly. The state's cabinet has only one minister.

Glimmer of hope

Despite the contentions and questions raised at the ruling party's intent over inducting riders in the reservation bill, the women leaders are hopeful that the yet-to-be-approved legislation holds the power to ensure women their meaningful participation in shaping society.

"In politics, candidates need a social standing. People don't imagine seeing women as leaders. I hope the bill changes this perception," said Mathur, adding that she hopes that the women will no longer remain second-class citizens.

"Starting from perception to societal status to the availability of resources, the whole ecosystem supports men which makes them an obvious choice to be in a fray for leadership roles. Finance is the biggest factor. Parties spend insane money in campaigning which can only be afforded by men. Women don't spend such a huge amount of money on their ambitions even if they come from affluent families," she said.

"Currently, the status quo and even the new initiatives are taken considering the priorities of men. We are merely a vote bank. The women will gain confidence that they are not second-class citizens of this society. Women even feel ashamed when approaching the police," she said.

"Our future generation will have more confidence in expressing themselves freely. But 10-20 years down the line, the situation will improve with increased representation and will inch closer to achieving our long-pending right of equality," Mathur added.

Shagufta said the country will see a monumental shift in the political leadership once the bill comes into effect. "The current politics is male-dominated and hyper-aggressive or sentimental. I believe women will bring more composure, class and efficiency in leadership as we are raised as multitaskers," she said.

"Our democracy is not new now and there have been attempts to give women equal rights but the situation in this aspect is spiralling down continuously.

There are women in politics but they are largely instated to serve tokenism. There is a dire need to compel the political leadership to induct more women," she said. Besides, the women also must see themselves in leadership roles. The reservation ensures that. It will change the landscape of the society, nature and everything around us," Shagufta added.

Tracing bill's Journey 27 years in making

The need to have more women in position of political power in India has been keenly debated for decades. Exactly 30 years back, Parliament amended Constitution to reserve 33% seats for women in village councils and municipal corporations in urban areas. Looking back:

1989

Rajiv Gandhi: Introduced Bill to provide reservation for women in rural and urban local bodies. Bill approved in LS but failed to get passed in Rajya Sabha

1992-93

Narasimha Rao: Bill to reserve 33% of seats and chairperson posts for women in rural and urban local bodies passed by Parliament, becomes law

1996

Deve Gowda: Introduced bill in Lok Sabha to reserve seats for women in Parliament. Referred to Joint Parliamentary Committee, later lapsed

1998, 1999, 2002, 2003

Atal Bihari Vajpayee : NDA government pushed Women's Reservation Bill in the 12th Lok Sabha in 1998. However, this time too, the bill failed to get support, and lapsed again. It was subsequently reintroduced in 1999, 2002 and 2003 under the Vajpayee government, but with no success

2008, 2010

Manmohan singh: UPA government tabled Bill in

Rajya Sabha to prevent it from lapsing which passed it. However it was never taken up for consideration in the Rajya Sabha.

2023

Narendra Modi: Parliament passed Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam. It is to be implemented after census is held and delimitation exercise is completed. It currently awaits President's assent.

Women centric schemes

- Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Centre)
- Ujjwala Yojana (Centre)
- Nirbhaya Fund (Centre)
- Janani Suraksha Yojana (Centre)
- Ladli Scheme (Delhi)
- Free Bus Ride (Delhi)
- Kanyashree Prakalpa (West Bengal)
- Mukhyamantri Mahila Utkarsh Yojana (MMUY) (Gujarat)
- Sakhi One-Stop Centers (Maharashtra)
- Maitri Abhiyan (Haryana)
- Mamata Scheme (Odisha)
- Aapki Beti, Hamari Beti (Himachal Pradesh)
- Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivah

Yojana (various states)

- Mukhyamantri Mahila Utkarsh Yojana (various states)
- Ladli Laxmi Yojana (various states)
- Kishori Shakti Yojana (various states)
- Mahila E-Haat (various states)

With the passage of Women's Reservation Bill, it is not the question of how but when the legislation will be implemented to reserve a third of seats for women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies. It still needs a long-drawn process of census and delimitation before it becomes a reality.



Giving Women their Due

- 33 percent reservation for women

- by Smt Jyotika Kalra, SCM Ujjawal Women's Association, Advocate-on-record, Supreme Court of India, Former Member, National Human Rights Commission

Empowering women in Indian politics remains an ongoing challenge, despite significant attempts and persistent advocacy for gender parity in legislative bodies. Despite noticeable progress since the establishment of the first Lok Sabha, where women occupied a mere 5% of seats, the current scenario still needs to improve. India continues to lag behind numerous nations regarding women's representation, with only 14.39% of seats held by women in the Lok Sabha (2019–2024) and 8.8% in the Rajya Sabha (2010).

According to recent UN Women data, women's representation in Parliament in Rwanda is 61%, in Cuba it is 53%, and in Nicaragua it is 52%; they constitute the top three countries as far as women's representation in Parliament is concerned. Even our neighbouring countries, such as Bangladesh,

have 21% women in parliament, and Pakistan has 20% women in parliament, significantly higher percentages, highlighting the urgent need for affirmative action to bridge this gap. The population of women in India is 48.5%, but shockingly, only 27.4% of women are in the workforce. During 2011–15, female MLAs in the state legislative assemblies were 8.4% and female candidates were 7.3%. The data shows that there is a continued low representation of women in the hierarchy of law-making.

The lack of female representation in parliament stems from enduring biases, misunderstandings, insufficient political determination, and societal unawareness. There have been several chronological attempts to improve the representation of women by tabling the Women's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha; these instances are mentioned below:

2009- 2010	The Union Cabinet passed the Women Reservation Bill and the same was passed in Rajya Sabha.
2014	The bill was expected to be tabled in L.S. as the then government did not have the majority, so the bills could not be passed, so it lapsed.
2023	The bill namely Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, was finally passed in both Lok Sabha by 454 members in favour and 2 against and also by Rajya Sabha and signed by the President of India. It was passed as the 128th Amendment; 33 per cent reservation in the 545-member Lok Sabha would mean 182 seats for women. Features of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam: 33 % Reservation for women including 33 % for SC & ST in Lok Sabha, State legislative assemblies and NCT Delhi by inserting: 1. Article 239AA to give Reservation for women in NCT of Delhi- 33 % (33% SC & ST). 2. Article 330 A to give 33 % reservation for women in Lok Sabha (33% SC & ST). 3. Article 332A, to give 33 % reservation for women in State Legislative Assemblies (33% SC & ST)

- 4. Article 334A (1): Reservation for women will come into effect after an exercise of delimitation after the census. Act shall cease to have effect on the expiration of a period of fifteen years from such commencement.
- 1. (2) The reservation shall continue till such date as the Parliament may by law determine it.
- 2. (3) Rotation of seats reserved for women shall take effect after each subsequent exercise of delimitation as the Parliament may by law determine.

It is out in the open that it has already been a struggle to come to this stage of passing the women reservation bill. However, even now when it has been passed its implementation hinges on the completion of the delimitation process based on the census. Part 5 of the Act states that the reservation "will come into effect after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose after the relevant figures of the first census taken after the commencement of The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023."

Delimitation is a process of redrawing boundaries for territorial constituencies within the country, aiming to reflect shifts in the population. It is an intricate process involving comprehensive analysis of census data, spanning from broader state-level details to minute details up to gram panchayats. Predictably, this meticulous task could consume significant time, spanning up to 2-3 years. The projection of the changes in Lok sabha seats as per India Today group after delimitation are going to be that, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh with Telangana and Kerala may possibly lose 8 seats each after Delimitation and Bihar may gain 10 seats and UP may gain 11 seats. This makes it pretty clear that it might be further delayed due to opposition from southern states.

This delimitation is to take place after the Census; the 2021 census was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and later census was postponed until after the 2024 elections. The date of this census will be decided only after the results of the 2024 elections. The census is expected to go through a projected timeline of 2-3 years, the completion of census might extend to 2027, that too if it strictly commences in 2024.

As discussed above, the reservation of seats for women has at least been postponed for 5 years and may be extended further. I am of the view that for the immediate implementation of reservation for women, there exists no impediment. I explain it further as far as representation of women is concerned it is almost 50 % in each of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. This means thereby every Lok Sabha and State Legislative

seat are similar as far as the number of women is concerned. The proposed delimitation may not be able to give any identified reason justifying any particular seat to be reserved for women. As such any of the unreserved 1/3 rd seats can be reserved for women, similarly out of SC/ST seats, any of the 1/3 rd seats can be reserved for women. Delaying the reservation for women despite passing of the Act, shows an undercurrent that the present male parliamentarians are not prepared to surrender their seats to females. Keeping in mind the present belief system of our society even after the implementation of this Law, women may not be able to take the benefit of this Law; societal perceptions of women's responsibilities hinder their progression in political and professional arenas. This scepticism often comes from the belief that women's primary role is to discharge family duties. Shockingly, this notion has even influenced institutional policies, as seen in the service rules of Indian Foreign Services, which required women to get permission before they plan to marry, a wrong thankfully overturned by a bench of three Judges led by Justice Krishna Ayyar in 1979 in C.B. Muthamma an IFS officer, case. For too long, doubts about women's capabilities have persisted, perpetuating a gender balance heavily in favour of men in political spheres.

To prepare women to win Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly seats, we need a transformative shift in societal perceptions. We need to have active participation of women in political discourse, debates, and discussions. The discussions should spread political awareness, spotlighting the journeys and struggles of both male and female political leaders. In essence, the key lies in rewriting the narrative, enabling women to step into political arenas as equals and embracing their rightful place as leaders and decision-makers.

The journey toward achieving equitable representation in law-making bodies demands efforts, systemic reforms, and societal transformations. The struggle for women's rights in India persists, echoing the persistent call for inclusive and representative governance.



Information & Technology for gender equality

- by Smt Bina Jain, Patron and Managing Trustee, Education Trust

Gender bias is undermining our social fabric and devaluing all of us. It is not just a human rights issue. It is a tremendous waste of the world's human potential to deny women equal rights.

In our country, many categories exist. Some people are very advanced, but some are far from even basic information; they have never heard the name of technology. In this fast-changing time, information and technology are the most important factors in living with dignity and confidence.

I am sharing my views on the lack of information and technology for women. One of the major factors is the lack of literacy. Literacy plays a vital role in understanding technology. Most of the time, technologies are developed by men. They don't think from a woman's perspective. That's why the majority of women are still dependent on men for many different purposes due to a lack of information and digital literacy.

Due to such factors, they lack confidence in their communication skills. Digital literacy and the use of the Internet will enable women to become more productive and career-oriented. The importance of providing women with basic knowledge and proper exposure to the Internet and digital technologies is that it allows them to start their businesses, be aware of the latest technology, make themselves independent, and become financially independent, thus benefiting society and the country in the long run. Technology plays a vital role in advancing gender equality.

People need a basic understanding of the ability to use digital media to work effectively in today's society and use technologies in a meaningful way. The ability to use a computer, a smartphone, the internet, e-banking, or a website can be considered digitally literate. Increasing the focus on digital literacy among women will provide them with the opportunity to actively participate in the economy.

Women who are economically empowered will be able to support their families and communities in a big way. But all forms of discrimination against all women and girls are present in every field.

Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and financial areas. Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property and financial services.

Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote women, which is very difficult in a maledominated society.

If society is serious about bringing equality, adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls at all levels, and stop harassment at home, work, on the streets, etc.

A move to get them aware of banking literacy will make them financially independent. Working women have no right to spend or use their hard-earned money. When a woman goes to work, she does double duty at home and the office. The weaker sections of society, deposit their money but don't know how to withdraw it. There are very pathetic situations for the uneducated and even many educated women. Most of the time, in the seminars discussed in urban areas, most of the NGOs are working in urban or semi-urban areas, but in our country, the majority of the population is in remote or remote areas. What about them? Who will think for them when they are empowered?

If society and the government truly want to make changes and treat men and women equally, they should prioritize quality education and awareness.



Lifestyle modification using millets

for healthy environment

- by Dr Booma Srinivasan, MIC - Environment Protection & Preservation

Millets are a highly varied group of small-seeded grasses widely grown around the world as cereal crops or grains for fodder and human food. Millets, as a functional food, provide various macro- and micronutrients in our daily diet.

Millets are starchy, protein-rich grains. They provide plenty of phosphorus and magnesium, and finger millet packs more calcium than any other cereal. Hence, to create awareness among its members, the Women's Indian Association of Chennai organized a lecture on July 22, 2023, at WIA premises on the topic "Lifestyle Modification Using Millets for a Healthy Environment" by Dr G. Sivaraman, B.S.M.S., PhD, Chief Siddha Physician, Arogya Health Care. The program was well attended by many branch members, creche teachers, and nurse-aid students.

The President of WIA, Mrs Padma Venkatraman, extended a warm welcome to the guest speaker, Dr G. Sivaraman, as well as to the entire gathering. Ms Bargavi Devendra, Honorary Secretary, WIA, gave a detailed talk about the nutritive value of the powder made by WIA, its ingredients, and how it is being prepared, marketed, and sold.

Ms. Booma Srinivasan, Treasurer, WIA, presented an elaborate introduction of the guest speaker; his field of expertise being alternative medicine and alternative diets, in which Millets played a main role.

Dr G. Sivaraman began his speech emphasizing the importance of this year, 2023, "the International Year of Millets," and went on to talk about the various nutritive contents of different millets as well as some of the South Indian recipes that can be made out of them. He claimed that the cultivation of millets has the following environmental benefits:

1. The millet cultivation is done predominantly out

of legacy seeds and not hybrid ones.

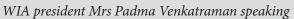
- 2. These crops are drought-resistant and require much less water irrigation when compared to other cereals.
- 3. Millet cultivation can thrive without using fertilizers or pesticides in poor soils.
- 4. They are a good crop for farmers in dry regions dealing with the effects of climate change.

Dr Sivaraman shared his view saying that it is quite unfortunate that our generation is witnessing the deaths of our children due to their unhealthy eating habits and unhealthy lifestyles. He reiterated that if we can make lifestyle modifications by using millets in our daily food intake, then we will be heading towards not only a healthy life ourselves but also creating a healthy environment for the next generation. He also asked that the group limit their daily intake of sugar and salt. Further, he prescribed a daily diet chart that can be followed easily, detailing the menu starting from our morning drink to our evening dinner.

The doctor mentioned the potential health benefits of millet, including protecting cardiovascular health, preventing diabetes, helping people achieve and maintain a healthy weight, managing inflammation in the gut, etc.

Earlier in the day, a cooking contest using millets was organised by WIA on the WIA premises. Many branch members and creche teachers participated enthusiastically. Their final products were on display for all the other members to see and taste too. The millet recipes were rated for their flavour, appearance, and taste, and three participants were adjudged 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes, respectively, by Mrs. Radha Srinivasan, a cookery expert. The prizes were distributed to the winners by the guest speaker.







Guest speaker Dr G Sivaraman's address



Millet recipies prepared by ladies for the cookery competition



Millet dishes being examined



Goup photo



Glimpses into Half-yearly conference, Balasore - July 2023

The physical half-yearly meeting of AIWC was held in the first week of July 2023, at Balasore, Orissa. It was the first physical meeting after the pandemic. The AIWC President Smt Kalyani Raj delivered the welcome address.

She talked about the capacity-building sessions held by the Zones in the local language which all the members very well received.

She talked about some initiatives being explored by her:

- 1) Training of girls and women in e-rickshaws with ETO Motors in Delhi
- 2) Collaboration and extension of AIWC skill development programme with Navjyoti India Foundation with Ms Kiran Bedi.
- 3) Propagation of energy efficient equipment among branches with EESL, Govt of India Power enterprise.

4) Training of women in Mason or construction work with INHALF, Ahmedabad, etc.

AIWC Secretary General Dr Manju Kak presented her report through a PowerPoint presentation talking about the important programmes and activities done by HO permanent departments during the past six months'.

She stated various donations received at the Head Office and suggestions and recommendations relating to programmes and branch activities in detail.

AIWC treasurer Dr Upasana Singh presented audited annual accounts and balance sheet for the financial year 2022-23. She elaborated on the reregistration of AIWC.

*(Photographs on the coverpage)

Brief account of Zonal meeting of North Zone - September 2023

The Zonal Meeting of the NORTH ZONE was organised on 23 September, 2023 in Pathankot, under the guidance of our Zonal Coordinator Mrs. Sumi Chopra. The venue of the meeting was Raghunath Temple, Meerpur Colony. Timings were from 10:00am to 5:30 pm. Mrs. Kanta Salaria, eminent social worker, was invited as the chief guest.

All the branches of North Zone actively participated in this event. Along with AIWC members, some social activists from the city were also invited. Around 100 to 120 women gathered in the meeting. All the branch heads got sufficient time to read their Branch Reports and discussed various difficulties,

they are facing in the branches. AIWC President Mrs. Kalyani Raj keenly heard all the problems and helped them by giving her valuable suggestions and solutions to their queries.

All the members of Priyadarshni Kandi Area ie Executive committee and SCM Members, Mrs. Raj Dogra, President, Mrs. Lalita Ale, Secretary, Mrs. Rani Shakti, cashier, Mrs. Veena Dogra, Mrs Archana Dogra, Mrs, Sheetal Mehra, Mrs. Deepika Gupta, Mrs. Kiran Devi, Mrs. Usha DIman etc. took part enthusiastically, in organizing this event and making it a successful one. The programme ended with the National Anthem.

*(Photographs on the coverpage)



Gender differences in the labour market

- by Meenakshi Kumar, MIC, Roshni, AIWC, New Delhi (* Extracted from the research of Claudia Goldin Professor at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA)

Over the past century, the proportion of women in paid work has tripled in many high-income countries. This is one of the biggest societal and economic changes in the labour market in modern times, but significant gender differences remain. It was first in the 1980s that a researcher adopted a comprehensive approach to explaining the source of these differences. Claudia Goldin's research has given us new and often surprising insights into women's historical and contemporary roles in the labour market.

Before Goldin's pathbreaking book was published in 1990, researchers had mainly studied data from the twentieth century and concluded that there was a clear positive association between economic growth and the number of women in paid employment. In other words, as the economy grew, more women were at work. However, because older data had barely been studied, this relationship remained unclear over a longer period.

By uncovering data back to the end of the eighteenth century, she was also able to reveal a surprising new historical fact: before the rise of industrialisation in the nineteenth century, women were more likely to participate in the labour force. One reason for this was that industrialisation made it harder for many married women to work from home and so combine work and family. Goldin innovatively documented this, using data from over ten thousand female household heads in eighteenth-century Philadelphia. Even if Goldin was able to show that many unmarried women were employed in manufacturing during the industrial era (in some states, up to forty per cent of all young women worked in industry), the total female labour force declined.

Goldin showed that this motherhood effect can partly be explained by the nature of contemporary labour markets, where many sectors expect employees to be constantly available and flexible in the face of the employer's demands. Because women often take greater responsibility than men for child-care, for example, this makes career progression and earnings increases more difficult. Tasks that are hard to combine with part-time work also make it more challenging to maintain a career for the person in the household, usually the woman, who chooses to reduce their working hours. All these factors have far-reaching consequences for women's earnings.

In other words, we should not count on economic growth automatically reducing gender differences in the labour market. But what explains the differences? Why is equality progressing so slowly? Goldin established that marriage is one important explanation.

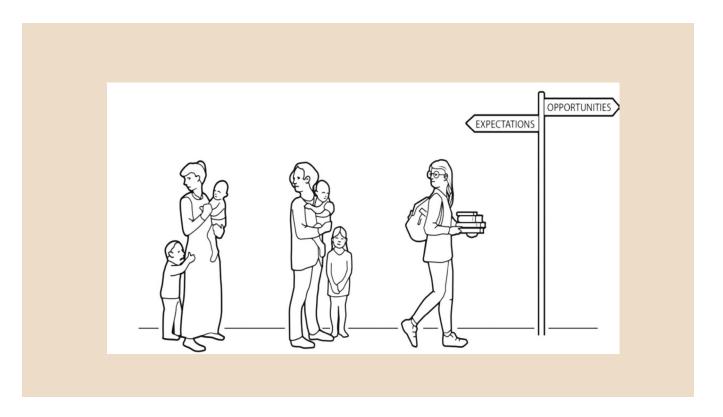
Goldin's research shows that the differences between women and men in the labour market are determined by diverse factors during the various periods of societal development. Policymakers who want to affect these differences must first understand why they exist. Investments in information and education, or legislation that removes institutional barriers, may have a significant effect for a certain time, particularly if women's career expectations and educational levels lag behind those of men. However, the same investments probably have a limited effect in societies where women already have high levels of employment and are perhaps more highly educated than men. For example, we know that it is not enough for women to be educated on the same terms as men; the earnings gap between men

and women remains. The opportunity to plan and finance a return to the labour force after having children, or to work more flexibly, may be of greater importance.

Goldin's studies have also taught us that change takes time, because choices that affect entire careers are based on expectations that may later prove to be false. US history and similar developments in many other high-income countries show that change can be hidden for decades in the aggregated statistics, because a new behaviour does not initially have

a significant overall impact. Major changes in the labour force can only occur over relatively short periods of time when groups that adopted the new behaviour in the labour market start to reach middle age and affect the career choices of younger women.

We know all this due to Claudia Goldin's research. Her insights show that similar patterns have been observed in many other countries. Her research brings us a better understanding of the labour markets of yesterday, today and tomorrow.







1. Human Touch Foundation activities

- by Kriti Naren, Secretary, Greater Noida Branch, New Delhi

1. Independence Day Celebration

AIWC Greater Noida branch celebrated Independence Day with children at the Sakipur Village Centre. The youth wing team organized this program and explained the significance of this day to the children, and every child actively participated. The children also took part in a procession with the national flag. All the participants were filled with a sense of patriotism and pride. They chanted slogans of patriotism and sang patriotic songs. Lots of fun games were organized; sweets, stationery, toys, and other daily necessities were distributed among the children. The ration was also distributed among those in need.

Young members named Kriti Naren, Madhurendra Kumar, Rajeshwari Mitra, Sahil, and Shruti were in charge of the arrangements.

2. Plantation Drive

The branch also participated in a plantation drive that took place today at sector 137 Noida. Uttar pradesh State Minister Public Works Department Brijesh Singh, MP Mahesh Sharma, IAS, Narendra Bhushan, Chief Secretary UP, Administration and Nodal Officer Gautam Buddha Nagar, DM Gautam Buddha Nagar District, Manish Verma along with many other dignatories inaugurated Ayush Van by planting the plants in this area. Our youth wing members Madhurendra, Rajeshwari, Aditi, Anurag, Raghuraj, Ayush, Kunal, Yuvraj participated enthusiastically.

3. Breastfeeding Awareness Week

International Breastfeeding Awareness Week was

observed on August 7th at Sakipur Village. It was an initiative to create awareness and promote the significance of breastfeeding. The event aimed to educate, empower, and support expectant mothers, new mothers, and healthcare professionals in understanding the numerous benefits of breastfeeding for both maternal and infant health. The common myths and misconceptions about breastfeeding were addressed, and evidence-based information was shared among the participants to dispel misinformation related to breastfeeding.

Event Highlights:

The event was attended by more than 35 women from the local community, and they keenly listened to Dr Mudita, a prominent gynaecologist from Apollo Hospital, shared insights and the best practices of breastfeeding. The session was made informative through the display of pictorial posters and a short skit emphasizing the importance of breastfeeding for a healthy, long life and other benefits for the mother. The nutritional advantages, bonding experiences, and long-term health benefits associated with breastfeeding were highlighted.

The attendees were of diverse ages, including pregnant young women. The message was reiterated through the live case of a lady who was breastfeeding her one-and-a-half-year-old daughter, and she shared some practical advice with expectant mothers. Attendees learned about the nutritional advantages, bonding experiences, and long-term health benefits associated with breastfeeding. The event also highlighted the role of breastfeeding in preventing various health issues in infants.





Independance Day at Human Touch Foundation





Participation in plantation Drive







Young mothers meet in Breast-feeding week



2. Legal Awareness Programme

- by Raminder Arora, SCM, AIWC Kanpur branch

On July 12, 2023, the AIWC Kanpur branch organised a legal awareness program addressed by Additional District Judge Mrs Shubhi Gupta, who is also Secretary of the State Legal Advisory Board and Secretary of the National Women's Commission.

The audience was primarily the women from the slum areas who are engaged as housemaids and victims of domestic violence.

The root cause of the problem arises from the fact that they are uneducated, belong to families of low-income groups, and men folk are addicted to alcoholism and unemployment.

In her address, the ADJ very well explained to these beneficiaries that the Indian Constitution lays down many different laws and bylaws to settle disturbed marriages, domestic violence, dowry cases, etc.

She also mentioned the role of the police in such cases, and if possible, at every police station are placed counsellors and PLVs who help to tackle these situations without an FIR being lodged.

Family counseling cells too play a major role in the settlement of disturbed marriages, and many incidences were mentioned wherein they are happily settled now. It was clearly mentioned that one should not assume that divorce is the only end to every problem that a woman faces and also that in this era of women empowerment, one should not take undue advantage of her rights.





3. RAAHI project

- by Poonam Mahajan, Secretary, AIWC, Amritsar branch

The Holy City of Amritsar has been selected to implement the Smart City Project. Under this plan to make the city smarter and better, the Amritsar branch of the All India Women's Conference, which is dedicated to the upliftment and betterment of women and children and works in the field of socio-economic development of women, especially in the fields of education, health, self-employment, and employment-oriented training programme, was selected to give skill training to female family members of autorickshaw drivers under the project named RAAHI.

In this regard, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between Amritsar Smart City Ltd. and the All India Women Conference, Amritsar, under the Holistic Intervention (RAAHI) project.

This project aims at the upliftment of autorickshaw drivers and their families and envisions providing skill training to female family members of autorickshaw drivers to achieve overall livelihood improvement in the auto driver community.

In the first phase of four courses, cutting tailoring, hair and skin care, computer operator (DCA), and food and fruit preservation were selected to provide skill training to female family members of autorickshaw drivers.

These courses are free for the students, and the fee will be paid by Amritsar Smart City Ltd. Almost 125 students have received training till now. Some of them are working and helping their families financially.

On November 11, 2022, Mr Akshay Sharma, Transport Manager (PMIDC), Ms Akantsha Lova, Senior Programme Manager (NIUA), Mr Bibekjot Sandhu, Programme Manager (CITIIS, NIUA), and Mr Herve Dubreuil, Head of Urban Division, visited the center with their teams. They promised to help the AIWC with the maintenance of the building.

In the second phase, more courses in physiotherapy technician and painting were also added to the MOU. AlWC feels honoured to be a part of such a project.







4. Adolescent's problems

Programme report of one day programme

- by Smt Santha Balakrishnan, Chairperson, SCFFH, Nagarcoil branch

A one-day program on "Adolescent Counselling" was conducted at Tirunelveli Dakshina Mara Nadar Sangam College, T. Kallikulam, Vallioor, by the 'Suraksha Community Center for Family Health, Nagercoil, on August 24, 2023. The program was sponsored by the All India Women's Conference, New Delhi. At the start of the program, the Chief Guest, Mr. Rajendran Sivaramapillai, and the programme team paid tribute to the honour of the statue of Karmaveerar Thiru Kamarajar.

The day was divided into three sessions, and the initial two sessions were conducted separately for boys and girls.

The topics covered for girls were:

- a) Influences of Social Media
- b) Health and Hygiene, Reproductive Cervical Cancer

The topics covered for boys were:

- a) Influences of Social Media
- b) Youth Addiction

The girls and boys were made aware of the advantages and disadvantages of social media, and topics like cyberbullying and Facebook depression were discussed.

Understanding the importance of reproductive health, access to information, and safe practices to empower individuals to make informed decisions to maintain their well-being and build healthy relationships was discussed in the second session for girls. A talk on understanding menstruation and menstrual hygiene was aimed at breaking the societal taboos and misconceptions surrounding this natural process.

During the second session for boys, the nurturing of relationships with elders and peer groups' contribution to an individual's personal growth and emotional well-being were discussed. The principles of respect, communication, and balance in these relationships were focussed on.

By valuing the wisdom of elders, fostering positive interactions with peers, and finding a harmonious balance between the two, individuals can navigate their social worlds with greater resilience and satisfaction. These relationships are essential components of a fulfilling and enriched life.

The session on 'sexual harassment' was conducted in the post-lunch session.



The major points discussed were:

- Section 294
- (a) does any obscene act in any public place, or
- (b) sings, recites, and utters any obscene songs, ballads, or words in or near any public space, (imprisonment of either description for a term that may extend to three months, or with a fine, or with both.)
- Section 354

Imprisonment for a term that may extend to two years, with a fine, or with both

• Section 509

Utters any word makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object,

Imprisonment for a term that may extend to one year, with a fine, or with both.

The programme was presided over and inaugurated by the Vice-Chairman, Suraksha Community Center for Family Health, Nagercoil, Prof. Dr Swarnalatha Raju, Mrs Anitha Natarajan, Treasurer, Mr Dinesh Krishnan, and committee members. Mr Rajendran Sivaramapillai attended the program.

The Statutes on Prevention of Sexual Harassment

- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention , Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 &
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention , Prohibition and Redressal) Rules 2013
- The law replaced the Vishaka Guidelines 1997 of the Supreme Court

On Complaint Committee

- Two kinds of committee for different types of organization are provided for in the law
- An Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), at least a 5 member committee at all workplaces employing 10 or more workers
- A Local Complaints Committee (LCC). A five-member committee at the district level for handling complaints from workplaces employing less than 10 workers
- When the complaint is against the employer, it will be handled by LCC

Say no to **Sexual Harassment** At Work Place





Millets awareness programme by Hyderabad Branch

- by Supriya Bhalerao, Secretary, Hyderabad Branch

On 13th July 2023, Hyderabad branch held a programme on Millets at Nishulk School, Khairatabad for the students of classes 8, 9,10.

Ms Gayatri, Head Mistress, welcomed all and gave introduction of the school. Then the Chief speaker Prof Ramakrishna spoke in Telugu on Millets.

Then Ms Farida Hussain, President, Hyderabad Branch, spoke extensively on different types of Millets, their benefits and how to add these in diet. Millet grain with greens is the most healthy food.

Their names in English, Telugu and Hindi were displayed in different charts, made by 11 students who read them out. Members appreciated their work. The samples of different grains were displayed and 10th class kids had to identify names by seeing the millet seeds. Winners were given prizes and also for poster making. Small food packets were given to students.

Ms Lolly gave vote of thanks. It was a very educative programme which was funded by Ms Farida Hussain and coordinated by members Hajra and Lolly.





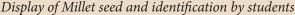
Prof. Ramakrishna Mrs Farida Hussain speaking





Poster making & reading









6. Enhancing Life Skills for Adolescents

- by Santhanavally S Nair, Secretary, TVS, Constituent Branch, Thiruvananthapuram

Thittamangalam Vanitha Samithy (TVS) is a constituent branch of Thiruvananthapuram branch of AIWC for past 24 years. It is a rural branch and previously had various activities conducted with the help of Panchayat. We have conducted many one-day awareness programmes, Udaan programme, Village Health programme, (Swasthya Sudhar) etc.

A three-day programme on enhancing life skills for Adolescents was conducted from 15th to 17th September 2023 benefitting 22 participants. There were six resource persons including a doctor, two advocates, two teachers and a social worker. The topics covered were; social media and its impact, adolescent-mental, physical, emotional and behavioural problems, balanced diet and yoga, health, hygiene and cleanliness, counselling on career options, critical thinking, decision making, problem-solving, stress coping mechanisms, self-awareness, creative thinking etc. There was an interactive session as well.

Gender equality was another important topic where the importance and ways on making this world a better place for women were highlighted. The participants were taught to treat fellow human beings with respect and empathy. Make sure you find time to develop your mind, which will be a very rewarding investment for each person.

The parents of all these beneficiaries were very much satisfied and grateful to AIWC for conducting such a useful programme.

The Samithy celebrated its 40th anniversary on 17th August 2023. M Nandakumar, a former IAS officer who contributed a lot of services towards the upliftment of the Samithy in the initial stage, was invited to inaugurate the function and he honoured our secretary for her sincere social service.

The secretary of our Samithy have also received an award from the Bank of Maharashtra, Vattiyootkavu branch for the best self-help group.







7. Health and Hygiene programme at South East Delhi Women's Association (SEDWA)

satisfied.

- by Sumi Chopra, Zonal Organiser, AIWC, New Delhi

SEDWA (South East Delhi Women's Association) a branch of AIWC, conducted an awareness programme on health and hygiene on 28th June 2023. The doctor Mrs Geeta Grewal touched upon all health problems related to young, middle, and old aged women. She told them about cleanliness and other female-related illnesses, that must be

addressed immediately, without any delay. The sanitary pads were distributed among beneficiaries. Beneficiary participants asked their queries relating to their health issues and the doctors suggested the remedial solutions. It was a very successful program; all women were happy and







"We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty."

- Maya Angelou

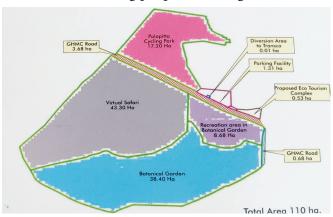


1. Paradise amidst IT parks of Hyderabad

-by Supriya Bhalerao, Secretary, Hyderabad Branch

A sprawling Reserve-forest on around 275 acres of land is nothing but a pleasant scenic paradise amidst concrete jungle of IT area of Hitech City in Hyderabad. Beautifully laid with clever use of the land, this Kothaguda Reserve-Forest (KRF) as is called, is developed by Telangana State Forest Development Corporation.

The prime objective is to conserve the rich Biodiversity and propagate the message of Environmental Conservation among people of Telangana state.



A plan of the Reserve-forest

It has very unique features such as -

- It is spread over 245 acres of land with 100 acres of botanical garden, 40 acres of modern bicycle track and the remaining land with virtual safari.
- It maintains 7 ecosystems of Deciduous Forest, Evergreen, Desert, Aquatic, Miyawaki, grasslands, Mangroves Forest.
- It has 18 types of forests developed with 18 forest tree species
- It is also having 50 Theme parks under 5 gardens such as Medicinal, Product utility, Phyto feature,

Conceptual and Mythological Garden.

- Everyday 10 buses of School children visit the Hub. It is so interesting for schools that only a 3-minute power-point presentation sent to the school, inspires the school management to send the children to visit the forest. A huge amount of learning happens and children are reluctant to go back.

Botanical Garden:

The park has wonderful walking tracks, green lands with huge full-grown trees, where the walk is a great visual experience.

It hosts a Night Safari & an Eco Park. It also hosts a Bird Park on 31 Acres and an eco-tourism project monitoring unit in 2.5 acres.

It has red sandy loam soil, and the important native trees species are Azadirachta indica, Tectona grandis, Terminalia tomentosa, Acacia nilotia with the southern tropical dry deciduous thorny scrub.

- The park has an interpretation center with various pictorial and 3D models on various types of forests, National Parks, wild life, Sanctuaries etc.
- Fiber mural models of a big elephant, giraffe, indian gaur (Bison), spotted deer and black buck are displayed in the garden beautifully.
- Special gardens include herbal/ medicinal garden, cactus garden, butterfly park, xerophyte garden, arboratum, Nakshatra vanam (27 trees), Navagraha vanam (9 trees), Rasi vanam (12 trees) etc. Keeping in the view, increased strength of young school children, children's play area with a variety of play equipment is placed in the garden.

- For conducting small gatherings and meetings in the natural green environs of the garden an open air **amphi-theatre** has been constructed. The Park has been designed beautifully, with water bodies complementing the lush greenery of the place.

There is a **Acupressure track** in Botanical Garden for morning walkers for educating the people. Based on Panchatatva park with walkway the acupressure concept was developed based on the 5 elements of nature (Panchabhutas) i.e. air, earth, water, akash and fire. The Panchatatva park is a circular track developed using (8) components to walk upon i.e 20 mm stone, 10 mm stone, river stone, 6 mm chip, run-off sand, tree bark, black soil and water.

There are some other attractions for the visitors, which are -

- a Cafeteria, for tea, coffee, snacks etc
- a Party zone that includes a cellar store room
- **Cottages zone** for resting or relaxing for a few hours for people who come for a day-long visit
- **Souvenir Shop** that displays Environment friendly products
- **Fitness zone** with an elaborate indoor gym in the shape of a tortoise and a skating rink. A lot of regular young visitors, specially from IT sector to the botanical park, for walking / cycling purpose have taken a membership and come in the morning or evening.
- Adventure/Corporate games Park in the Botanical Garden, that has a bicycle station made at the height of 40 feet on a very strong old Eucalyptus tree (see the photo), from where the bicycles can be driven from one tree to another, on a rope track.



Little ones enjoying the Botanical garden. Fiber deers in the background

Also for children of all ages and adults can have great adventure activities in the park like zip line, zip line cycle, commando tower, Bungee Trampoline, rope courses. Skating rink is an additional interesting item for children and it has added colour to the garden.

- Education hub for children: The aim is to bring children from all the schools & colleges close to the nature through field trip education at the Botanical Garden. TSFDC has developed all the above works at Botanical Garden and every day minimum 100 to 300 school children from various schools visit Botanical Garden to have a lot of fun with education. For Schools, Colleges & Research Scholars this Botanical Garden is the right place to learn practically, in natural green & calm environ zone.

Pala Pitta Cycle Park (PPCP)

It is of international standard and they have avenue—wise colour planting in the cycle path of 3 kms, with flowering plants i.e., Bauhinia alba, Bauhinia blackeana, Cassia fistula, Lagerstroemia indica, Plumeria rubra, Cordia sebestena, Callistemom, Spathodea, Cimpanulata Bansoo etc., and also planted the fruit-bearing plants such as Seethaphal, Panasa, Custard apple, Ber, Seemachinta, Sandal wood etc, to attract the birds.

Now a proposal is being considered of introducing the fish fingerlings in the Revenue Pond spread over in 6 acres area of PPCP and for that a request has been put up to the Fisheries Department to supply 20000 fish fingerlings. This will help attract the birds.

Virtual Safari in the making:

Around 80 acres are utilized for this unique concept of virtual interaction with wildlife. There will be safari vans moving on the tracks developed in the thick plantations, like the ones seen in wildlife sanctuaries. The visitors will be given special eyeware, through which they will visualize the the Wild life coming very close to the. This will be a special effect technique which will give an experience of visiting a Sanctury not moving out of their own city.

This remarkable creation is one of its kind and Hyderabadis are lucky to have it in their own city!!







Educating the youth





Adenture sports park - Left photo shows the cycling track station and track from tree to tree



Cactus nursery with the rare Ghost tree sapling in the centre that glows at night



Cycling enthusiast group





Tortoise Hi-tech Indoor Gym



2. Snapshots of the World Water Conference at Stockholm

- by Usha Nair, Member-in-charge, Liaison with International Agencies)

The Stockholm International Water Institute has been organizing World Water Week every year since 1991. It is the leading conference on global water, championing cooperation across sectors and national boundaries. The conference delves into a broad range of topics, from food security and health to agriculture, technology, biodiversity, and the climate crisis. Each year has its own theme, which is explored from many different perspectives. This year, I participated in the conference virtually from August 20–24, 2023. Listed below is the summary of a few sessions.

The theme for 2023 is 'Seeds of Change: Innovative Solutions for a Water-Wise World'.

This year, for the first time, free registration for virtual participation was offered. (A full access pass for inperson attendance costs nearly 1000 EUR.) It was an excellent opportunity to be part of this important event. I registered for online participation. There were hundreds of sessions on varied topics related to water. We could go through the programme and prepare our schedule by selecting events that we wish to attend. I chose 22 events. Though I could not attend all the events, videos of all the events were made available, and so I ended up viewing several sessions. Details of some of the interesting sessions are given below.

Promoting gender contextualization of the SDG 6 global indicators:

Sustainable Development Goal 6 is about "clean water and sanitation for all." The target is to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. However, it was felt that there was a lack of suitable indicators to track progress. Hence, the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6 (IMI-SDG6) has developed approaches and gender-relevant indicators for contextualizing and monitoring gender aspects

related to the SDG 6 global indicators. This session enhanced the understanding of how gender aspects can be analysed and monitored within the context of SGD 6.

Addressing Water Security Challenges in the Himalayan Region:

This was an interesting session that identified threats and challenges in the Himalayas relating to water management. Extractive practices of industries, rapid urbanisation, disruptive activities such as mining in the Tibetan plateau (where 10 rivers originate), massive construction activities undertaken by India and China at the international border, lack of access to data related to water for common people, etc. were identified as challenges. Various solutions were also mentioned, such as capacity building, transparency in policy formulation, accountability of urban governments, participation of vulnerable groups, including women and youth, in the formulation of policies, community-based water management, combining traditional wisdom with scientific knowledge, using alternate energy to reduce dependence on hydropower and enhance access to water, strengthening legal frameworks, effective transboundary water treaties, etc. It was stressed that equity in access and distribution must be ensured across all sections and sectors.

Water Delivery in Remote Areas in India Using Solar Energy:

This session detailed water delivery in remote areas of India using solar energy. Unreliable power supply, poor-quality roads, poor-quality available water, a lack of sanitation facilities, etc. are challenges faced by remote areas. These affect the health, education, and social upliftment of the population. Sunlit Future, an NGO based in Auroville in south India, has been working on providing access to water using solar solutions for the marginalized population,

primarily tribal communities. They survey the areas and work out specific solutions for them. Solar-powered pumps and distribution networks are provided to the community. Village-level committees take ownership to maintain, manage, and regulate the systems. Participatory groundwater management ensures that there is fair and equitable access to water.

Two-eyed seeing - Indigenous values for climateresilient water management:

Two-eyed seeing is an approach to inquiry and solutions in which people come together to view the world through an Indigenous lens with one eye (perspective), while the other eye sees through a Western (scientific) lens. This session presented examples and case studies from Fiji, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand related to the management of water and natural resources, with a two-eyed approach.

Several interesting facts were mentioned:

In Fiji, water has deep spiritual significance in cultural practices. Each indigenous community has a totem tree. Research has found that such trees indicate the presence of groundwater. Most communities have sacred pools and surrounding groves that are revered and protected. When a chief is anointed, he takes a bath in a sacred pond or pool, or in the sea if it is a coastal area. Several water bodies are reputed to have medicinal properties. The government is proactive and has introduced legislation to protect and preserve traditional wisdom and practices. Two-eyed seeing is adopted in policies and practices, thus updating and contextualizing indigenous knowledge.

The speaker from Thailand gave some interesting details about Thai beliefs and practices relating to water. There is a common belief that auspicious trees provide both spiritual and physical healing. Traditional practices include planting four layers of trees on river banks: trees with extensive roots that hold the soil together and prevent soil erosion; trees that provide home and shelter to a large number of species, thus protecting ecological balance; trees

that help recharge groundwater; and trees that provide fruits, thus replenishing food security. A curious ritual that prevents rampant tree cutting is tying bamboo containers containing the umbilical cords of newborn babies to the branches of a healthy tree, which then cannot be felled. However, there is concern that mining and construction are causing huge damage to the forests and rivers.

New Zealand, too, has interesting traditions and practices. The Waikato River, the longest river in the country, is managed by five tribes. The river is considered a tupuna (ancestor), a taonga (treasure), and the mauri (life force) of the Waikato-Tainui, Raukawa, Ngati Tūwharetoa, and Te Arawa iwi tribes. Intergenerational transfer of knowledge is considered important, and this helps in preserving traditional knowledge. Greater stress on education and awareness has been recognized as essential by the government, and steps are being taken to ensure this. Research offers a growing body of examples of indigenous-led approaches to biodiversity and water management.

There were experts from Australia to present tribal beliefs and practices. Ancient people considered land, water, and sky as inseparable, and their systems always followed an integrated approach. But when control was taken over by modern governments, they started making laws that separated these elements. This, the indigenous people believe, has disrupted natural systems. 'Rematriation' is indigenous women-led work to restore sacred relationships between indigenous people and their ancestral land, honouring matrilineal societies, in opposition to patriarchal violence and dynamics. Women pass on their wisdom through stories, songs, and dance. There was a call to 'rematriate' water. Indigenous people must be treated as experts, as opposed to the present trend of seeing them merely as consultants in discussions. This will help in protecting cultural values, cultural indicators, and indigenous values.

Feminist Water Agenda and Women Leaders in Scientific Water Management:

These were two sessions focusing on women. It was emphasised that in all projects, procedures—

28 All India Women's Conference

policies, finances, and responsibility, to name a few—must be inclusive. Facilitate the creative voices of all members of society in policy discussions, formulation, and implementation. Finally, there was the assertion that a humanist approach is required, which will ensure center stage for the feminist approach. Another interesting discussion was on why more women are not attracted to STEM jobs relating to water. This could be due to stereotyping, a lack of mentorship, and a lack of leadership opportunities. This imbalance needs to be rectified for proper water conservation and management.

Stockholm Junior Water Prize

Naomi Park from the USA received the prestigious Stockholm Junior Water Prize 2023 for her research on the removal of carbon dioxide and oil products from the ocean. In her research, Naomi Park has developed a method to simultaneously remove these contaminants. The jury noted that "the winner is taking a troublesome waste product and using it to help solve a number of the most pressing issues we face in the modern world. By using Styrofoam and creating a'sponge' that absorbs both carbon dioxide

and oil products from the ocean, this student built a model and tested it in multiple conditions, even simulating ocean waves, with impressive results." HRH Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden presented the award during a ceremony at World Water Week in Stockholm.

The Stockholm Water Prize

The Stockholm Water Prize is the world's most prestigious water award, presented every year since 1991 to men, women, and organizations in recognition of extraordinary water-related achievements. Professor Rinaldo received this year's prize from H.M. King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden, patron of the Stockholm Water Prize.

Professor Andrea Rinaldo is a leading authority in hydrologic sciences. His pioneering research has led to new insights into the complex ways in which water shapes the Earth's surface and ecosystems and has provided in-depth knowledge of how solutes and populations of aquatic species move at varying speeds, both on and beneath the Earth's surface. This research is used to protect biodiversity and stem the spread of disease.



"A woman is like a tea
bag—you can't tell how
strong she is until you
put her in hot water."

- Eleanor Roosevelt

3. A Report on World water week celebrations in Stockholm

- by N Bhanumati, MIC, Water Conservation and Sanitation

As the MIC of Water Conservation and Sanitation, I took every opportunity to learn about the events going on in India and worldwide. I was fortunate enough to join the recently concluded Water Week programmes conducted in Stockholm.

The gist of the five-day programme from 20th to 24th August is stated below:

Water and Sanitation is the basic need and right of a human, but we must also talk about responsibilities. Decided to conduct Water Week worldwide to discuss about water crisis and its economic and social consequences worldwide. Six important trends were discussed in the sessions conducted over 5 days.

1. Interconnectivity is crucial:

The theme of seeds of change emphasized the need to talk more about how to make transformations happen rather than just listing problems. Urgent need to focus on intergenerational dialogues and learning from each other.

2. Time to rethink innovation:

Innovation is needed in Governance, finance, and values of culture which is directly and also indirectly related to the water crisis.

3. Learning from indigenous people:

First time it is focused on indigenous people's knowledge of innovation and the importance of values such as reciprocity, respect and relations.

4. Oceans are making waves:

It does not make sense to treat freshwater, coasts, and oceans as separate entities. The source-to-sea approach is increasingly becoming a new norm.

5. New approaches to new governence:

It is very well discussed about water governance and how we need to change incentives and governance related to water.

6. Linking international processes:

Stressed the need for collective action to solve water challenges.

Thinking about how we value water, ensuring access and availability of clean drinking water and sanitation that is essential to both animals and humans: not enough finance for water from private or Government organisations.

In this connection, I must mention the details of our sub-committee meeting (virtual) held on August 24. The participants suggested many points worth considering.

President Mrs Kalyani Raj briefed us as to how used water is recycled in the Head Office and also about projects at the Head Office.

Secretary-general Dr Manju Kak exhibited support for all the branches that are doing water awareness events.

Treasurer Dr Upasna Singh said this type of awareness is the need of the hour

Smt Amleshwari Morla suggested the need to educate maid servants about water usage.

Smt Smita Palit from Kolkata stated about water meters fixed to monitor the water usage by each flat, which is a really good idea.

Smt Asha Gambhir expressed the need for and support by Governments.

Smt Rekha Sali and Smt Madhu Saran also expressed their concern about water conservation. Dr Sivaprasad, scientist from the National Institute of Hydrology, Kakinada said that because of encroachments on ponds and canals, rainwater is going to waste instead of getting collected in ponds. Finally, it is declared that it is our collective responsibility to step up and dare to lead, to act and empower others to act faster, bolder with all and by all. We all have a role to play in driving innovation in communities. Combined action between public and private sectors, NGOs (like AIWC) and communities is essential to effectively manage the water crisis. We all must become water ambassadors.

"We save money in banks". "Let us save water in water banks" like Pools, Ponds and Canals.



4. Breaking barriers and soaring high Digital Literacay case study - a success story

- by Akshara Vadalikar, SCM, AIWC Sahaspur Rural Branch

Women's empowerment is not merely an external element but also an internal one. Her internal psychological stability is very important in the process of empowerment. A woman needs to empower herself within to expose and explore the outer world and create space for her enhancement in society. Women in the rural sector understand their importance and need for development, which boosts interest in them to face the obstacles and prepare them to overcome them as they are crucial agents of the economic development of the country. Digital literacy provides a way to tap into the latent potential of women by providing them with knowledge of the digital world and opening doors to new and confident women.

Information technology has revolutionized the world as never before. The benefits accrued from the synergy of knowledge and IT need not be restricted to the upper strata of society but have to freely flow to all segments of the female population. Technology as a means to empower and as a tool that bridges the distance between hope and opportunity is one of the crucial pillars through which the iconic program is being driven and turned into a reality on a day-today basis. One of the case studies of Miss Nusrat is



the use of technology to successfully build personal confidence and esteem, which has wider implications for her life.

Nusart's father, Basat Ali, a farmer, was extremely protective. Since he did

not want his daughter to be influenced by any "bad environment," he made her quit school after class VIII. However, with the assistance of AIWC volunteers, Nusrat and her mother saw things differently and understood the value of education and empowerment. They persuaded Basat Ali

to complete her Class X, XII, and digital literacy programs through various programs of the All India Women's Conference, i.e., the mainstream education program for underprivileged rural community girls and the rural computer education program supported by the All India Women's Conference Delhi and run by AIWC Sahaspur Rural Branch.

Nusrat is now pursuing her higher studies in Bachelor of Arts through Uttarakhand University. Simultaneously, she began her career in the chain of Smile Stores as a counter salesgirl. Due to her exposure to digital learning and e-marketing within 6 months, she has been handling their web orders and supply chain management at Dehradun. After two years of experience, she is now successfully working with a top chain of cosmetic stores and handling their supply chain management portal.

She aspires to have her supply chain store and an online sales portal. Simultaneously, Nusrat is now the main breadwinner in her family, and being the eldest daughter, she is foreseeing her siblings' education.

It is amazing to see many of these girls soaring towards new dimensions. It reflects their acceptance of ground-level situations and their willingness to move forward in life.

They believe in the betterment of their current conditions, the never-ending learning choices, and the potential of women's ability to evade and crack the four walls of their houses and some traditional values that had supposedly nourished but actually stripped them of their freedom and rights. They do not dismiss their pasts but embrace them with forward-looking, optimistic thinking, and we know their dreams are achievable.

As quoted by Melinda Gates, "If millions more women had the same chance to invest in themselves and their ideas, they could transform the world."



5. Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh

A tribute

- by Dr Challa Maha Laksmi, MIC Legislation, Visakhapatnam



Our branch celebrated the 114th birthday of Durgabāi Deshmukh, Lady Deshmukh, on July 15, 1909. Born in the year 1909 in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, the town was known as old Venice by the writers in those days. She was an Indian freedom fighter, lawyer, social worker, and politician. She was a member of the Constituent Assembly of India and of the Planning Commission of India.

An activist for women's emancipation, she founded the Andhra Mahila Sabha (Andhra Women's Conference) in 1937. She was also the founder and chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board. In 1953. She had an education in Hindi; in Hindi Prachar Sabha, she used to give lessons to younger children and elders at the tender age of 14. She ran a school to teach Hindi in her village or township, Kakinada.

In the year 1920/21, Durgabai was a volunteer during Gandhiji's visit to Kakinada. There was a public meeting, and she was a translator for Gandhi and Nehru. She arranged a meeting for less privileged women by collecting a fund of Rs. 25,000 for the freedom struggle. The national leaders were shocked to notice the fire in Durgabai at the tender age of 12 to 14 years.

She took an active part in salt satyagraha as a leading lady. While satyagraha she was beaten brutally and sent to jail for a year in solitary confinement. During her confinement, she was asked for her wish, and she asked for a veena to play in jail for her and the inmates. Even in jail, she used to teach Hindi and music to fellow female prisoners.

After getting released from jail due to health reasons, she took permission from Gandhiji to start her studies, and she came out with flying colours and a gold medal. She completed her M.A. and LL.B. She was a member of the constituent assembly. She was one of the original signatories to the Constitution.

In 1944, after the death of Kasturba Bai, Durgabai was made in charge of the Kasturba Trust. In 1946, the foundation stone of the Andhra Mahila Sabha was laid with the active support of Gandhiji. She was a national leader, recognized by all senior Congress leaders from 1920 itself. In 1939, she completed her honors, joined law courses, and started practicing at Madras High Court. She got a TATA Fundamental Institute scholarship and recognition and an invitation to join the London School of Economics, but due to the Second World War, she could not use the admission. In the year 1946, she was invited to be part of the Constitution Writing and Preparation Committee. As an advocate, she was successful and continued in the Federal Court, Delhi.

She was also a writer and wrote articles in a local newspaper, "Bharathi," between 1924 and 1930. She

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wrote more than 30 books: Chintamani and I and The Stones That Speaketh were a few of them.

She was also a visionary, and under her able leadership, she started a unit for artificial limbs for differently abled children.

In 1958, Andhra Mahila Sabha's activities extended to pan-India as Matha Sisu Samrakshanalayas, research centers for health. Higher education centers started in Hyderabad in full swing with her initiative as chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board.

In preparing the Hindu Code bill, her part was laudable; she convinced everyone who expressed their apprehension about the bill. She was elected as presiding officer or president of the Constitutional Committee; this is how she commanded respect from women at large with her hard work, knowledge, and commitment to work. She was appointed as a finance committee member, and when Dr.Chintamani Deshmukh was appointed as chairperson, she resigned as a member. That is her commitment.

She married Dr. CD Deshmukh in 1953, and they lived happily for 28 years, until her last breath in 1981.

She was a multi-faceted and multi-talented human being, and it is difficult to come across such a type of human being. She was and will remain a source of great inspiration for everyone!





Durgabai with a flag in her hand



6. Tribute to AIWC Freedom Fighters

- by Indrani Sengupta, Assistant Secretary, AIWC, New Delhi

The AIWC Kolkata South Branch paid tribute to some of the AIWC stalwarts who were great freedom fighters on the occasion of Independence Day. An awareness programme was organised for school students of the AK Mitra Institution for Girls, who are mostly first-generation learners.

The objective was to familiarise the young girls with not only the 96-year-old organization but also to recall with gratitude AIWC's stalwart sacrifice and struggle in the struggle for independence.

1920–1947 were turbulent times and fascinating too. The role of women moved from the home to the "world". Society was not ready to accept women into the world, so the struggle was immense. Many took part in the boycott of foreign goods and mobilized more women into the movement. They suffered torture and imprisonment, but nothing deterred them.

History is gendered, so the contribution of women in the freedom struggle finds cursory mention in prescribed texts. It is therefore necessary that we highlight their role for the young generation and bring them to the forefront. The speaker was Dr Eshita Sur, Associate Professor of Political Science at Scottish Church College, who has a keen interest in the work of AIWC. Dr Sur began with Margaret Cousin's association with the great women of the time.

Margaret E. Cousin:

The AIWC was established in 1927 by Margaret E Cousins with the aim of women's empowerment through education. The members, as well as the presidents, had played an important role in our freedom struggle.

The founder, Margaret E Cousin, was an educationist and social worker. Despite being a foreigner, she spoke for Indian independence. She was jailed for speaking against the government and was a member of the Flag Presentation Committee of 74 Indian women led by Hansa Mehta. She was the 11th President of AIWC.

Sarojini Naidu:

Smt. Sarojini Naidu played an important role in the freedom struggle, women's emancipation, and ensuring civil rights for women. She was one of the founding members of the AIWC and was the fourth president of the organization. In the Indian independence movement, she was one of the important participants in the Salt March, and she had the honour of being the first female president of the INC. She was also the governor of UP.

Sarala Roy:

Smt. Sarala Roy, 6th President of AIWC, was an educationist, feminist, and social activist and played a key role in organising women towards women's suffrage and against child marriage. She played an important role in setting up AIWC branches in Bengal.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur:

Smt. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the 12th President of AIWC was a powerful politician, and she was the first Health Minister of India in 1947. She was also one of the members of the Constituent Assembly, and there she raised the first question of women's education and rights. She participated in the Dandi March and the Quit India Movement and was sent to jail, where she was put in the company of criminals.

Shaheen Hamid Ali:

Begum Shaheen Hamid Ali had attended the session of the INC and decided to participate in the organisation. She was the 14th President of the A.I.W.C. and represented the organization at the Istanbul Congress of the International Alliance of Women. She also participated in the Swadeshi Movement. One of her most renowned achievements

was a campaign to encourage the Sarda Act, also known as the Child Marriage Restraint Act. In 1947, she was one of the founding members of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit:

Smt Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, the 16th President of AIWC, was noted for her contribution to the Indian Independence Movement. She was jailed several times. She served as the 8th President of the United Nations General Assembly from 1953–54 and was also the 3rd Governor of Maharashtra (1962–64).

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay:

Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the 17th President of AIWC, was an Indian social reformer, activist, and notable freedom fighter. She was a founding member of A.I.W.C. and was its first organizing secretary. She was very well known for her contribution to the Indian Independence Movement, especially for boycotts and non-cooperation movements. Her famous book was The Awakening of Indian Women (1939). Her contribution to music, theatre, and culture was immense. She joined the Seva Dal, a Gandhian organization set up to promote social upliftment, and also motivated women across India to become voluntary workers called "sevikas." She had received many awards and prizes.

Hansa Mehta:

Smt. Hansa Mehta was the 18th President of AIWC, and her contribution to our national independence movement was notable. She acted in line with Mahatma Gandhi and established the Desh Sevika Dal in 1930. She was arrested by the British Government for her activities in the Indian Independence Movement. She was elected to the Bombay Legislative Council. She was one of the

members of the Constituent Assembly and the subcommittee on fundamental rights. She was the first woman to use the term human rights instead of men's rights at the office of the UN. On August 15, 1947, she had the honour of presenting the Indian National Flag to the President of India.

Conclusion:

Indian Feminism is rich in its content and history. Indian women freedom fighters dared to challenge patriarchal dominance. They had established that the nation belonged to them too. The number is smaller, but a few women also became members of the Constituent Assembly and played an active role in making our Constitution.

Our society is gendered, so the history of the freedom struggle is not an exceptional case. There is a deliberate silence on women's contribution to this journey. There are many reasons behind it.

- Women's issues were mainly confined to the issues of daily survival.
- The question of difference and sexuality was not addressed.
- Women's participation in the national freedom struggle was worth mentioning. It challenged many existing forms of domination.

With the report "Towards Equality" in 1975 that highlighted women's conditions in India, the women's movement took a new turn.

In this programme, some of the flag bearers of AIWC as presidents and members were paid homage for their great contribution to the national movement as well as the women's movement in India.

I am indebted to Dr. Sur for her extensive talk and presentation in the programme.



7. Success story of Kakinada Branch



Nagalakshmi, the daughter of a Kirana merchant, has mobility challenge and uses a wheelchair to move from place to place with help. She has studied until class 10. She comes from a small village called Peddapuram, which is 10 kilometres away from Kakinada.

Nagalakshmi is determined that she wants to live with dignity and not be a burden to anyone. She goes to the AIWC Kakinada Centre to learn tailoring so as to be able to earn a living and also support her father.

Our Kakinada Branch enrolled her in their Udaan

Project supported by AIWC Head Office, wherein

Girls are imparted skill training. We are very happy that we were able to help her, and we will continue supporting all her future endeavours.



8. How I forgot

A poem

- By Prem Duggal President, AIWC, Amritsar Branch

When T.V. Came to my House I Forgot how to read books

When the car came to my house I forgot how to Walk

When Computer came to my house I forgot spellings

When AC came to my house
I stopped going under the tree for cold breeze

When I stayed in the City
I forgot the smell of mud

With the Coming of Fast Food
I forgot to cook dal and rice

When I got Whats app
I forgot how to Sleep



"Success is not final, failure is not fatal, It is the courage to continue that counts."

- Winston S. Churchill



1. रीना की कहानी एक सामान्य औरत का सामाजिक कार्य के क्षेत्र में प्रवेश

– रीना बनर्जी, सचिव, नवसृष्टि (सेडवा की घटक ईकाई)

सन 1987 में शक्तिशलिनी में कार्यालय सहायक के पद पर कार्य करने का अवसर मिला। उस समय में खुद पत्राचार के माध्यम से 12वीं की परीक्षा की तैयारी कर रही थी। संगठन में उन तमाम महिलाओं की अलग-अलग तरह की समस्या से युक्त दास्तानों को सुनकर मेरे अंदर एक अजीब सी हलचल होने लगती। इससे पहले जहाँ बचपन गुजरा था वहाँ मैंने इस तरह की समस्यायें देखी-सूनी नहीं थी। मेरा बचपन नेपाल में व्यतीत हुआ। वहाँ की गरीबी, भौगोलिक परिस्थितियों के कारण समस्याएं थीं पर ऐसा नहीं कि दहेज के लिए जला दिया, दहेज के कारण निकाल दिया, मारपीट, अत्याचार, बलात्कार इत्यादि। शक्तिशलिनी में इन समस्याओं को खुद बैठकर सुनती और धीरे-धीरे उनकी मदद के लिए आगे बढने लगी तो दिल को अच्छा लगने लगा। धीरे-धीरे काउन्सलर के रुप में काम करने लगी। उसी दौरान कुछ महिलाओं के समस्याओं को नजदीक से देखने और काम करने का अवसर मिला कभी इस तरह की समस्याओ को मनोहर कहानियों में पढ़ा था जिससे मेरे पुरे व्यक्तित्व पर बहुत ज्यादा असर हुआ।

ग्रेजुएशन के बाद परिवार की ओर से एक ऐसा सुझाव आया कि मै अपना कार्यक्षेत्र बदल लूं। पर मैने देखा कि कहीं और मुझे दिली तसल्ली नहीं मिलेगी जो मुझे अब मिलती है। मैंने निर्णय किया कि मैं जीवन पर्यन्त सामाजिक क्षेत्र में ही काम करुंगी।

मुझे याद है उन महिलाओं की आवाज जो तमाम दर्दों को सहते हुए इस चिन्ता में जी रहीं थीं कि उनकी बेटियों को भी जीवन में ऐसे ही दर्दों से गुजरना पड़ेगा क्योंकि परिवार व समाज की बन्दिशों ने उनकी बेटियों के जीवन को भी चारदीवारी में कैद करके रखा हुआ था।

शक्तिशलिनी में दस वर्षां के अनुभव ने यह सोचने पर बाध्य कर दिया कि अगर औरत अपने अत्याचारों का विरोध करना या उनसे निजात पाना चाहती है तो केवल एक ही धारदार हथियार है और वह है उसका हर मायने में सशक्त होना। महिला का शिक्षित और प्रशिक्षित होना, जानकारी पाना व स्वावलम्बन ही उसको किसी भी तरह की कठिन परिस्थिति से मुकाबला करने का साहस दे सकता है। शक्तिशिलनी मे



महिला आन्दोलन से जुड़े महिलाओं में सत्यारानी चड्डा और शाहजहाँ जी गुरू रूप में मिली।

सन 1994 में "नव सृष्टि" यानि "नई सृजन" का आरंभ किया जिसका उद्देश्य था कि समाज में महिलाओं के लिए भयरहित सम्मानित जीवन जीने का एक माहौल तैयार किया जा सके।

आरम्भ में लगता था कि क्या यह सम्भव हो पायेगा? पर आज लगभग तीन दशको के अनुभव से कह सकती हूँ कि कोई भी काम असम्भव नहीं है अगर हमारा ध्येय अटल और पाक—साफ़ है। मुझे यह देखकर बहुत अच्छा लगता है कि मुझे सही संगठन और वातावरण मिला, ऐसे लोग भी मिलते गये जो हमेशा मेरे उद्देश्यों को प्राप्त करने में मददगार रहे! आज तक दिल्ली में दस लाख लोगों के बीच काम कर चुकी हूँ और बहुत सी महिलाएं, बच्चे, ऐसे हैं जो प्रत्यक्ष रूप में जीवन के कठिन दौर से निकलकर खुशहाल जीवन जी रहे हैं! हजारों लड़कियां चारदीवारी से निकलकर आसमान को छूने के लिए आगे बढ रही हैं! ये वे लड़कियां हैं जो खुद अत्याचार को सहन करना तो दूर किसी और के साथ हो रहे अत्याचार को भी नहीं सहेंगी!

दो कार्यकर्ताओं से बढ़कर आज दो सौ से अधिक कार्यकर्ताओं ने नव सृष्टि में काम किया, पर मेरा सबसे यही कहना है कि हम लोग चाहे जितनी प्रोफेशनल डिग्रियां हासिल कर लें पर सामाजिक क्षेत्र में असली परीक्षा और डिग्री वही है कि आप इस काम को पूरे दिल से करते हैं। अगर किसी की परेशानी देखकर आप चैन से सो जाओगे तो आपकी सारी प्रोफेशनल डिग्रियां समाज सेवा के क्षेत्र में बेकार हैं!

आज कॉलेज के हजारों छात्र फील्ड प्रेक्टिस के लिए देश



विदेश से आते हैं। सबसे मेरा कहना है कि समाज में ऐसे लोगों की बहुत जरुरत है जो समाज में बदलाव ला सकें। हम सब को हर भेदभाव से परे सिर्फ एक अच्छे इन्सान के रूप में आगे बढना होगा!

सन 1987 से 2023 तक 29 वर्षों की यात्रा ने जीवन की बहुत सारी सच्चाइयों से अवगत कराया। बहुत सारी कड़वी सच्चाई से रुबरु करवाया, पर सीखने को बहुत मिला। मुझे जीवन का एक ऐसा कॉलेज मिला जिसके मास्टर खुद वे लोग थे जो अपनी परेशानियों को लेकर मेरे पास आये। मैंने उनके लिए काम करते हुए खुद बहुत कुछ सीखा है! मैंने देखा कि समाज में कितने तरह के जाल हैं? पितृसत्ता, धर्म, शिक्षा, पैसा, प्रशासन, राजनीति, कानून! और इन सभी जालों ने कमजोरों को खासकर महिलाओं और बच्चों को कैसे घेर रखा है। बहुत सारे बच्चे, औरतें इस जाल में ऐसे फंसे हुए हैं कि इनसे निकलना बहुत कठिन है। मेरा हर मकहला से कहना है कि

खुदी को कर बुलंद इतना कि हर तकदीर से पहले खुदा बंदे से पूछे बता तेरी तेरी रजा क्या है



2. काश....

— आँचल बृजेश मौर्य, 'चाय के पल' से

"सुधा... जल्दी करो... देर हो रही है मुझे... ना जाने क्या करती रहती हो। तुम्हारा तो काम ही खत्म नहीं होता...", सुदीप ने आवाज लगाई तो सुधा जल्दी—जल्दी लंच बॉक्स पैक कर किचन से लगभग दौड़ती हुई बाहर आई।

"सॉरी सुदीप... आज सुबह नींद ही नहीं खुली जल्दी, थोड़ा लेट हो गया।"

"तुम्हारा तो रोज का है"... सुदीप ने गुस्से में जवाब दिया और ऑफिस जाने के लिए निकल गया ।

सुधा बुझे मन से वही खड़ी सुदीप को जाते हुए देखती रही. .. काश सुदीप एक बार ऑफिस जाते हुए मुड़ कर देख ले लेकिन ऐसा हुआ नहीं। सुधा अपने मन को समझाते हुए अंदर आ गई और बच्चों के स्कूल जाने की तैयारियों में लग गई।

बच्चों के जाने के बाद वह घर की साफ—सफाई और बाकी के काम करती थी। आज घर की सफाई करते—करते वह आईना साफ कर रही थी कि उसने अपने आपको देखा। ऐसा महसूस हुआ जैसे बरसों बाद आईना देख रही हो। कभी घंटों तक आईने के सामने बैठकर सिंगार करने वाली आज खुद को ही पहचान नहीं पाई।

सूनी आंखें... जिसके नीचे काले घेरे हो गए हो गए हैं। रुखा चेहरा जिस पर ध्यान नहीं देने से आने वाली झुर्रियां उसे उम्र से अधिक बड़ा बताने लगी। उसके सुंदर घने काले लंबे बाल जिससे कभी सुधा को इतना प्यार था कि उसे घंटों संवारा करती और किसी को छूने नहीं देती। आज उनका इस तरह से बेतरतीब बंधा जूड़ा देखकर बहुत तकलीफ हुई ।

आज अपने आपको आईने में देखकर ऐसा महसूस हुआ कि जिसके लिए मैंने अपने आपको मिटा दिया उसके नजर में मेरी कोई अहमियत ही नहीं है।

सुधा का मन अतीत के उन गलियारों में भटकने लगा जिसमें सुधा की हंसी, खिलखिलाहट, सहेलियों के साथ गप्पे मारना, उनके साथ घूमना, अपने पसंद के सारे काम करना जिसका उसे मन करता था। उसका सुंदर रूप जिसे देखकर दादी हमेशा कहती, तू तो चांद का टुकड़ा है लाडो... तुझे जो वर कर ले जाएगा वह बड़ा ही सौभाग्यशाली होगा।

पढ़ लिख कर हमेशा अपना एक नाम, एक वजूद बनाने की चाह ना जाने कब और कहां खो गई इन जिम्मेदारियों के बीच। आज उसे ऐसा लग रहा था कि जैसे सुधा तो कब की मर चुकी है यह तो सिर्फ एक चलती—फिरती जिंदा लाश है। सब कुछ खो कर भी कुछ ना होने का काटा सा चुभने लगा। तभी फोन की कर्कश ध्वनी सुधा को वर्तमान में ले आई। उसने फोन में देखा, सुदीप की फोटो उसमें चमक रही थी। सुंदर मुस्कान के साथ उसने उठा लिया और जैसे ही "हेलो" कहा... उधर से आवाज आई, "इतनी देर क्यों लगाती हो फोन उठाने में सुधा, क्या कर रही थी?"

"जी वो....."

"अच्छा सुनो... शाम को मेरे कुछ फ्रेंड आने वाले हैं तो उनके लिए भी डिनर बना लेना। और मैंने कुछ सामान भेजा है, उसे ले लेना ठीक है।", इतना कह कर सुदीप ने फोन काट दिया। सुधा कुछ देर फोन को देखती रही... फिर तैयारियों में लग गई। बच्चों को जल्दी डिनर करा कर उसने रूम में भेज दिया और खुद भी तैयार होने चली गई।

तैयार होकर जैसे ही आई कि बाकी के सारे काम कर लूं तभी दरवाजे की घंटी बजी। देखा तो सुदीप थे, सुधा को देखते ही बोले... "तुम कहीं जा रही हो क्या?"

सुधा... "नहीं तो, आपने कहा था कि मेहमान आने वाले हैं डिनर के लिए इसलिए चेंज कर लिया।"

"तुम्हें उनके साथ बैठना तो है नहीं फिर यह सब करने की क्या जरूरत थी?" सुदीप कहते हुए रूम में चला गया। सुधा समझ ही नहीं पाई कि क्या कहें... बालों का जूड़ा बना, कमर में साड़ी का पल्लू लपेटकर फिर किचन में लग गई।

थोड़ी देर बाद सारे गेस्ट भी आ गए। फिर सब का नाश्ता और औपचारिक मुलाकात के बाद सुधा डिनर की टेबल लगाने लगी। सभी खाने का आनंद ले रहे थे और गपशप कर रहे थे की ऑफिस में काम करने वाली लड़िकयों की बात छिड़ गई। उनके कपड़े, उनके श्रृंगार और उनके चाल चलन का न जाने क्या—क्या चर्चा का विषय होने लगा।

एक ने कहा, "लड़िकयों को ऑफिस में काम ही नहीं देना चाहिए वह घर के काम ही करते ठीक लगती है। तभी सुदीप ने कहा सही कह रहे हो उन्हें जितना बांध कर रखो उतना ही समाज सही रहेगा, क्राइम कम होगा।

"मुझे तो पहले का ही रिवाज ठीक लगता है। घूंघट करके जब औरतें रहती थी, घरों से बाहर नहीं जाती थी और जब जाती भी थी तो किसी के साथ जाती थी। अब बाहर निकल कर कौन सा तीर मार लेती है।

"आज भी तो घर का सारा भार हम पुरुष ही उठाते हैं तो क्या जरूरत है यह सब महिला सशक्तिकरण (mahila sashaktikaran or women empowerment) का नाटक करने का। फिजूल का सबका दिमाग खराब कर रखा है।" आज सुधा को सुदीप के विचारों को सुनकर ऐसा लग रहा था जैसे किसी ने जिंदा भट्टी में उसे झोंक दिया है। उसके अंदर जैसे ज्वालामुखी फटने लगा। वह अपने आप को रोक नहीं पाई क्योंकि बात सिर्फ उसके अपमान की नहीं थी। बात समस्त स्त्री जाति के सम्मान की थी।

"बड़े सुंदर विचार है तुम्हारे सुदीप और तुम्हारे इन मित्रों के भी। तुम लोगों को लगता है कि हम औरतें करती क्या है। काश तुम लोग यह समझ पाते कि औरत ईश्वर की सबसे खास रचना है।"

"तुम लोगों को जरा सी चोट लग जाए या एक हड्डी टूट जाए तो इतना चिल्लाते हो। काश वह दर्द महसूस कर पाते जब हम एक बच्चे को जन्म देते हैं जो 20 हड्डियों के एक साथ टूटने के बराबर दर्द होता है।

"उस पर यह सुनने को मिलता है कि औलाद पैदा करके कोई महान काम नहीं किया। तुमने कभी उसे घर से निकाल देने की तो, कभी उसे तलाक देने की धमकी देते हो। और अगर इससे भी संतुष्टि नहीं मिलती तो उसके मां—बाप को बुलाकर उन्हें जलील करते हो।

"लोगों को क्या लगता है कि औरत कोई खिलौना है, जिसे जब चाहा खेला और तोड़ कर फेंक दिया। अकेली औरत को देखकर तुम पुरुष उस पर दानव की तरह टूट पड़ते हो, हम तो ऐसा नहीं करती, अकेले पुरुष को देखकर।

"तुम पुरुष कहीं भी अपनी पैंट खोलकर लघु—शंका करने के लिए खड़े हो जाते हो और दोष हम औरतों पर कि हम समाज को दूषित कर रही हैं।

"अगर यह कह दे कि हमारा तन—मन हमारा है, इस पर हमारा पूरा अधिकार है। हम जिसे चाहे दे, तो समाज और मर्यादा का उल्लंघन है। सिर्फ औरतें ही विवाह के समय दान में क्यों दी जाती हैं. मर्द क्यों नहीं?

"क्योंकि मर्दों में दूसरे का घर बसाने की शक्ति ही नहीं है। अपनी कोख से बड़े—बड़े वीर, पीर, पैगंबर जनती हैं। फिर भी यह पुरुष समाज कहता है, औरत नरक का द्वार है। उसे जन्म से चुप रहना, सहना सिखाया जाता है।

"जहां उसने अपने सम्मान और रक्षा के लिए आवाज उठाई, मार दी जाती है। अपने वात्सल्य और छाती से जीवन सींचती है और उसी छाती के कारण तुम जैसे लोगों की गंदी नजरों का शिकार होती है।

"उसे तार—तार कर, अपमानित कर सड़कों पर फेंक देते हो। जिससे प्रेम करती है, उस पर आंखें बंद कर विश्वास करती है। यही उसका गुण है लेकिन तुम जैसे लोग इसी का स्वांग रच कर उसे ठगते हो।

"काश कि तुम लोग समझ सकते कि औरत क्या है? काश औरतों को तुम लोगों की तरह छल करना आता तो आज इस तरह यहां बैठकर बातें नहीं बना रहे होते। तुम जैसे खोखले विचारों वाले लोगों के बीच खड़े होने में भी मुझे घुटन हो रही है।"

कहते हुए सुधा लॉन (Lawn) की खुली हवा में सांस लेने चल दी...

सुदीप और उसके मित्र वही सिर झुकाए शर्म से बैठे रहे। ऐसा लग रहा था जैसे आज उन्हें किसी ने आईना दिखा दिया और वह आईने में अपना चेहरा ही नहीं देख पा रहे हैं।



Work of AIWC Branches July-September 2023



Human Touch Foundation for Women distributed medicines, sanitary pads, first aid kit, toothpaste, toothbrush, stationary, clothes etc among flood affected families in village Nagli Wajidpur, Noida, on 17th September 2023.





Teacher's day was observed by the Hyderabad branch on the 5th September, 2023. The students taught the classes and got the blessings of the teachers. The teachers were honoured by giving double size blankets as gift for the upcoming winter. Vice President Rama Anantram was present at the program.







Independance Day at the Head office



All gathered in the HO on the 15th August. The President did the flag hoisting. All 3 office bearers - President, Secretary General and Treasurer spoke at the occassion



Bapnu Ghar girls performing during Independance Day



AIWC, President Ms.Kalayani Raj, Secretary General Dr.Manju Kak and Treasurer Dr. Upasana Singh, members, staff and Bapnu Ghar residents marching in the AIWC Premises.

AIWC Campus at 6, Bhagwan Dass Road was well decorated with flags, shamiyana and green carpet. Happy moments for AIWC celebrating Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav!

GMJ Constituent branch of AIWC Calcutta Branch



The GMJ Branch holds Annual Fund-Raising Programme on 4th & 5th August 2023



GMJ Branch observed Independence Day at Navanir, Chetla and gave food packets to Park Circus Street children and Chetla Slum children