

# PROTBAD Forum Newsletter



Protesting Violence Against Women

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## OPINIONS

**Karuna Nundy**, *Advocate, Supreme Court*: The conviction of these rapists is clearly not enough, sexual violence runs deep in Delhi and unless we deal with the source, it'll continue to pour forth. Here are some changes I'd like to see. Attitudes to women and recognition of their full range of rights should be linked to recruitment, promotion. The system should recognize and reward good



police officer, a good magistrate, a good prosecutor by their attitudes to Dalit women, to lesbians, to sexually active women wearing skimpy clothing. Also penalize actors in the criminal justice system for the opposite, i.e. discriminatory behaviour. So when a policeman or woman, a prosecutor or a judge is recruited, their attitudes need to be part of the interview. Equality training in various spheres should be included in schools what kind of citizens are we looking to produce? Showing children early on that people of other gender, other castes, and religions are equal needs to be central to our education system. We've been thinking of the Dalit boy sitting in corner of classroom, who sees a cartoon that's discriminatory. Think also of the girl who only sees Maharani Laxmibai and Sarojini Naidu in her history books. Teach women they are equal, and they are more likely to be treated that way. We need self-defence classes in school for girls. And to teach boys that girls are equal. Boys should also be given empathy training to show them what it's like to be a girl. Anger management courses have been proven to work. Allowing women to sue for money damages and injunctions in civil cases would help to go along with criminal cases. We need civil damages for victims of crime in India, it's an easier

forum for her to navigate, also on principle, and she should be compensated for the psychological and material damage she is caused as well as have the perpetrator punished. The low conviction rate for rape (some figures show only 27 percent convictions) is also why rapists are not that scared and victims reluctant to go to court. Police reforms have been waiting to be implemented since the 1980s. Police need better investigation methods, find the right guy, ways to preserve evidence. We don't have proper witness protections programmes, or the best prosecutors though the victim's lawyer being allowed to be present now helps somewhat. Some of the important changes like quicker trials enabled by more judges and courtrooms are reforms the whole criminal justice system needs. Also you have to have to be able to complain effectively if your prosecutor is not competent or has been bribed.

**Mihira Sood**, *Advocate*: Rape exists because of a patriarchal, misogynistic culture that condones it, whether tacitly or explicitly, and because of widespread lawlessness that encourages it. What we



need to do, and urgently, is two-pronged: systemic social change and legal reform. We must educate people, starting at the school level, about respect for women, for personal spaces and for the rule of law. We need to introspect, all of us, on how we contribute to the objectification of women, from the popular culture we consume to the way we bring up our children from where it's a slippery slope to a twisted and unjust understanding of sexual assault in legal terms. In terms of the law, we urgently need a more comprehensive and inclusive definition of sexual violence, critical amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure that will reduce the time taken for trials, fast track courts for sexual assault cases, harsher punishments and a serious program of police reform and sensitization. All of these are doable, and all are equally crucial not just for better implementation but also to signal the seriousness with which such crimes will be viewed. Unfortunately, there appears to be little political will for any of these measures, which is where the media and the increasingly powerful voice of public spirited citizens will have to take centre-stage.

**Gautam Bhan**, *Queer Activist and Academic*: Men are not born biologically violent, we make them so. Our responses to sexual violence must recognise, name, and both institutionally and individually counter the dangerous mix of impunity and entitlement at the core of contemporary masculinity that allows such violence. Boys and men are raised in our society to think that we are men because we demand, we take, we win, we conquer. Add to that the sense of impunity pervasive in our cities on all fronts due to the failure of our institutions and we are brought to where we are today. We cannot legislate good behaviour, as the saying goes, we have to build its DNA in schools, in homes, in public spaces, in our media that must begin by refusing, unlearning and denying this entitlement and the violence it takes to live it as the only way to be 'men'.



## NEWS : VAW IN INDIA

### ■ ANDHRA PRADESH

**Software Engineer arrested**: A software engineer was arrested by Malkajgiri police on 19th October for raping a 24-year-old housewife. Police is on the lookout for his wife, who allegedly turned out to be an accomplice. On October 14, the victim lodged a complaint alleging that Raju's wife Usha Sree called her to her flat and deliberately

went out after bolting the door from outside. Raju allegedly raped the victim. Raju was arrested while his wife is absconding. A case was registered against him under 376 (rape) of Indian Penal Code (IPC).

**Hyderabad techie raped by men posing as taxi drivers**. The girl hired a cab outside a popular shopping mall. After the woman got into the car, another person also entered

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the cab. She was driven to a forested area. When she tried to use her cellphone to call for help, it was snatched away. Arrested men said that they were confident that the woman would not report rape. They were right. She was dropped off near her hostel five hours later. When she went to the police for help, she said that she had been kidnapped and released after she shouted for help. But the friend who she had tried to call had already phoned the police to alert them that the woman appeared to be in trouble. The police officers also spotted blood on her clothes and began investigating the possibility of rape. Police were able to identify the car through security cameras at a school near where the rape was committed. Experts at the National Investigating Agency helped and car was identified.

### ■ CHHATTISGARH

**Two sisters raped for two weeks** : Two minor girls, both sisters, were gang-raped in a moving van that went around for over two weeks after assailants kidnapped and kept girls in captivity in Bilaspur district. Both the rape survivors, aged 15 and 13, were rescued and handed over to their



parents. Accused Mahendra befriended the girls at Ratanpur fair on September 25 and took them along for a trip and he dropped both the sisters at Simga town where accused Ishwar was present. The duo then forcibly took the girls in a stolen van and raped them while the vehicle was moving across several places in Durg, Raipur, Bilaspur, Rajim, Simga and Kasdol. The accused had threatened to kill the girls if they resisted. Police got a tip off about the presence of a girl in a van which was around Devrikhurd village in outskirts of Bilaspur. The van was intercepted, detained and girls were rescued.

### ■ DELHI

**Woman gang-raped in her home** : A 32-year-old woman was gangraped by two people when she was sleeping in her home, on 16th Oct. The victim was sleeping with her two children in her house in West Delhi, when Santosh, 22, and Roshan, 24, barged in and raped her. Her husband was on night duty in a factory. The woman told her husband when he returned from work and then informed the police. Police said the two accused, residents of the same area, were arrested from their houses.

### ■ HARYANA

**Minor dalit girl raped** : A 14-year-old girl was allegedly raped in the Nehru Colony area of Faridabad. Accused is a neighbor of the victim. After raping the minor dalit girl, the accused threatened to kill her if she told anyone about the incident. The incident was reported by the parents and accused has been arrested. Meanwhile, in a separate case in the district, a woman has accused three persons, including a couple, of kidnapping her minor daughter.

### ■ MAHARASHTRA

**4-year-old girl raped** : A 4-year-old girl was raped by an unidentified person in Bhiwandi on morning of 9th Oct. The police suspect that the culprit was known to the victim. The incident took place when the girl was playing near her house. The child told her parents that an 'uncle' propped her on his shoulders and took her into the forested area nearby. There he raped her and dropped her back home. Her parents then approached the police. Medical tests confirmed that the girl had been raped.

**Salesman molests British woman in auto at Oshiwara.** A 24-year-old British woman, who does bit roles in Hindi films, was molested in Oshiwara when travelling in an auto-rickshaw with her two friends on 22nd Oct. Gaurav Gupta, a salesman in a multinational gift manufacturing firm allegedly touched her inappropriately and fled

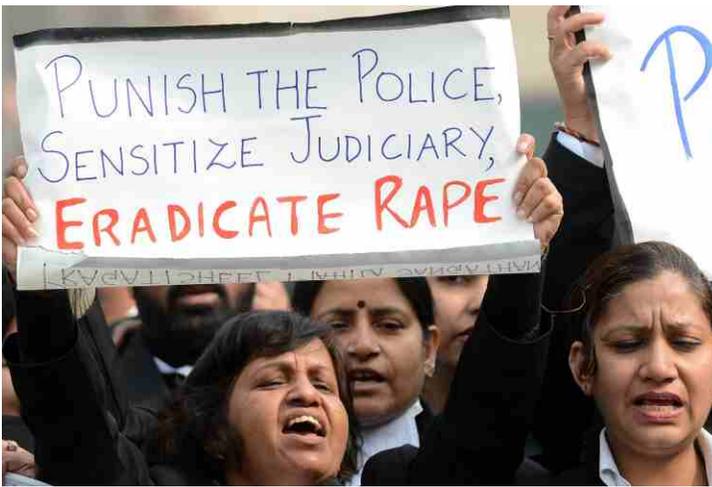


towards a mall on Link Road. She screamed and a few passersby chased Gupta. Three constables, who were in the vicinity, too, chased Gupta and caught him.

**Rapist caught after DNA match** : The Malwani police arrested an auto driver for sexually assaulting a teenage girl last year after the DNA of her new-born child matched his. The alleged rapist turned out to be Mohammad Siraj Khan, a father of seven. The teenage survivor, who has a mental health condition, was taken to a hospital in last September by her parents. Doctors found her 5-months pregnant. Her parents registered a complaint of rape. Due to her mental condition, the survivor could not provide any information on her assaulter. In January this year, the girl delivered a baby boy. The survivor's family accepted the newborn as a part of the family. But the baby was weak and died in two months. Meanwhile, the police carried on their probe. The teenage girl's blood samples, along with those of the six suspects, were sent to the forensic lab. In January, the newborn's blood samples too were sent for DNA profiling. The reports matched Khan's samples. Khan confessed he accosted the girl and raped her more than once in April 2012.

### ■ PUNJAB

**Minor raped in Amritsar** : A 14-year-old girl on her way to school was gang-raped on 25th Oct. Revenge is alleged to be the reason behind the ghastly crime. The girl was assaulted because her elder sister had registered a case of harassment against the prime accused Goldy. Goldy was jailed after it. After coming out of the jail, Goldy, along with two other men, kidnapped and raped the younger sister. The girl shared her ordeal with her elder sister, who then approached the police.



## ■ TAMIL NADU

**Woman beheads tormentor husband :** Unable to bear his harassment, 21-year-old Praveena beheaded her husband in Sivaganga district. After killing him, she walked down to the nearby police station in Tirupathur village with the blood-soaked sickle and surrendered. The man was an autorickshaw driver but was involved in anti-social activities. He has several cases pending against him in various police stations. He first married Muthumari and had two children. He also married Praveena. The couple had one child. Both Muthumari and Praveena were frustrated with police frequently knocking on their doors in search of Parimannan. Unable to face the harassment Praveena went to her native village. On fateful night, Parimannan visited her, quarrelled with her demanded money for liquor. An angry Praveena sprinkled chilli powder on his face and then in a fit of rage, beheaded him with a sickle.

## ■ UTTAR PRADESH

**Cops ask the rape victim to strip:** A 14-year-old girl was allegedly asked to strip in front of cops at a police station in Kushinagar district to convince them that her allegations of rape were genuine. When girl's parents tried to file a complaint, policemen asked for a bribe of Rs 50,000. When the family failed to meet the demands of the in-charge of police station, he asked the girl to accompany him into a room where he locked the doors and asked the girl to strip saying he wanted to verify if she was raped.

**Schoolgirl gangraped, burnt alive.** A minor girl, student of class VIII, was gangraped and then burnt alive on 23rd Oct. The girl sustained 80% burns and died next morning. The girl had gone to a agriculture farm for toilet along with her elder sister. As the two were returning, three villagers,

including a local goon, dragged her to a nearby area and gang raped her. When girl threatened the assailants that she would tell villagers, trio set her on fire. The assailants then escaped even as her elder sister rushed to the village and raised an alarm. By the time girl's family and others reached, the girl had already sustained 80 percent burns.

## ■ WEST BENGAL

**Police constable arrested for molesting colleague :** A

Kolkata Police constable has been arrested for molesting his female colleague at a deputy commissioner's office on the night of Saptami (11th Oct). Sheikh Noor Alam, 36, was arrested that very night following an FIR filed by the victim. The complainant says Noor was drunk when he sexually assaulted her. This comes close on the heels of the arrest of a policeman for allegedly cheating a Chinsurah resident with false promises of getting him a job on the force.

## ARTICLE : COMMON MYTHS ABOUT RAPE

**Here are some of the most common myths that surround rape and sexual assault.**

**Myth.** *Do not go out alone at any time. Women are most likely to be raped outside, in dark alleyways late at night. This is the best way for a woman to protect herself.*

**Fact.** The suggestion of avoiding walking alone, especially at night is common for avoiding sexual assault. However, only 9% of rapes are committed by 'strangers'. Women are raped in their homes and in their work places where they are less likely to be believed and even less likely to report. Available data shows that around 90% of rapes are committed by known men. This myth can control movements and restricts freedom, making women feel that they are living under a 'curfew' and that it is a woman's responsibility to be either in or out at certain times.

**Myth.** *Women who are sexually assaulted 'ask for it' by the way they dress or act, rape only happens to young women.*

**Fact.** Many women are led to believe that if they are not part of a certain category, they are 'safe' from being raped. Women and girls of all ages, classes, culture, ability, sexuality, race and faith are raped. How a woman looks or dresses has little significance, since reports show

that there is a great diversity in the way the assaulted women act or dress. Rapists choose women based on their vulnerability not their physical appearance.

Age is not a criterion either, since girls as young as three or women as old as 93 have been victims of rape and assault. Rape is an act of violence that has very little to do with sexuality. Women are raped from the age of three to ninety three. Rape is an act of violence not sex.

**Myth.** *Everyone knows when a woman says no, she often means yes. Women secretly want to be raped.*

**Fact.** Rape is a terrifying, violent and humiliating experience that no woman wants or asks for. Legally a person has the right to change their mind about having sex at any point of sexual contact. If a sexual partner does not stop at the time a person says no, this is sexual assault. If a person is in a relationship with someone or has had sex with a person before, this does not mean that they cannot be assaulted by that person. Consent must be given every time two people engage in sexual contact. Sex without consent is rape.

**Myth.** *The woman was drunk / took drugs / had a bad reputation / was hitch hiking / wore tight clothes / seduced him / probably got what she was asking for.*

**Fact.** If a person is unconscious or their judgment is impaired by alcohol or drugs, legally they are unable to give consent. Having nonconsensual sex with a person who is intoxicated is sexual assault.

Rapists use a variety of excuses to attempt to discredit the women they rape and to justify their crime. No woman asks or deserves to be rape or sexually assaulted. Often a rape case is defined more by the woman's character than by what has happened to her.

Newspapers and mass media often refer to women in the roles that they have within society - 'young mother', 'grandmother', 'doctor's wife' etc. If the woman's role or social position is not seen as socially acceptable, she is often held responsible not the rapist. For example, the original 'Jack the Ripper' and Sutcliffe in the late 70's and 80's were glorified by the press. (Jack the ripper has his books, museum, cocktails, computer games and even



tourist walks in London named after him where you can visit the places women were murdered!)

The rules imposed on women's behaviour allow rapists to shift the responsibility for rape onto women wherever possible, so that most of the perpetrators who rape are seen as victims of malicious allegations, carelessness or stupidity. There is no other crime in which so much effort is expended to make the victim appear responsible—imagine the character or financial background of a robbery victim being questioned in court.

**Myth.** *Women eventually relax and enjoy it. They secretly want to be raped.*

**Fact.** There is a widely held belief that women enjoy rape or that it is 'just sex at the wrong time, in the wrong place'. Rape is a crime of sexual violence and humiliation which can involve being beaten, physical restraint, the use of knives and sticks, urination and defecating. Studies have consistently shown that most rapes involve physical force to some degree. Often when a woman is raped she is afraid that she will be killed - rapists often use the threat of killing a woman or her children to ensure her 'submission' and her silence after the attack. Women do not enjoy sexual violence. Victims of murder, robbery and other crimes are never portrayed as enjoying the experience.

**Myth.** *The woman did not get hurt or fight back. It could not have been rape.*

**Fact.** Men who rape or sexually assault women and girls will often use weapons or threats of violence to intimidate women. The fact that there is no visible evidence of violence does not mean that a woman has not been raped.

Another myth that goes hand in hand with this is that 'rape is a fate worse than death' and this links with the belief that women should fight and resist throughout. Faced with the reality of rape, women make second by second decisions, all of which are directed at minimising the harm done to them. At the point where initial resistance, struggling, reasoning etc have failed, the fear of further violence often limits women's resistance. The only form of control that seems available to women at this point is limiting the harm done to them.

**Myth.** *Men of certain races and backgrounds are more likely to commit sexual violence.*

**Fact.** There is no typical rapist. Studies show that men who commit sexual violence come from every economic, ethnic, racial, age and social group. 85% of rapists are men known to their victims.

**Myth.** *Men who rape or sexually assault are mentally ill or monsters.*

**Fact.** Studies have indicated that as few as 5% of men are psychotic at the time of their crimes. Few convicted

rapists are referred for psychiatric treatment.

**Myth.** *The man was drunk / on drugs / depressed / under stress / wasn't himself.*

**Fact.** Men use a variety of excuses to justify the act of rape. There is never an excuse.

**Myth.** *Once a man is sexually aroused he cannot help himself. He has to have sex.*

**Fact.** Studies show that most rapes are premeditated i.e. they are either wholly or partially planned in advance. All rapes committed by more than one assailant are always planned. Men can quite easily control their urges to have sex—they do not need to rape a woman to satisfy them. Rape is an act of violence - not sexual gratification. Men who rape or sexually assault do so to dominate, violate and control.

**Myth.** *Men who rape are sexually frustrated / do not have the opportunity to have sex with a willing partner.*

**Fact.** Men who rape are as likely as any other man to be cohabiting or having a significant relationship with a woman. More than one in five women is raped by their partners or their husbands. Women who work as prostitutes or in the sex industry are usually dismissed as rape victims because of bias by the police, criminal justice

system, juries and society in general.

**Myth.** *Women make up stories about being raped.*

**Fact.** Reporting to the police can be a difficult decision. There are many myths that underlie the belief that women make false and malicious allegations of rape against innocent men. Studies show however, that the allegations of rape that are false are exactly the same as that of any other crime i.e. around 4%.

**Myth.** *Women cannot rape other women.*

**Fact.** Only a man can commit the offence of Rape as the penetration has to be with a penis. However, both women and men may experience rape. If the penetration is with something other than a penis, then the offence is assault by penetration.

The majority of sexual assaults are committed by men against women, but anyone can be sexually assaulted and emotional, physical and sexual abuse does happen in same sex relationships. Often when women are assaulted by other women they fear they will not be believed. It is important to realise that women who are assaulted by other women are able to access support and are believed.

Courtesy: [www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

## NEWS : RESERVE BEDS AT HOSPITALS FOR ACID ATTACK VICTIMS

The Centre Government has asked all chief secretaries to introduce a comprehensive legislation within three months to stop misuse of acid and corrosive substances. The Centre has asked state governments to pay a compensation of Rs 3 lakh to acid attack survivors as care and rehabilitation cost. Of this, Rs 1 lakh should be paid within 15 days of an incident to facilitate immediate medical attention, while the balance Rs 2 lakh should be paid as expeditiously possible, within two months.

The Centre has directed all central and state government hospitals to treat acid attack survivors free of cost. "Acid attack survivors need to undergo a series of plastic surgeries and hence 1-2 beds should be earmarked in government hospitals, so that the person need not run from pillar to post to get these operations performed expeditiously. In addition, private hospitals, which have availed the facility of concessional land for setting up hospital, should also provide one or two free beds.

The Centre has also banned over-the-counter sale of



acid and corrosive substances. The seller will have to maintain a log-book/register recording the sale of acid, details of the person to whom it is sold and the quantity sold. It is also mandatory for the buyer to produce a photo identity card issued by the government, with the person's address. The seller's log book should also specify the reason for buying the

acid. Moreover, all stocks of acid must be declared by sellers to the sub-divisional magistrate, within 15 days. Educational institutions, research laboratories, hospitals, government departments and departments of public sector undertakings, who are required to store acid/corrosives, will have to maintain a register of acid use and file the same with the SDM.

*"It is little wonder that rape is one of the least-reported crimes. Perhaps it is the only crime in which the victim becomes the accused and, in reality, it is she who must prove her good reputation, her mental soundness, and her impeccable propriety."*

## ■ MANGALORE

A local court in Mangalore on Sept. 21, 2013 awarded life imprisonment to two persons for gangraping a minor girl at a railway station here in 2010. Court also imposed Rs 25,000 fine on each of the accused—Nishith (20) and Ashok (26)—failing which they would have to undergo additional two years imprisonment. The 15-year-old girl from Odisha, who was at the station, was taken to a compartment and gangraped by the convicts on the pretext of boarding her onto a Goa-bound train. The victim was found unconscious by a cleaner who informed police.



## ■ DELHI

A 50-year-old man has been sentenced to life imprisonment by a Delhi court for ravishing his minor niece, allowing others to gang-rape her and forcing her into prostitution. The court convicted him for six offences (rape, gang-rape, criminal intimidation, criminal conspiracy, wrongful confinement and procuring the girl for prostitution). He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for conspiracy, 10 years jail for rape, 14 years for immoral trafficking and life term. The sentences would not run concurrently. The court observed that crime was “abhorrent, diabolic and barbaric.” A complaint was made to NHRC by the employer of the girl after she told her that Pannu used to sexually abuse her and his wife was party to it. The girl had told the court that after the death of



her father, her uncle Pannu and aunt had brought her to Delhi to look after her in 2003 as her mother had left them earlier. For some time, Pannu kept her properly but then raped her several times when she was 13-year-old, the girl said. Pannu used to forcibly send her with other persons for prostitution and he used to take money from them, she said.

## ■ WEST BENGAL

A 15-year-old tribal girl, who was forced to parade naked through villages in Birbhum district for daring to fall in love with a boy from another community, has been nominated for the National Bravery Award. India TV had highlighted her story in detail forcing the district administration to act. Birbhum District Magistrate Soumitra Mohan said that he had received a letter from the Indian Council for Child Welfare nominating the girl, who had mustered courage to file a police complaint against her tormentors, for the award. Despite her parents not wanting to lodge a complaint because they feared a social boycott and knowing what could lie in store for her, the girl scraped courage to identify her tormentors at a police identification parade," District Magistrate said. The girl, a resident of Battala village was stripped and forced to walk naked through four villages with her pictures taken and circulated through MMS. She had filed a complaint with the Rampurhat police station in the first week of August. The men were arrested, but later released on bail.



## TRAINING MUSLIM WOMEN TO BE PHOTOGRAPHERS AGAINST FATWA

An educational project in India is encouraging Muslim women to take up photography, in defiance of a controversial fatwa issued earlier this year that said the practice was ‘unIslamic’. Woman’s advocacy group **Aawaaz-e-Niswaan** which is based in the Mumbai suburb of Kurlahas trained more than a dozen women in photography skills, going against of regional customs and, now, this particular fatwa. Haseena Khan, founder of the project, explained that she had been thinking about new ways to help Indian women break out of restrictive traditional roles when she hit on photography. Training women to use cameras would not only open new career paths, she reasoned, but encourage them to mingle more openly in a society that expects women to stay in the background.

Khan recruited professional photographers to help teach students, with the one requirement being that they had to work outdoors, in public. The students, most of whom had never held a camera before, faced up to the challenge, capturing scenes ranging from celebrity appearances to wife-beating, often while wearing a burqa. (Sample images here.) Khan said the recent fatwa, in which the head of the country’s leading Islamic seminary declared photography ‘unIslamic’ and unsuitable as a career for Muslims, simply adds more urgency to her work. “The fatwa reeks of the medieval mindset,” Khan told. “Just as writing brings catharsis to writers, photography is a way of feeling liberated.”

A final surprise for the ‘burqa-clad photographers’ was



a felicitation organized by **Awaaz-e-Niswaan** and **Point Of View**. A gaily wrapped package was given to each of them (it contained a brand new digital camera). The delight with which it was received made a poignant scene. For the women, it was not just a camera—it was a pat of encouragement, a promise of support, and a chance to change their world, through photographs and personal example.

## LAXMI : A TRUE BRAVEHEART

On 28th September, India TV honored 13 bravehearts with newly constituted ‘Salam India Award’ in New Delhi. Laxmi was one among the 13 recipients.

Laxmi was only 15 years when on 22.04.2005; she was pinned to the ground and attacked with acid by a 32-year-old man and a lady accomplice because she turned down his offer of marriage. The deadly attack disfigured her face, ears, hands and chest but could not scar her spirits.



Hers is a story of pure courage. She became the face of campaign **Stop Acid Attacks** and filed a PIL in the Supreme Court seeking tougher regulations on the sale of acid and harsher punishment for attackers. Subsequently, the apex court on 18.07.2013 directed that the attack with acid be made a non-bailable offence. It also ordered state govts. to pay Rs. 3 lakh compensation to the victims. The court also asked states to frame rules to regulate the sale of acid. Laxmi says, “Face does not matter.”

## STORY OF A SURVIVIOR : KRISHNA



Krishna with Urmi Basu, the founder-trustee of New Light

Krishna's father was killed by robbers and her mother, seven months pregnant, had to travel from the Sunderbans to Calcutta with her 4-year-old brother in search of livelihood and a shelter. She landed in the dark lanes of Kalighat and was sucked into flesh trade. And now, Krishna is fighting to save many such mothers and daughters.

### Women Commission for Self-defense and Women Rights for School Curriculum

The Punjab state women commission has decided to approach the Punjab education department to include self-defense and women rights as additional subjects in school and colleges. According to the commission the step could go a long way in empowering the women at an early stage. Commission chairperson Paramjit Kaur said the commission soon is launching awareness campaigns in schools, colleges and universities to make girls aware of their rights and to empower them. She said that the commission has also launched a campaign to provide justice to women at their doorstep. Sixty cases were reported at the hearing by commission and 9 were solved with mutual understanding. She said wherever necessary the verdict of women commission is submitted by parties in designated courts as well. She said the first priority of the commission is to solve all the issues pertaining to women with the consent of both the parties.

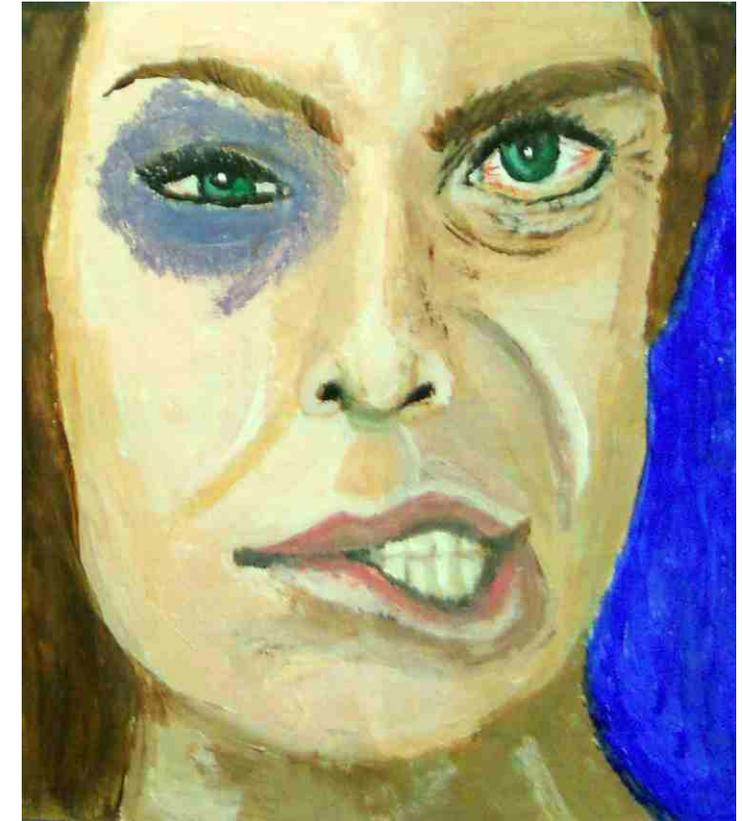
"My mother was helpless. I saw her suffer... strange men in the house and I didn't want the same for myself. I couldn't study beyond Class VIII because my mother couldn't afford it. Yet, I got the opportunity to do good work after I met Didi (Urmi Basu, the founder-trustee of New Light)," said Krishna, now also a founder-trustee of New Light, a Kalighat-based NGO that works to protect women and children of sex workers. The 31-year-old's story has inspired *Half the Sky's* collaborative initiative for the first *Students Rebuild Awards* to grant her \$10,000.

When *Half the Sky*, a four-hour TV series inspired by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's book and endorsed by the likes of Meg Ryan, Diane Lane and Eva Mendes turned into a worldwide movement for raising awareness about women's issues, a hunt began for community leaders. Entries poured in from Sierra Leone, Cambodia, India, Kenya and Somalia—the countries featured in the book.

Krishna's story won with the highest number of votes. "Krishna was among the first few I met when starting New Light. She was 17. Her mother was a prostitute and she was under great pressure to join...but she resisted and I saw in her a readiness to make a leap out of this space, bonding and compulsions," Urmi said. Krishna was among five women 'recognised and celebrated' for showing 'uncommon grit, persistence and commitment to improving conditions for themselves and others'.

The judges included actresses Olivia Wilde, America Ferrera, fashion designer Eileen Fisher, UN adviser and noted economics professor Jeffrey D. Sachs. Krishna has already received 60% of the grant. "Before the award... she was asked how she would use the funds and Krishna

decided to create a replica of the New Light model of creche and night shelter in another location," said Urmi, who helped find four lanes in Sonagachhi where the project is set to take off with Krishna in charge. The new project will be called Operation Starfish, in a throwback to a Hawaiian folktale in the first chapter of *Half the Sky*, where a man walking on the beach picks up one starfish at a time and throws it back into the ocean because "it would matter to that one starfish which is going to survive". ■■■



**Violence is NOT always visible,  
because it hurts soul too.**

### HELPFUL LINKS ON VAW

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<http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence> • <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/>  
<http://indialawyers.wordpress.com/category/crime-against-women/>

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