



Protesting Violence Against Women

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Editorial

Protibaad : An Inventory of Actions and Future

Wish you all a very happy and successful 2014.

Reacting to the brutal gang rape and subsequent death of a young student in New Delhi in the December of 2012, we created an online forum 'Protibaad'. That horrendous incident generated mass protest and anger in India, and brought the issue of violence against women (VAW) to national and international conscience. 'Protibaad' became the voice of protest of its members. One year down the road, it is time to make an inventory of our actions—what we have achieved and not, and what we need to do to take our cause forward.

A quick look at our member list will tell you that this is a truly international forum that has people from all over the globe, from different professions, and disciplines.

In January and February of 2013, we collectively drafted a petition to the President of India urging the government to take concrete actions for preventing VAW. We produced a comprehensive document containing a set of recommendations covering education, media, technology, economics, religion, and society. We also circulated this document as an online petition through change.org. We sent the signed petition to the president's office in Feb. 2013. You can view the petition at <http://protibaad.wikispaces.com/>.

Throughout 2013, we have used the online forum to highlight ongoing incidents of violence against women in India. We did more than highlighting. We actually posted the news items and then attempted to build discussions and action points around those incidents. We have joined hands with activist organizations to protest against incidents like acid attacks on women, police inaction and sluggish justice system, role of media in promoting violence against women and other issues. Our members have played important roles in generating awareness by curating and posting articles and opinions, as well as participating in campaigns and debates relating to Violence against Women.

We also started a monthly Newsletter in July 2013. The core editorial team (Subhodev Das, Aparajita Sen, Debasis Bandyopadhyay, Arin Basu, Sangbreeta Moitra and Subrato Mitra) put together the monthly issues covering the most important news items relating to VAW. The Newsletters are published on the forum Protibaad (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/protibaad/>), on the page <https://www.facebook.com/ProtibaadForum> on Facebook and on the blog <http://protibaadforum.wordpress.com>.

We want to take our activism further in 2014 by focusing on a few issues we believe to be fundamental for preventing VAW: **child marriage, education for girls and women, and economic empowerment of women**. We intend to make these issues our priority, on the forum, blog and in our Newsletters. We hope that we shall have greater participation from our members this year.

We have several academics in our member lists interested in research on VAW. We would also like to get involved in projects for fighting violence against women in India. We hope that we shall be able to do much more in 2014.

STORY OF THE MONTH

Madhyamgram Gang Rape Case

This time the venue was Madhyamgram, and the victim was a 16-year old girl. She was gang raped twice by the same set of men in Oct. 2013, and then set on fire on 23rd Dec. by the same men wanting to silence her and her family. They succeeded. The young girl succumbed to her burn injuries on 31st Dec. The Bengali language daily 'Anandabazar Patrika' reported that signs of a foetus were found in the girl's womb during post-mortem, as confirmed by WB police.

Girl was first gangraped on 25th October at Madhyamgram not far from Kolkata and found lying in a field near her house. She was forcibly taken away by the same gang and raped again when she was returning home with her parents after lodging a complaint with the local police. She identified and named six people who had committed the crime. The severely injured girl was later found lying unconscious near the railway tracks the same day. Her family changed residence but could not protect the girl from being set on fire in her own home. It was initially presumed that the young girl had committed suicide by immolation, but the girl named the two people who had set her on fire. A murder case has now been filed against these men.

On 1st January, a raging row sparked between the ruling TMC and the opposition (Left Front and the Congress). Opposition alleged that city police took away the girl's body in the early hours of the day and tried to forcibly cremate it. They did not succeed, however, not having the death certificate. TMC and the police have denied all allegations. CM Mamata Banerjee again accused the opposition parties of 'conspiracy'.

A CBI probe has been sought by Congress party. The National Commission for Women has taken cognizance of the case and sought a report from CM Mamata Banerjee on the action taken by her government.

While the civil society is actively protesting against the incident and demanding justice, the government of West Bengal remains strangely silent.



Violence against women is an everyday reality, act now, always, and forever before its too late.

Economic Wellbeing of a Society Embedded in a Culture of Violence against Women

In the story of Madhaymgram we hear the story of a migrant student, daughter of a taxi driver. She was smart and her parents did not push her into child marriage to find a 'safe home'. Instead they encouraged her to aspire for higher education. The society did not reward that decision. A street-gang raped her on two separate occasions, because police did not offer protection.

The society does not educate such men, who loiter on the streets without jobs, to go home to share house work with women. Those tasks are assigned to women as per social custom. Most religions and rituals too support such gender-based assignment of duties. However, as technology advances, by replacing manpower with brainpower, employers demand untapped talents of women buried at home. In response women aspire for higher education and attempt to join the workforce. They find barriers imposed by men with less brain power, extracting rents from their privileged status and institutional power endowed by existing social norms, culture and religions. Such barriers against civil liberty, coupled with no legal rights to inherited property (until quite recently) and, above all, a continual push for marriage which a girl faces even as a child, discourage women to explore their full potential and to contribute efficiently toward economic development. At the same time, the conflicts between socially powerful men with limited brain power and socially underprivileged smart women aspiring for higher education and jobs may have been contributing to the growing violence against women, causing economic waste and productivity loss for the whole society.

Those were the key points of a research paper I presented at the Delhi and Kolkata ISIs and at the IGIDR in Mumbai. Also as an invited guest lecturer, with a key policy executive of the WB State Government, Abhirup Sarkar, as the chairperson for the session, I discussed the key ideas of that paper at the 23rd annual conference on "Contemporary Issues in Development Economics", held in Jadavpur University.

A NEW BEGINNING IN KRISHNANAGAR

Subsequently a few of us in my hometown Krishnanagar have begun a series of activities to promote awareness of this social evil, primarily among men. The founder of the Central Nursing Home in Krishnanagar, Dr. Basudeb Mandal, took the lead role by kicking off lectures at high

schools. The big bang of planned events, which attracted other stars, followed. I am very grateful to Dr. Mandal for that. Those events would be parts of a three point action plan.

1. Initiate cultural events to celebrate the legacy of Rammohan and Vidyasagar with an objective to promote awareness of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation of women **with a special emphasis on the perils of child marriage**. Distinguished community leaders and intellectuals like Dr. Basudeb Mandal, Anada Award winning author Dr. Sudhir Chakraborty, respected social leader and the winner of a lifetime achievement award Chandan Sanyal, committed to work toward organizing a cultural event in the near future. It will include contribution from a veteran artist Debojjwal Majumder, who plans to produce a documentary in sketches of the evolution of different forms of violence against women since the days of Rammohan, with a special emphasis on sexual harassments which women in India suffer every day, inside and outside home. There will be Holui songs, poems, drama skits, drawing and speech contests, debates and discussions involving primarily young students but also adults, veteran intellectuals and social leaders.

2. Modify school curricula to incorporate a new course in relationship building designed to teach the students in classes IX and X respect for human rights, issues surrounding sexual harassments, teenage suicides and perils of child marriage. In



Dr. Debasis Bandopadhyay with Dr. Basudeb Mandal at Krishnanagar



particular, it would teach necessary communication skills to promote understanding of gender specific issues to enable boys and girls to build a healthy relationship as adults. Following meetings with teachers and headmasters, Mr. Tusar Kanti Samanta, the newly appointed Head Master of my *alma mater* the Krishnanagar Collegiate School, committed to take the initiative by starting a weekly class on an experimental basis. He also proposed to confer with the DM of Nadia to convene a meeting of all HMs to pool resources across all schools in the Nadia Distt. to follow suit. He informed that together with other headmasters he had already submitted a similar proposal for curriculum changes to Avik Majumder, Chairman of the WB Secondary School Syllabus Committee. I called Abhirup Sarkar to enquire about the status of the proposal from Mr. Majumder. I hope to see a positive outcome during my visit later this year.

3. Mobilize counselling services to accompany monthly health camps of the local Lions Club to provide direct hearing of VAW in various forms including forced child marriage & sexual harassments. My school mate from the KCS, Dr. Tapan Das, currently serving as the President of the local Lions Club, agreed to take up the above initiative starting the with the next medical camp the Club will be organizing. Dr. Das intends to contact professional counsellors, to seek sponsorship from local and international supporters to make the initiative sustainable in the long run. He welcomes all local professionals who are interested in supporting his idea of providing counselling service to teenage children and other individuals concerned about issues related to sexual harassment. He can be contacted at: tkdas1959@gmail.com.

—Dr. Debasis Bandopadhyay

Child Marriage

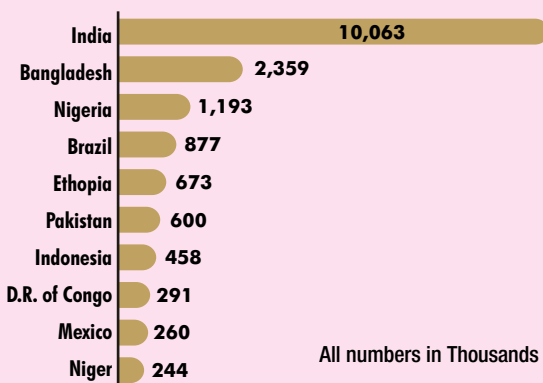


The Council on Foreign Relations has launched an interactive guide on child marriage in January 2014. It is available at http://www.cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/child-marriage/p32096#!/?cid=soc-twitter-in-infoguide-child_marriage-010814.

We present below some of the findings presented in the guide.

- ✓ Across developing countries, an estimated one in three girls is married before turning 18 and one in nine before 15. Analysts project that if current trends continue, 142 million girls will marry before adulthood within this decade.
- ✓ Surveys of child brides conducted by the United Nations and many nongovernmental agencies paint a broad demographic portrait of young married girls.
- ✓ Girls from rural areas are twice as likely to marry as children as those from urban areas.
- ✓ Child brides are most likely to be from poor families. Across many countries, young married girls are most often from the poorest quintile of the income bracket.
- ✓ Married girls are generally less educated, either for lack of opportunity or the curtailment of their schooling by early marriage.

Top 10 countries with Child Brides



Child Marriage prevalence Rate in India is 47%, highest in the world. Spurred by widespread poverty and centuries old traditions, some 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India. Many parents marry their daughters off young to preserve their chastity until marriage, which upholds family honor, and to protect maturing girls from predation. Because early marriage is deeply rooted in many communities across India, enormous social pressures perpetuate the practice.

The states with the highest incidence of child marriage in the country are Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

Indian government has made combatting child marriage a priority. The 2006 Prohibition of Child Marriage Act punishes those who perform or promote such marriages with imprisonment or a fine of up to 100,000 rupees (\$1,800). The law also allows for child marriages to be annulled and gives child brides the right to live with their in-laws until they remarry. In 2013, a state court declared that the act overrides the Muslim Personal Law, which allows girls to marry once they reach puberty. Enforcement and awareness of these laws, however, remain a challenge.

According to UNICEF (Child Marriage Fact Sheet, Nov. 2011), "Child marriage is associated with several health risks for the young mother, as early marriage may translate into repeated pregnancies at a tender age when the body is not fully prepared for child bearing.

"Girls age 15-19 are more likely (66.6%) to experience delivery complications compared to 30-34 year-old women (59.7%) and neonatal, infant and child mortality rates are much higher for younger girls.

"Risks of HIV/AIDS infection are higher among young girls as their negotiation skills and experience to ensure a healthy sexual life are less developed."

Child Marriage in Rajasthan

To curb child marriages that are rampant in Rajasthan's rural areas, the state government has issued a directive that the date of birth of the bride and groom be printed on wedding invitation cards. All district collectors and Superintendents of Police (SP) have already been asked to ensure strict enforcement of the directives, likely to be enforced across the state soon.



A senior woman and Child Welfare Department officer told sources, "All printing press owners will have to secure a date of birth certificate from the families of the bride as well as the groom before printing any wedding cards." The officer said that if the printing press owner finds either the bride or the groom or both are not of the legal age for marriage, he would turn down the print order. "He may even have to report the proposed wedding to the district administration, so that it can be prevented," the officer said. Printing press owners found flouting the orders would face arrest and six months' imprisonment, and also have to pay a fine of Rs. 1,000.

The project was launched on a pilot basis at Bharatpur district in April last year. "The results are great. About 50 child marriages were prevented in the past one year. Now, it has been implemented across the state," the officer said.

—Rachita Bhattacharya

University Student (rachz.bhu@gmail.com)

**Please don't label me.
Let me grow up
and choose for myself**



www.humanism.org.uk
www.richarddawkins.net
www.atheistcampaign.org

A Saviour of the Child Brides

Ms Kriti Bharti (26) is a child rights activist and rehabilitation psychologist. She has a group of around five volunteers to assist her but on almost all child bride-saving missions, she prefers to go alone. "I don't want to put the lives of others at risk," she says. "Over the past five years since I've started working to stop child marriages, I've helped to annul over 150 child marriages," she says. "I've also received more than 50 threats warning me of dire consequences, even death." Kriti has been threatened by not only families but also members of caste councils and even local politicians but she refuses to be intimidated.



Image courtesy: Friday Magazine, Gulf News

Kriti is from Jodhpur, Rajasthan. She is an award-winning anti-child-marriage activist and women and children's rights campaigner. She has been working to help children for over 5 years. She established the charity **Saarthi Trust** in 2012 to help victims of India's child marriage crisis and set up another charity, **Badhtey Kadam**, to help poor street children who are looking to improve their lives. Raised by her single mother, Indu Chopra (58), a government employee, the activist grew up learning to cope with the knocks she received in life. Her father abandoned her and her mother when she was two years old. "I had a tough childhood so, although different in many ways, I can identify with victims of child marriages and their grief for their lost childhood."

It was while Kriti was doing her masters degree in rehabilitation psychology from Rajasthan University in 2007 that she began to work with children who had experienced traumatic situations and required counseling. After working with street children for around seven months, she found that one of the biggest issues facing children, specially those in the rural areas, was child marriage. It greatly moved her and she started campaigning against child marriage.

We wish her greater success and hope, no harm will come to her. ■■■

Short Film 'Bol' takes on Violence against Women in a Powerful Way

It is one of the great and tragic ironies of violence against women that the problem is so widespread yet the victims feel like they are all alone. Mumbai-based filmmaker **Pooja Batura Pathak** brilliantly addresses this paradox and other subtle realities in her short film titled **Bol**, which means **Speak Out**. The video tells women that "the more you talk, the less it will happen."

Shot in black and white and without dialogue, the film tackles child abuse, sexual harassment, marital rape, and domestic violence in only 12 minutes. It begins with a bruised woman writing in a journal, "Someone, somewhere, is going through the same what I am going through." Yet as the film shows, these problems are faced by more than someone, somewhere. The film's focus shifts from one woman to another as the characters pass each other while going



about their lives, giving the unshakable impression that this kind of violence is, in fact, going on everywhere, that women face it throughout their lives, and that it is a cycle that just goes on and on in silence. This especially true in Pathak's country, where instance after instance of violence against women makes speaking out especially crucial.

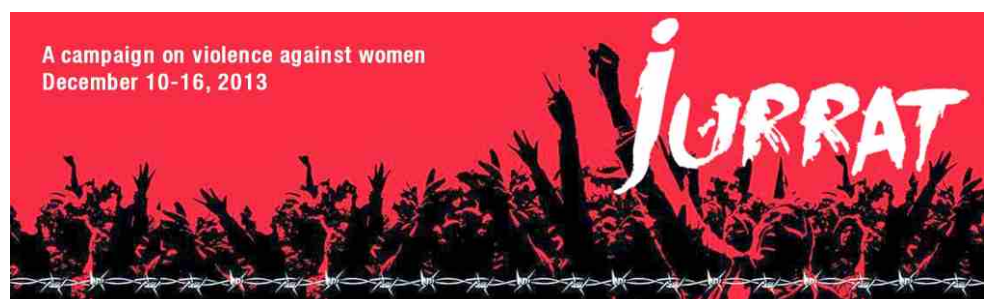
It's a hard watch but well worth it. ■■■

Changing Attitude with Holui Songs in Krishnaganj

Madhyamgram marked the end of 2013 with a frustrating reminder that violence against women remains a social disease that has no obvious cure. Sheer absence of political will to help a girl when she was alive and the ugly political ping pong that followed with her dead body speaks volume about the lack of leadership among political parties in promoting awareness and in combating violence against women.

A group of village musicians took the lead with Holui songs. These songs describe sufferings of women in a society that accommodates, in silence, violence against women in various forms: from everyday sexual harassments to rape, murder and forced suicides. The tradition of signing against a social disease and for a positive change in social attitude with Holui songs had started since the days of Maharaja Krishnachandra of Krishnaganar, Nadia. The songs tell us stories of women who suffer violence needlessly.

—Staff Reporter, **Ananda Bazar Patrika** (The Bengali Newspaper)
Kolkata; Sunday 19 January, p 14



JURRAT, a campaign on violence against women was held in Delhi from 10-16th December, 2013 marking the anniversary of the heinous Delhi gang rape. This whole year, city after city and village after village has screamed 'Rape' 'Gang Rape' in the months after the much publicized and condemned Delhi-gang rape.

'Jurrat' means Courage! Audacity! Brazen spirit! Fearless stride together to recognize, speak out, protest and act against the manifold forms of violence faced by women in both private and public spaces. 'Jurrat' signified the urgent need for women

and men to both question and act beyond the oppressive gender norms. The campaign aimed at interrogating and broadening the popular discourse on gender violence beyond the hyperbole of media narratives.

According to the organizer Swara Bhaskar, "We wanted to reclaim the streets of Delhi and make them safer for all women." To achieve this various events were held in different parts of Delhi. The week-long chain of acts and presentations ended with a musical concert at the JNU convention centre on December 16. ■■■

L'affaire Khobragade



Ms. Devyani Khobragade, the Deputy Consul General of India in New York kept the Indian media fully occupied in December. She was charged by U.S. authorities for committing visa fraud. She had allegedly provided false information for obtaining a visa for Sangeeta Richard, also Indian, to be employed as her domestic help. The visa was delivered based on a work contract which stipulated her hourly salary in the U.S. at \$9.75 for a normal 40 hour working week. However, in reality, Ms. Richard was paid only \$3.31/hour, as alleged in a legal complaint letter filed by her to the US authorities. Ms. Khobragade was arrested by U.S. federal law enforcement authorities on 12th Dec. 2013 and was then subjected to a 'strip search' that includes search of her body cavities.

There was a huge outcry about the humiliation and mistreatment of the Indian diplomat in India which eventually started a serious diplomatic row between the two countries. It also brought back into focus the questionable practices of Indian diplomats posted abroad with respect to their domestic employees. The public opinion was sharply divided into two camps: (a) those who wanted justice for the domestic help Ms. Richard and (b) those who bristled at Ms. Khobragade's 'dishonour'. The Govt. of India quietly got her an UN accreditation guaranteeing diplomatic immunity and flew her back to New Delhi. Ms. Richard's family is now reportedly in the US for escaping the wrath of Ms. Khobragade's powerful father, a retired IAS officer.



Women Tourists in Danger?

The month of January 2014 witnessed several sexual assaults on foreign women tourists in India. On 2nd January, a Polish woman travelling from Mathura to New Delhi was allegedly drugged and raped by her taxi driver. She was travelling with her 2½ year old daughter. The survivor's medical test has confirmed rape.

On 9th January, an 18-year-old German teenager was allegedly raped after falling asleep on a train heading to Chennai in southeastern India, where she was going to do volunteer work with a charity. German Teen Raped in India.

On 15th January, a 51-year-old Danish tourist was attacked by a group of men in the Paharganj area in New Delhi. She had lost her way near her city centre hotel. Police say she was robbed and raped at knife point. Several people, including juveniles, have been arrested by the police.

Since last year, the lack of safety of women travelers has been canvassed all over the world and has impacted the number of women tourists visiting India.

There is a 35% fall in women foreign tourists to India recently—25% overall since December 2012. Most cancellations are from the UK, US, Canada and Australia. India's loss is gain for Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam.

Indian Ad turns the Male Gaze back on itself and it's Awesome



Mumbai based film school Whistling Woods International released a YouTube video recently, one year after the horrific rape case in Delhi. The short video shows four scenarios where women are subjected to the ever-pervasive male gaze while going about their daily lives, whether talking with friends or just riding the bus. But then a reflective surface, be it sunglasses or a necklace, turns these gazes back on the men themselves.

The video is both very realistic—and uncomfortable—portrayal of men staring at young women, and also in the message it is trying to send, namely "You look ridiculous and creepy, and we can see you." All too often, not just in India but all over the world, it seems that men looking at women in public places somehow think they are watching a display, as though women exist on a TV screen. When, of course, in reality, women can see the people staring at them just fine, and those stares can make us feel not only uncomfortable and objectified, but downright unsafe. And yet the underlying idea that women going about their lives are putting on some sort of detached performance persists. As per the video description on YouTube, Whistling Wood International wanted to make an ad empowering women as part of the celebration of 100 Years of Indian Cinema. It's the sort of message that needs to be heard everywhere.

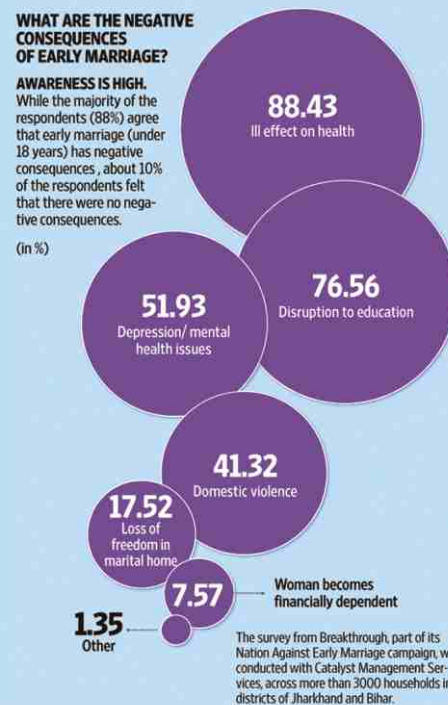
PERCEPTION AND PRACTICE

India's failure to co-sponsor the first United Nations Human Rights Council resolution recognizing child marriage as a human rights violation and adding its elimination to the UN's post-2015 global development agenda has put the spotlight on the country's poor record in curbing child marriage. A recent survey highlights perceptions regarding child marriage in the country.

WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF EARLY MARRIAGE?

AWARENESS IS HIGH. While the majority of the respondents (88%) agree that early marriage (under 18 years) has negative consequences, about 10% of the respondents felt that there were no negative consequences.

(in %)



HELPFUL LINKS ON VAW

- <http://protibaadforum.wordpress.com>
- <https://www.facebook.com/SaveNavaruna>
- http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/violence_against_women_20130620/en/
- <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence>
- <http://indialawyers.wordpress.com/category/crime-against-women/>
- <http://moneylife.in/article/who-is-devyani-khobragade/35684.html>

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