

Women's rights

On 16 December 2012, a 23 year old physiotherapy student and her companion got into a bus in Delhi, to return home after a film. There were five men and the driver in the bus and they all started to harass the young women. When her friend intervened, he was beaten, and knocked unconscious with an iron rod. Then the men dragged the women at the back of the bus, beat her up and gang raped her while the bus was running. After the beatings and rape ended, the attackers threw both the victims from the moving bus on the road. Thirteen days later the woman died from her injuries.

The coverage this incident brought by media and outraged protests nationally and internationally forced the government to admit the severity of the reality for the first time. « *It is indeed a matter of shame that, notwithstanding the gains we have made, incidents of violence and sexual offences against women are on the increase,* » the prime minister Mr. Singh acknowledged, in *New Delhi*.

While the protest has been going on, reports of similar incidents have been emerging from different parts of the country. Again, after two months, the assault on the 19 year old student in her home in South Delhi shook the capital. An electrician who knew the girl forced his way into her apartment and tried to rape her. When she shouted for help, he pushed an iron rod into her mouth and silenced her. Neighbours who heard her cries rushed over and moved her to hospital. The chief minister of Delhi, *Ms. Shiela Dikshit*, came out in open saying that « *Women don't feel safe in Delhi* ».

One may think these are incidents that happens once in a while, but it is not so. I personally know many young girls and women who have been victims of violence besides my personal experience while working in rural India. 15 years ago, while I was living in a leprosy colony, the milk man got into my room around



Violence against women is very common in India.

11.30 pm. I was awake, and was able to run out of the room for life. If I didn't act for one second, I would have also ended up like these young women.

Œuvre des pains chose the land where *St. Anthony's School* stands today because it was also a piece of land, where a young girl of 17 was raped, tied up and killed. Today, her death bed has become the play ground for the children of *St. Anthony School*. A homage paid to this young innocent girl to bring up a new generation better informed and prepared to fight for their rights.

Following the incident in the bus mentioned at the top, women's rights in India took centre stage. The government is currently drafting anti-rape laws. Many hoped attention from the outrage over the attack would lead to a culture change. That shift is now taking place with a fight to end a long standing and illegal practice : female infanticide. Recently the government announced steps to stop gender-based abortion, which kills about 7,000 unborn girls a day in India. The ultra sound technology has reached most parts of the country, it has become more affordable, more accessible and it has definitely fuelled the



Recently we celebrated the « *World Toilet Day* ». Did you know that one in three people around the world do not have a safe, clean and private toilet? An estimated 1.1 billion people defecate in the open, majority of them living in rural areas.

The defecation in the open causes communicable diseases such as cholera which threatens lives. That is one aspect of it. What about the struggle they go through on a daily basis? When they get sick, when the visitors come, when it is raining heavy and cold?

Idrisha has 5 children, she had no toilet until recently she took a loan from the « *Self Help Group* » to build it. « *Going to the open field for the toilet has always been humiliating me. As my children were growing, I felt it all the more. For emergency, we used a pot and put ashes to keep it dry. I felt like vomiting with its smell and didn't feel like eating the whole day after emptying it in the field. My family is very happy that we have a toilet now.* »

Creating awareness about having private toilet in the villages is one of the main efforts of our social workers! More and more people are doing it. We hope one day all the villagers will make it!

whole sex-selective abortion scenario. There's new hope that cultural support for aborting baby girls in the womb may be softening. The government of Rajasthan has announced that it's penalizing some of the doctors who perform these gender-based abortions. About 100 doctors will be kept up to five years in prison for performing gender-based abortions.

Recently BBC reported « *Nearly a quarter of Indian parliamentarians are facing criminal charges.* » This clearly shows the quality of the leadership... leaders who are elected to serve the people do crimes and get away with it. The situation has worsened in India recently. The public sector has become awfully corrupt. Malpractices and corruption are spread all over and it hardly leaves anyone untouched. Public awareness is taking place, and a lot of protest is going on against it. However, they are like sheep without Shepard, no strong leader who is clean, with a vision for the future has emerged so far.

People are coming out in open, demanding the government to pass severe anti-rape laws however, when the law is passed, will it be implemented or will get away like in many other cases? The national election is fast approaching, the government wants to pacify the voters, they will do anything to collect votes. For the innocent people who are victims there is a long way to go, but it is good to see that people are starting to spread awareness and raise voice against this crime.

Women are physically weak, they are not prepared for an attack as such and many may still be ashamed to come out in public, so this stigma of rejection by the society will continue to keep these crimes covered up to a large extent for some more time.

Let us hope the life sacrificed by this girl will not be in vain, that her generation will continue to fight it out.

International Women's Day

In the midst of all these events happening, our people in Asmoli region prepared for the women's day celebration, on March 8. Special programs for the emancipation of women and awareness about the present happenings has



been conducted in different villages. In each of the villages women prepared different programs to stage on this day. Several hundreds of women participated in it.

Vasanti from Bela : « Before meeting Jena (GMVS-Œuvre des pains staff), my life was confined to my house, hardly I got out of my house in public. Now, I have a social life, I have friends and we talk about many things and my world is much bigger. I am happy that I can read and write. This brought a big change into my life it is a new beginning that I am living now. »

Lakshmi Mittal

I was not surprised by people asking me about Lakshmi Mittal since a lot of talk is going around about him after he decided to close down the steel factory in Liège. One of the questions I was asked is, if his religion wants him to collect maximum wealth ? Though he is from the business caste, I believe it doesn't force him to collect maximum amount of money. There are poets, philanthropist, etc. also in Vaishya caste.

Though Mittal has Indian origin, he migrated to England like so many other Indians. He is living in London. It is true, Mittal represents one reality that there are very rich people in India while majority of its people struggle to

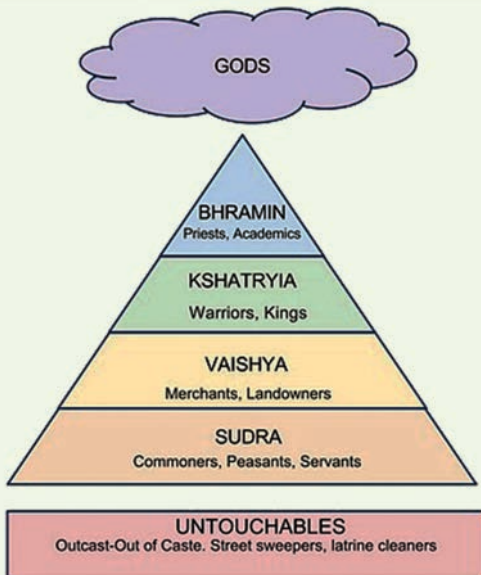


During the Women's Day, informations are given to the women about how to react in certain situations.

meet both ends. Those who know India will certainly agree that India is a country of extreme contrast.

The Hindu religion is divided into 4 main castes : **Brahmins**, the priestly caste, the top in the hierarchy, **Kshatriyas**, the warriors, second in the hierarchy, then comes **Vaishyas**, the merchants and **Sudras** the low caste. Finally you have the outcasts, the untouchables or dalits. There are many more divisions under these main caste.

In Hindu religion, in general, people worship their God(s) and the Salvation comes from being good with God. It doesn't involve so much of one's neighbour. Where as in Christianity, to be good is to share and care for our neighbours as well, there is a strong spirit of sharing.



Farmer's clubs

India is an agrarian country with around 60% of its people depending directly or indirectly on agriculture. As the land is divided into smaller and smaller pieces among its inheritance, it becomes really difficult for the farmers to survive with farming alone. They are not skilled and the unskilled labour is not paid



Each group consist of 10 to 20 farmers.

well. There is an increase in the suicide rate of farmers in India. The estimated suicide rate among agricultural workers in India is seven per 100,000.

Knowing the increasing problem, in our project area, *GMVS-Œuvre des pains* decided to intervene and to help the farmers. We consulted the farmers and decided to form « Kisan Clubs » (Kisan = farmers). Each group consist of 10 to 20 farmers. Once the group is formed, they are registered in the local bank supported by *National Bank for Rural and Agricultural Development* (NABARD). Nabard has scheme to support the farmers, they train them and give loans once the group is registered in the local bank.

During the last 6 months, *GMVS-Œuvre des pains* has registered 5 *Kisan Clubs* consisting of 60 farmers. They receive training from NABARD. If they want financial support for their farming, they are eligible to get loan from the bank. The manure called 'Vermicompost', produced by earthworm fed by cow dung is what help the farmers best. It brings back the fertility of the land and improves the quantity and the quality of the crop.

Sunil, one of the member, says : « *Though I noticed that each year I have to use more and more manure to get the crop, I didn't know that this manure has been spoiling the quality of the land and the chemicals in it is absorbed by the crops and it is not good for our health. I am happy that there is an al-*

ternative way, that we can start the organic farming. I start to use the vermicompost, which will preserve the quality of the land and produce healthy food. »

Sunil remembers the happy days when he was growing up in his family house. He lived with his grand parents, parents and 4 uncles and all the cousins under the same roof. The joint family contained the families of his parents, 4 uncles and grand parents, each of them having their own separate kitchen however. They all worked in the family land and the income from the land was handled by the grandfather. Each of his sons received what is needed for their

daily expenses. The grand parents divided their land among their 5 boys and then, the 5 families divided that land among their children as well. The piece of land Sunil got is 3 bighas (approximately 1/2 acre or 1 hectare), just not enough to make a living for a family of 5. His wife is part of one of our SHG (*Self-Help-Group*), she took a loan and bought a buffalo and they run the family with the income from the land and the buffalo. Sunil says « *I try my level best to keep my family going. However, I don't see any better future for my children* ».

Molly Sebastian



Inauguration of a « Kisan Club ».

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