

A Report

on

International Women's Day Celebrations 2005 For Building Solidarity among Women across the State of Andhra Pradesh

Organised by

COVA

March 2-3, 2005, Hyderabad

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INTRODUCTION

To commemorate the International Women's Day, COVA organised a Two-Day event involving 450 SHG Leaders from eight districts (50 from each district) and 1000 women from the old city of Hyderabad, on March 2-3, 2005. The broad objective of this event was to build solidarity among women across the State of Andhra Pradesh.

The details of the two-day event were as follows:

Day I – On 2nd March 2005 public meetings were held in 16 bastis in the old city of Hyderabad. SHG leaders from each district participated in the meetings at two areas and interacted with SHG members in the area and shared their experiences. Action-oriented resolutions were passed in each of these meetings on the three chosen issues: Communalism and Women, HIV-AIDS and Women, and Violence against Women.

Day II -A day long convention on 3rd March 2005 brought together about 450 women from eight districts and 1000 women from the old city of Hyderabad at Quli Qutub Shah Stadium, High Court Road, Hyderabad which was a combination of serious discussions as well as cultural events revolving around the following themes:

- a) Communalism and Women – Insecurity of the community/ constructing community identities and consequent pressures on women.
- b) HIV-AIDS and Women – Care, support and rehabilitation of affected women, control over sexuality etc.
- c) Violence against Women – Dowry related violence, Divorce (Triple Talaq), temporary/contract marriages, sexual harassment etc.

The convention was meant to be a platform for advocacy and it was expected that all participants would carry key messages back to be used at various levels in their work areas. We propose to network with other women's organisations in the state for building solidarity and obtaining inputs into the content.

Background to the Convention

Realizing the important role that women play in maintaining peace and harmony in the society and in order to empower women specially from the minority community COVA works extensively with women both in the urban and rural areas. In the old city of Hyderabad COVA has brought together 4000 women from different communities under two co-operative societies – Mahila Sanatkar and Roshan Vikas. In nine districts of Andhra Pradesh, we have initiated a program to increase the involvement of Muslim women in SHGs. These women had hitherto not been reached through any developmental programmes of either the government or the NGOs. They live in abject poverty, are severely affected by repressive social customs and children, especially the girls, do not have access to education. In short, their low status in society denies them access to basic human rights severely restricting their upward mobility. COVA initiative has reached out to about 60,000 women in nine districts, 50% of whom are from the Muslim community.

In its decennial year COVA feels that creating linkages between women mobilised through different COVA promoted networks – Mahila Sanatkar, Roshan Vikas and 9 district networks would lead to synergy amongst them across the state in order to bring about a change in the status of women. It was hoped that coming together to celebrate International Women’s Day – 2005 would generate solidarity amongst them and give them a strong impetus to struggle for their rights and a better life.

BASTI MEETINGS

As part of the celebrations of International Women’s Day, public Meetings were held in 16 bastis in the old city of Hyderabad on 2nd March 2005. Self-Help Group (SHG) leaders from nine districts of Andhra Pradesh participated in these meetings, interacted with SHG members in the area, and shared their experiences. Action-oriented resolutions were passed in each of these meetings on the three chosen issues: Communalism and Women, HIV-AIDS and Women, and Violence against Women.

The following is a brief report of these meetings:

At Hafeez Baba Nagar

About 95 members of SHGs participated in this meeting including the women delegates from Guntur district. The meeting was chaired by Ms Bilquis, one of the Directors of Roshan Vikas, who initially explained the benefits of SHGs.

Ms Ahmedi Begum spoke on the occasion on HIV/AIDS and TB and their impact on women, and about violence against women. She gave the participants much information on this disease in Telugu and Urdu. The violence against women in the name of dowry was also discussed at length. The members present participated in the discussion with enthusiasm, clearing their doubts.

Some of the members performed a play with a message for eradication of the dowry system. A dance programme and songs rendered by children entertained the participants.

Resolutions on Communalism and Women: The members passed a resolution to the effect that especially women and youth should be given information on how to prevent communal riots in bastis, as riots affect women most and youth are misused by vested interests to carry out riots.

Resolution on Violence Against Women: The members resolved to fight against the dowry system within their homes and in the society at large, as it is perceived as the major cause of violence against women in this society.

Resolution on the HIV-Aids and Women: The meeting also resolved to spread awareness among women in the bastis on HIV/AIDS.

[Rapporteurs: Mr. K. Sridhar and Mr. Syed Mehboob Ali.]

At Lal Darwaza

The local SHG members organised and managed this public meeting at Lal Darwaza. Ms V.Laxmi Prasanna, a local resident and teacher by profession, moderated and chaired the session. SHG representatives introduced themselves and their activities to each other. Ms. Parvathi from Kasthurba Mahila Mandali briefed the audience about COVA and all its activities. Children of SHG members presented dramas, songs, and dances. A volunteer from Play for Peace conducted a non-competitive game session for the participants.

Though there was an open discussion on the themes of Communalism, HIV/AIDS and Violence against Women, no resolutions were passed in this meeting on these issues. An interesting highlight in the program was the speeches delivered by some school going children of SHG members on the specified topics.

About 100 members participated from different SHGs and localities, including 22 from Guntur district.

[Rapporteur: Mr. Vajid Khan]

At Krishna Reddy Nagar

The International Women's Day celebrations began at Krishna Reddy Nagar with registration at 10.30 am. About 50 members participated in this meeting, including 34 members from Anantapur District.

The meeting started with welcome address by Ms Irfana. She also spoke about the importance of the International Women's Day. Students from the local school sang a welcome song.

While sharing their experiences in SHGs, the members discussed at length how effectively the grants from the government could be utilized for the welfare of all the group members. The Community Organizers from Anantapur district spoke about the difficulties they faced in forming groups with Minority women, and other problems in the field. Ms V.Ramanamma spoke about the transformation that happened in her life due to her enrolling in an SHG. The change was so tremendous that she even started an organisation called HELP on her own and was forming SHGs with Muslim women. Ms Shabina from Anantapur district spoke about the future plans of their groups for promoting education in Urdu, and providing livelihood opportunities for women with skills in handicrafts. Ms Ameena Begum from Roshini Mahila Mandali Hyderabad made a presentation on COVA and its activities. Ms Naseem, who has been associated with the health awareness activities of Roshan Vikas in Hyderabad, spoke about their initiatives in bringing awareness about TB in the bastis.

The Telugu song sung by B. Jayamma from Ananthapur on the travails of women at home and outside, moved the audience. The children from the local school and the community sang songs and performed dances.

[Rapporteur: Mr. P.M.Khan]

At G.M. Chowni

At G.M. Chowni, the meeting took place at the residence of Ms Yousufunnisa, a Director of Roshan Vikas. The program started at 11.00 am with a welcome song by children. About 87 members attended the program including those from Anantapur district.

Ms Yousufunnisa explained in detail about the activities of the local SHGs and Roshan Vikas. She proudly expressed their desire to start a Mahila Bank in near future. The group leaders introduced their activities to the members from the district. Some group members spoke about their experiences of how the loans they received from Roshan Vikas helped them in setting up business and improving their economic condition.

Ms Arshiya explained about the causes and measures for prevention of HIV/AIDS. Ms Balanarsamma recalled the lecture of Dr Ram Puniani that she had attended back at Anantapur and spoke on communalism and its impact of women. Talking of violence against women, Ms Afsara Begum spoke about the efforts of Family Counseling and Reconciliation Cell at COVA in solving disputes arising within families.

The women from Anantapur district were overwhelmed by the hospitality of the local women as well as their inspiring stories of managing their groups. They were all praise for the women who organised this meeting, from which, they claimed, they learned many a thing.

Girls from the local National Open School Centre and the SHG members regaled their guests with inspiring songs with messages for women's unity and development.

[Rapporteur: Ms Anees Fatima]

At Ambika Nagar, Gowlipura

In the meeting held at the residence of Ms Rajeshwari, the Group Leader of Sivananda Mahila Mandali, Gowlipura, and members from Nellore District (from Madina, Yaseen, Allahameen, Barkat and Bismillah groups of Tada Mandal, Jasmine, Indira, Khaja Waheb Rasson, Mahboob and Utukoor Groups of Vinjamur mandal) participated. About 55 women participated in this meeting.

Ms Rajeshwari gave the welcome address after which all the participants introduced themselves to one another.

Ms. Rajyalakshmi also spoke on precautions to be taken and need of awareness on HIV/AIDs. Ms Rukmini, a group member of Sivananda Group shared her own experience of harassment by her husband and in-laws, who threw her out of the house when she was pregnant. Their demand was for more dowry. She was now staying with her parents and was confident that she could live independently with the support from her group and COVA.

The women from Nellore district shared their experience of how SHG loans helped them find livelihood and improved their living standards.

Ms. Vinodha and group sang three songs in between the sessions. Play for Peace volunteers facilitated a non-competitive game session and performed plays during the programme.

[Rapporteurs: Mr. K. Govind Raj Chowdary and Ms. Devi]

At Chirag Ali Nagar, Kishan Bagh

About 24 women from Warangal district were welcomed by the local SHG members at Chirag Ali Nagar. The children of “New Kids Model School”, being run by an SHG leader Ms. Asma Banu, welcomed the guests with a song. The meeting was attended by about 65 women.

The women from Warangal district and the local women from ‘786’ Mahila Mandali and Mahila Roshni Mahila Mandali shared their experiences about the management of their respective SHGs, maintenance of records, saving and other developmental activities. The savings and loan repayment system, the internal lending process and detailed documentation in the local SHGs inspired the Warangal team.

A Play School teacher, associated with COVA, spoke on TB awareness and clarified their doubts about TB. Ms. Asma (SHG Leader), Mr. Mohd. Ashraf and Mr. Khajawali spoke on HIV/AIDS and the preventive measures. They explained the difference between HIV and AIDS and how women are more vulnerable to this disease.

Some staff representatives from COVA and the SHG leaders and members sang motivational songs.

[Rapporteur: Mr. Sk. Khajawali Sarkar]

At Karwan

The meeting here was attended by about 50 members. The leaders of the local SHGs welcomed the guests. Ms Prakat Kaur, one of the group leaders, made a presentation on COVA and its activities. Ms Radhika spoke on the activities of Roshan Vikas. All group leaders introduced their groups to the participants from Warangal district.

The members shared their experiences in managing their SHGs and stories of how the loans were utilized by the group members to improve their vocation like cutting mirrors, beedi making, embroidery work, stitching, and zari work.

An open discussion was held on Communalism, Violence and HIV/AIDS. The predominant view with regard to communalism was that poor women, who have to go out to work, suffer most during communal tensions. The members also felt that lack of education and economic independence makes women more vulnerable to especially domestic violence. Some members who were knowledgeable about the causes of and preventive measures for HIV/AIDS shared their knowledge with the rest and warned that women were most affected by this disease and so it is they who should know more about it.

[Rapporteur: Ms. Padma]

At Dhanaiah Nagar, Uppuguda

The meeting at Dhanaiah Nagar, Uppuguda, was chaired by Ms. Preethi. About 90 women participated in the meeting including the women delegates from Kurnool district. Initially, Ms Sujatha explained how the Program Officers of Roshan Vikas motivated the women of the bastis and facilitated the formation of groups with them. The women who never used to come out of their houses are now running SHGs efficiently. Their dependence on government and moneylenders has reduced considerably.

Ms Preeti, narrated an experience that illustrated the effects of communalism. During the 1984 riots her father's bakery was burnt. The bakery had employed 8-10 workers, who lost their livelihood. The family has not recovered from this shock even until now. Their economic status suddenly dropped after this incident. Some children from the locality enacted a play depicting violence against women. The play also tried to send across the message that a girl should be properly educated, confident and self-reliant before she is married. Ms S.V. Ramanamma, from PAD Organisation presented a case study of a couple who unwittingly contracted HIV and died of AIDS, leaving their children orphans. An open discussion on these issues followed the presentations.

The songs rendered by the women from the local groups and from the districts enthralled the audience.

[Rapporteur: Ms. Rafia Begum]

At Ambedkar Nagar

About 70 women from nine SHGs at Ambedkar Nagar and five SHGs from Mahboob Nagar District participated in the meeting at Ambedkar Nagar.

During the mutual sharing of experiences of the local group members and their counterparts from Mahboobnagar district, Ms Sunitha explained how in this locality in Hyderabad the number of SHGs grew from two to nine. Now the groups are in a position to offer loans up to Rs.20,000. The financial difficulties of the members are now considerably reduced.

The local women spoke about their experience of the communal violence in the old city of Hyderabad. They also said that due to efforts from the communities, it has reduced to a considerable extent in recent times. They felt that it was the duty of everyone to stop communal violence.

The SHG members said that the evil of dowry is the biggest problem in the society. One member cited a personal experience. She has four daughters and because of demand of dowry none of them is married.

One SHG member said that we should use all our might to stop HIV/AIDs from spreading. We must know how to prevent it and take necessary precautions. She cited the example of a woman who got this virus from her husband. The husband died after some time and the wife was killed by her brother to prevent this from spreading in the family.

The members sang songs about education and women's rights and development. Volunteers from Play for Peace conducted a non-competitive games session for the members.

[Rapporteur: Mr K.Mahender]

At Kanchanbagh

The meeting at Kanchanbagh was attended by 86 local SHG members and 26 women from Kurnool district. The women from the districts did not find much difference between their district and this area. They were feeling quite at home.

Sharing their experiences, the members felt that SHG should be strengthened and more groups should emerge. They felt that through the groups we should fight dowry system and domestic violence against women. Ms Arifa and Ms Latha initiated the discussion on SHG functioning and the issues confronting women. With regard to HIV/AIDS, the members agreed that more awareness was needed among women about its prevention and precautionary measure. They said, especially young children and teenagers should be made aware of this deadly disease. Similarly, they said, we should be more active in stopping violence against women, wherever it happens.

Play for Peace volunteer organised games for the participants, in which even the older women enthusiastically participated.

[Rapporteur: Mr. Mohd. Afzal]

At Falaknuma

About 90 women participated in the meeting organised at Falaknuma including about 30 women from Mahboobnagar district.

Initiating the sharing of experiences as SHG members, Ms. Hasina Begum, spoke about how the loan money was used effectively by members of the local SHGs for setting up small business or to purchase tools that would help them earn their livelihood, and not for activities like weddings and other family functions. The members of the groups have a tremendous sense of solidarity.

During the discussion on communalism and its impact on women, the participants observed that communalism is destructive to humanity. In the violence perpetrated by communal forces women become widows and children, orphans. Any problem would ultimately affect women most. All communities should live amicably and stay united. We should be sensitive to each other's pains and problems.

The participants traced the reasons for increasing violence against women in the dowry system and lack of education and financial independence of women.

Talking of the impact of HIV/AIDS on women, the members said that awareness should be spread about the disease that it is not contagious by touching, sharing clothes etc. As such, it is inhuman to treat the victims of this disease as outcasts.

The songs sung by the participants revolved around the themes of communal harmony, women's rights and education.

[Rapporteur: Mr. Syed Salahuddin Hashmi]

At Jahanuma

In the meeting at Jahanuma about 75 members participated from the nearby localities as well as from Medak district.

Ms Qudsiya Begum made a presentation on the activities of Roshan Vikas. Women from Medak District were very curious to learn how the members of Roshan Vikas saved money. Ms Abeda Begum and Ms Haseena Begum spoke about the local SHGs.

Ms Qudsiya Begum also spoke about how dowry system is leading to increasing violence against women. Mr. Satish from Medak district spoke about a custom called Jogini prevalent in some districts. Jogini means a woman dedicated to the village especially to fulfill the sexual needs of the men of the village. Some women are made into Joginis by this custom. After forty years of age, when a Jogini falls sick there is nobody to take care of her. Often they die of venereal diseases or even AIDS. Such women are facing lot of problems. Mr Satish said that their organisation rescued a 12-year old girl who was about to be made into a Jogini. They took her to the District Collector and got her admitted in a residential school. Such types of social violence are commonly practiced against women in some areas.

The members shared their experiences of communal violence. The members from Medak district maintained that in their area no such violent incidents took place. However, they are trying to forestall any communal feeling that may crop up in the minds of people there.

Sana Mahila Mandali performed a play on violence against women. Some of the participants sang songs depicting women's problems and women's noble role in society.

[Rapporteurs: Ms Manju Shree and Ms Ujjwala]

At Aman Nagar 'A'

In the meeting that was organised at Ansari Mahila Welfare Society at Aman Nagar 'A', 125 members participated from the local SHGs and from Nellore district.

The local SHG members shared their experience with Roshan Vikas and the managing of their SHGs and the women from the districts narrated their own. Roshan Vikas members said that the cooperative issues loans for setting up business, for health and education purposes.

The participants also discussed the impact of HIV/AIDS on women, its causes, symptoms and preventive measures.

Asma and team presented a group song on the unity of all religions. Imtiaz and team sang a song calling on women to emancipate themselves. Ansari group performed a play called "Dulha Bikta Hai" on dowry system. Reshma and team performed a play called "Munshi".

Play for Peace volunteers conducted a session of non-competitive games for the participants.

The following resolutions were passed in the meeting on the three themes:

Resolutions on HIV AIDS:

- Couple must be honest to each other without resorting to sex with multiple partners.
- Whenever there is a need of blood, it must be tested before use.
- Before taking injection, the needle must be sterilized if it is not disposable.

Resolutions on Violence against women:

- All women must be educated so that it helps in their awareness of their rights and in their leading a better life.
- Women should have unity. (This was proposed by a Class X student Naseem Unnisa).
- In times of crises, women should be in a position to defend their rights.
- Women must become independent.

Resolution on Communalism and women:

- People should forget their differences of religion.

The programme ended with a song by the group members about Roshan Vikas.

[Rapporteur: Mr Mohd. Murtuza]

At Riyasat Nagar

At Riyasat Nagar, the meeting was attended by about 100 members from the local Ekta and Masarath Mahila Mandalis along with women from Prakasam district.

While sharing their experiences, the local members recounted how joining Roshan Vikas changed their lives, in terms of livelihood opportunities, awareness on social issues and domestic stability. Ms Tabassum spoke about HIV/AIDS, its causes, symptoms and preventive measures. Nation Open School Centre students Mukaram and Waheeda spoke about how women have made rapid strides in every walk of life and are able to tackle their own problems. Ms Amena, a Play School teacher spoke on the discrimination a girl child is still subjected to in this society. The members discussed at length on the dowry menace.

The members sang songs on national integration, unity of women and Roshan Vikas. Two plays were enacted on domestic violence against women and on the necessity of women's economic independence.

The participants also shared their experiences of livelihood choices, increased self confidence, increased awareness on health and social issues like child labour, increased respect at home and outside after joining the group. The groups also conduct counseling for families. The members feel that now they do not have to keep borrowing money from friends, relatives or moneylenders.

The following resolutions were passed by the members in the meeting:

- Basti, Government and elders must come to the rescue of women who become victims of any kind of violence. Basti and group members must work together to resolve issue of violence against women. Government must be proactive in helping women.
- Women should be motivated to help the victim.
- Public awareness should be spread about the hazards of AIDS.
- Awareness should be raised among communities that all human beings are equal.

[Rapporteur: Mr Ajay Kumar]

At Mustafa Nagar

To celebrate the International Women's Day and to join the campaign for building solidarity among women across the state, an awareness programme was organized at the residence of Ms. Parveen in Mustafa Nagar to promote a sense of solidarity, like-mindedness and togetherness among women. This was an interactive programme of women, for women and by women. More than 90 women participated from 10 SHGs of Medak district (Koheer Mandal).

The programme began with Nath-e-Shareef by Ms. Asma Siddiqui. Ms. Parveen Khanum a Director of Mahila Sanatkar, Ms. Rehana, Program Officer, Roshan Vikas, addressed the participants and moderated the programme. They explained to the participants from the district about the background and objective behind establishment of COVA and Roshan Vikas.

Ms Radhamma, Ms Anees, Ms Abida Begum and Ms Rajeshwari shared their experience as to how after becoming a member of Roshan Vikas their lives changed to the better.

During discussion on communalism, most women participants asserted that women are the most adversely affected during any communal riots because with her discriminatory status in the society she has to face all kinds of physical, mental and emotional tensions and hardships. Ms Saberi Begum added that most of the riots are politically driven and occurred only for gaining political mileage to the leaders. All the women unanimously agreed upon working together across the religious barriers to combat communalism.

Mrs. Saberi Begum raised the problem of Dowry and issues related with it. Substantiating her comments she explained the discrimination against women shown from their very early years and at various stages of their life. She drew the attention of participants towards discrimination against girl-child in the form of lack of provision of nutrition, education and other basic facilities. Mr. Vivek said that there is an urgent need of redefining the role of women according to the contemporary time

and the participation of women should be ensured in decision making process at the family and societal level. Mrs. Abida Begum observed that still women are facing cruelty and are always advised to keep quiet in the larger interests of family and society. Ultimately the participants decided for an action oriented initiative that would be positive in the best interests of family as well as family. Mrs. Zakea Begum discussed HIV/AIDS related issues.

The participants sang songs depicting the feeling of a motherless child, self respect of women, and communal harmony.

[Rapporteurs: Mr Vivek Anand and Ms Rehana]

At Chandraiah Huts

About 80 women participated in this program including delegates from Prakasam district. The participants exchanged their experiences in managing SHGs and explained how they were able to benefit from their savings. The local groups and the groups from Prakasam district complimented each other on their activities, and each group said they were inspired by the other's work. The women from Prakasam district said that their groups were helping women in initiating livelihood activities like leaf-plate making. Especially the women, who were not yet part of any SHGs, were very much impressed and influenced by this sharing of experiences.

Ms Ishwari made a presentation on the activities of Roshan Vikas and COVA. Ms Leela spoke about HIV/AIDS and its impact on women. The participants unanimously agreed that it was inhuman to treat HIV/AIDS patients as outcastes. The women, both from the nearby localities and Prakasam district, shared stories of women who were subjected to domestic violence, mainly in relation to dowry. Women from Prakasam were not as exposed to communal violence as the women of Hyderabad. They listened to the experiences of the women of the old city of Hyderabad during communal riots.

[Rapporteur: Ms Fahmeeda]

CENTRAL CONVENTION

A day long convention on 3rd March 2005 brought together about 450 women from 9 districts and 1000 women from the old city of Hyderabad at Quli Qutub Shah Stadium, High Court Road, Hyderabad. The convention was a combination of serious discussions as well as cultural events revolving around the following themes:

- a) Communalism and Women – Insecurity of the community/ constructing community identities and consequent pressures on women.
- b) HIV-AIDS and Women – Care, support and rehabilitation of affected women, control over sexuality etc.
- c) Violence against Women – Dowry related violence, Divorce (Triple Talaq), temporary/contract marriages, sexual harassment etc.

The convention was meant to be a platform for advocacy and it was expected that all participants would carry key messages back to be used at various levels in their work areas. We propose to network with other women's organisations in the state for building solidarity and obtaining inputs into the content.

Opening Plenary Session

In the opening plenary of the Convention, SHG leaders presented reports of the previous day's meetings in 16 bastis. Dr. Sunita Krishnan from Prajwala, Prof Rama Melkote from Anveshi, Dr K.Lalitha from Thinksoft Consultants, and Ms Akhileshwari, Journalist from Deccan Herald, attended this session and addressed the gathering of about 1500 women from eight districts and the old city of Hyderabad.

Cultural Activities

Cultural activities like singing, individually and in groups, and skits raised the spirits of the gathering, especially as they revolved around the issues pertinent to women's lives. The talent of the women who participated made them more effective. The songs not only portrayed the contemporary status of women but also carried messages for action against exploitation. Dowry deaths, women's rights, communal harmony, prevention of HIV/AIDS, spirit of International Women's Day, motherhood, importance of education, call for struggle, were some of the themes of songs rendered by Manjula, Ramanamma, Anuradha, Rajitha, Uma, Afsar, Triveni, Manikyamma, Jayamma, Shameena Begam, Balanarsamma, Halima Begam, Jyotirmayi, Yasmeen, Vijayalakshmi, Nafees, Ishraf and others. Some of them are SHG leaders hailing from the districts as well the old city of Hyderabad, and some are students from the National Open School Centres facilitated by COVA in Hyderabad. Asma and team, the girl students of National Open School Centre, Asad Baba Nagar, presented a short play on HIV/AIDS. They also rendered a song in English welcoming the delegates to the Convention.

Welcome Address

Ms Asiya Khatoon, Managing Director, Mahila Sanatkar, welcomed the guests and the participants to the convention. Talking of the importance of International Women's Day Celebrations, she said, their objective was to highlight women's issues. COVA has been celebrating the International Women's Day for many years. This convention specially focuses on the three issues of HIV/AIDS, Communalism and Domestic Violence, which are affecting women more than any other section of the society. She hoped that solutions might emerge for these issues from the sessions of the day's convention. She welcomed the following distinguished guests of the day on to the dais: Dr. Sunita Krishnan, Prof Rama Melkote, Dr K.Lalitha, and Ms Akhileshwari. SHG leaders from the districts, Ms Balanarsamma, Ms Rajeswari, Ms Manjula and Ms Fareeda presented bouquets to the guests.

Ms Akhileshwari presided over the meeting.

Reports of Basti Meetings

Ms Sunita, Ms Mamata, Ms Mohammadi Begum, Ms Ishwari, Ms Khursia Sultana, Ms Sardar Begum, Ms Massrath, Ms Afia Parveen, Ms Zaakira Begum, Ms Prakat Kaur, Ms Lalita, and Ms Yousufunnisa reported on the proceedings at the Basti meetings conducted the previous day.

The reports were followed by keynote addresses of the guest speakers on the three issues. The following are the abridged versions of the speeches.

Dr K.Lalita on 'Violence against Women'

I have been working on women's issues for the past three decades. Though we still hear of domestic violence and violence outside against women, we are now able to at least talk about these atrocities. You have come from far off places to talk about them. In a recent incident, a man murdered his wife and was absconding. The local women staged a sit-in at his house until the culprit was arrested. I do not know whether to feel happy at this expression of solidarity or to feel upset at the continuing violence. It is good to see that the women now do not wait for some women's organisation to come in and help them. We should remember to bring any atrocity out of the four walls of the house. It should be brought to the notice of the society, even though we cannot be sure if appropriate action would be taken by any authority. There are police, hospitals, courts. Most of these institutions think only from the man's point of view. This is an endless struggle for women.

Some forms of violence are visible, some are not. In some instances of aggression, women are psychologically harassed. It is also violence. The dominant ideology in the society stipulates that women should not speak about their problems. There are problems that are unique to women.

We should also think about whether there are any differences in the issues of Hindu women and Muslim women. There is an allegation that the feminist movement is silent on the issues of Muslim women and that it exclusively addresses the issues of Hindu middle class women. There are also prejudices about Muslim women. That they don't practice family planning etc. But such trends can be seen in poor families even among Hindus. National level research on Muslim women is an urgent need. We are not able to find sponsors for such research. We do not have adequate data to prove that the stereotypes are false. Muslim women seem to enjoy fewer opportunities to go out. *Purda* system is practiced more in cities and towns, not so much in Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. You may be able to tell why. One reason might be the Nizam rule. We cannot generalise about all Muslim women.

All women experience violence and aggression. However, educated women may not be subjected to violence as much. Again, religion may come in the way of education. Organisations that work for women should keep these things in mind and chalk out an action plan accordingly.

[Dr K.Lalita's speech, delivered in Telugu, was translated for the audience into Urdu by Ms Qamar Jahan]

Dr Sunita Krishnan on 'HIV/AIDS and Women'

At our organisation, 'Prajwala', we come across this problem every day. The cycle of violence against women is completed when women, already victims of HIV/AIDS, are subjected to violence for being so. With regard to HIV/AIDS, women are the most affected lot. In the case of women, the disease is spotted sooner, as it is obligatory for pregnant women in Andhra Pradesh to undergo a HIV/AIDS test. A pregnant woman dreams a lot about the future. What happens to her if she comes to know that she is carrying HIV virus? Her in-law's cast aspersions at her character and say she is the one responsible. We have come across such a case at Warangal. The husband and the in-laws did not allow her into their house. Look at the discrimination. She is sent out of the house when she needed their support most. She cannot go for abortion at a late stage. Society harasses her everywhere accusing her of having illicit relations.

When the husband often falls sick because of HIV/AIDS, the pressure on the wife mounts up. On the other hand, there is the worry that children will be orphaned. There is a case in West Godavari district. The husband died of AIDS. Her brothers-in-law sexually harass her. HIV makes her life worse. The condition of those who find prostitution as the last resort is much worse. Society blames women for everything. 'If you behaved well, your husband wouldn't have gone to other women', is how they blame the woman.

We too superstitiously keep the AIDS victims at a distance. We are also responsible for killing them before they die. Do we know how many AIDS victims are burnt to death or sent out of homes? We are the society. Responsibility is also ours. Love,

affection and approval are what the HIV/AIDS victims require most. We should do all we can for them to lead a happy life as long as they live.

Dr Rama Melkote on 'Communalism and Women'

The English term 'communalism' was derived from the word 'community'. Usually we associate 'communalism' with a religion. But now Hindu women and Muslim women are changing the meaning of a community. That is the key. If we change its meaning, that is, if we work together, communal riots will drastically come down. We heard of communal riots in Hyderabad, in Gujarat or in Sudan. At some places, the women helped each other. Nevertheless, can we say that women do not succumb to communal feelings? Women also took part in Gujarat riots. Why do they get involved in such riots? When religion is used for political gains, it becomes a tool of exploitation. In Gujarat, in Sudan, we saw the participation of women in riots. When women of a community were being raped, women from the other community clapped. Several books were written on such atrocities that took place during the Partition (of India and Pakistan).

Women should give some thought to these issues. Let us keep in mind that every religion has the disposition to curb women's rights. Does religions have any prerogative to stifle our rights? We should be able to critically look at our own religion. Thereby can we get strength.

You, the women of the old city of Hyderabad, proved in the past that you can stop communal riots. What more can we say about your strength? You can stop them.

After listening to the reports of the basti meetings, I felt the surge of hope that we can form new communities. Atrocities happen to us since we do not question. Let us achieve our rights. Let us criticize our religions. Let us attempt to stop riots. Let us wage struggles. Let us form new communities.

Presidential Remarks: Ms Akhileshwari

Let me share some of my experiences. I was born and brought up here (in Hyderabad). I mixed with Muslims, even read Koran. Gradually distance grew. Today I feel I have come home. The language here is music to my ears. I want to recount a couple of incidents that illustrate how women are oppressed.

Women are still a minority in journalism. In a journalists' meeting, we decided to encourage women journalists. We invited some women journalists to a meeting. They did not turn up. For a meeting at Zaheerabad, I asked the editor of an Urdu daily to send their women journalists. But the young women were scared. They asked me to pick them up from their homes. They asked me to speak to their mothers. A mother asked me why I wanted to take them that far. I told her. She finally agreed. There was another call from a young woman, saying her father objected to her going. Ultimately two of them came. When they stepped into a hotel, they remarked that they had never been to a hotel before. In the meanwhile,

there were phone calls from their office to find out how they were. Staying in Hyderabad, they did not even know about the city. Such are the restrictions on women.

Home is our best school and mother is the best teacher. Girl children should be given strength first at home. They will grow as their parents train them. Proper training should start from home. Parents ask them not to lift their head, and they behave accordingly. Later it becomes difficult to unlearn these things. We raise them so protectively and give her in marriage to somebody we do not know! There is this contradiction among us.

It is important for us to talk. Lacking self-confidence, we speak softly. We are told that we are not supposed to speak loudly. Accordingly, we suppress our voice. We should learn to say 'no'. If we are strong within, we can say 'no'. If the occasion demands, we should be able to shout too.

Conclusion

Two women from Anantapur district, Ms Asiya and Ms Parvez shared their delight with the audience for being able to come out and speak to women like them at a gathering like this. They contrasted their earlier inhibitions with the present freedom to talk.

Ms Noorjahan Siddiqui proposed a vote of thanks.

Theme-based Parallel Sessions

After the opening plenary, three parallel sessions were conducted on the three issues. Each session was structured to accommodate presentation of at least three

case studies pertinent to the issue either by the victims themselves or by their representatives, followed by analyses by members on the panel. The members of the panel comprised experts and experienced activists on the issue.

For 'HIV/AIDS and Women', the panel members were: Ms Swarna Vani, Positive People's Network, Vijayawada, Ms J.Ramani, Advocate, Ms Rehana, Program Officer, Roshan Vikas, and Ms Mamata, a Director of Roshan Vikas.

For 'Communalism and Women', the panel members were: Ms Girija, Mr Sham Agarwal, Advocate, Legal Services Authority, Ms Farida Raj, Journalist, Ms Swarna, Program Officer, Roshan Vikas, and Ms Bilquis, a Director of Roshan Vikas.

For 'Violence against Women', the panel members were: Mr Jeevan Kumar, Human Rights Forum, Ms Shanti Shri, Advocate, Ms Rafia Begum, Program Officer, Roshan Vikas, and Ms Yousufunnisa, a Director of Roshan Vikas.

The participants could choose to attend the session of their interest.

Session on 'HIV/AIDS and Women'

Initiating the session on 'HIV/AIDS and Women', Ms Sajida Begum, who moderated the session, spoke briefly on how the whole family is ruined due to the dreaded disease. She informed the participants about the causes and preventive measures. Remarking that women are most affected by the disease and its social consequences, Ms Sajida said that women are unduly blamed for the spreading of the disease.

Case Study 1

Ms Radha from Kurnool district presented a case study from Done Mandal of her district. She came across this case during her field work on AIDS Awareness.

This is the story of a couple, Lakshmi Devi and Ramudu, belonging to the Boya community. Both of them came from respectable and traditional families. Lakshmi Devi's parents performed their marriage well gifting Rs.20,000 and five tolas of gold to her. The couple had no children in the first four years of marriage. They worshipped every god, visited every holy place with a desire for children.

Ramudu worked as a gangman in the railways. He developed sexual contacts with several women. As a consequence, he contracted HIV/AIDS. They neglected his frequent illnesses for a year. His brother was a member of our organisation. Hearing about the symptom, we called him and got his blood tested. It tested positive to AIDS. His wife too tested positive. Unfortunately by that time she was pregnant for two months. She went for an abortion. Her brothers did not allow her to visit them. Our Society is procuring medicines for them from Hyderabad. However, they both have grown weaker.

When we consider an alliance for marriage, we should first see how healthy is the man. We should also not neglect any illness.

Case Study 2

Ms Manikyamma from Guntur district related her own story:

My husband died of AIDS. Members of my own family and the society around me started showing discrimination towards me. These very people once liked me. Initially I could not understand this transformation. My parents and relatives stopped visiting me. Even when they visit they do not even accept a cup of tea at my house.

I was 20 when my husband died. We have two children. I wanted to die, but I lived on to bring up my children. I did agricultural labour to fend for the family. As I was not used to such manual work, on the eleventh day I had fever. I joined the book binding work. Though it fetched me far too less, it was less strenuous. In the mean time I came across the NGO called SEED, which gave me new hope. I am determined bring awareness about AIDS among others. My children too joined SEED. I am able to live because of them. Not everybody who has AIDS can openly speak about their problem. They need awareness to speak about it. AIDS patients still live with a social stigma. Children of the patients also face discrimination at schools. Other children make fun of them and keep them at a distance. Some patients commit suicide. Such people should be made confident that they can also freely move around. Youth should be especially made aware of the disease. If each one of us tell ten people about it, it will reach hundred more from them. Let us save our future generations. Let us eliminate AIDS from our society.

Case Study 3

Ms S.V.Ramanamma from Bitragunta, Bogole Mandal, Nellore district, narrated the following case:

I have been creating awareness on HIV/AIDS for the past three years. During this service, I came across a case in which a young couple died of AIDS. Ravi Kumar and Sudha were a handsome couple. He worked in Railway Protection Force. He used to drink and had sexual contacts with other women. Sudha once underwent a surgery. When she needed blood, they procured blood from a rickshaw puller. That was how she contracted the virus. After a long time, rashes used to develop all over her body. Her fair skin became dark. With all their superstitions, they destroyed trees on their site and even the house. I persuaded her to go for a blood test. She tested positive. Parents asked her not to visit them saying it would affect the prospects of her sisters' marriage. She too willingly abstained from visiting them. Thus she came to depend on us completely. She literally became a skeleton in three years. But she had tremendous will power. Her husband too went for a blood test after much persuasion. He was once a football champion, full of muscles. He could not bear the fact that he was affected by AIDS. When he also tested positive, we convinced the doctor to keep

this a secret from him fearing that he might commit suicide. The doctor gave him five years. Even though he was not informed of his disease, he was perplexed by his friends' behaviour. They kept him at a distance. He was very depressed. Even in hospitals, he observed that the doctors and nurses were discriminating against him. Both are dead now. But their children still face discrimination from the society.

While narrating this heartrending case, Ms Ramanamma became quite emotional and urged the participants to show mercy, be kind to the AIDS patients.

Analysis

After the presentation of the case studies, the panel members commented on them. Ms Mamata added some more information on HIV/AIDS. The HIV virus normally takes 8-10 years to cause AIDS. She said that as the virus is not spread through normal contact, HIV patients can freely participate in social life. We should strive to remove the stigma from the patients. Ms J.Ramani advised that HIV/AIDS patients facing injustice from within the family or outside, may approach any branch of Free Legal Aid Cell for Women. These cells help women settle their cases out of courts of law. She mentioned two cases in this context. A young man who tested positive was denied property share by his brothers. The Cell settled the case through counselling the elders of the family in favour of the patient. In another case, a college going girl contracted HIV due to negligence by the staff of a private nursing home. With the intervention of the Cell, the hospital management paid adequate compensation for her treatment.

Ms Swarna Vani said that she had seen many newly wed women turning to HIV cases within a few months of their marriage. Such a woman has to look after her sick husband, look after herself and children, and in some cases, go out and work. All this creates enormous stress upon her. Since she is about to die, her people are reluctant financially help her and even deny her right of property. NGOs should come forward to help them realise their rights.

The participants clarified their doubts on HIV/AIDS in this session. The panel members replied to the queries.

Q. How do we know that we contracted HIV virus? What are the symptoms?

A. There are no specific symptoms. They may also vary from individual to individual. Weight loss, skin disorders, venereal diseases, fever and motions are found in many. Some symptoms may be similar to that of TB. It is better to go for a blood test if these symptoms persist.

Q. After it became known that I am HIV-positive, I was denied the share in the property of my grandmother who mentioned me in her will. Can I get my share?

A. Definitely. Your people have no right deny you your share. You can serve legal notices on them. You'd better approach the Free Legal Aid Cell at Andhra Mahila Sabha, Vidyanagar, Hyderabad, or any advocate in your town.

Q. *My neighbour's newly wed daughter is afraid of going to her in-laws. How can we help?*

A. They may contact Women Protection Cell at Lakdi-ka-pul.

Q. Is there any age group which is more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS?

A. No. It can affect anybody irrespective of age.

Q. *Which test would confirm HIV?*

A. In government hospitals, they conduct three tests (?) Elisa test is also confirmatory, but it is expensive and usually not available in government hospitals. When you suspect after an experience that you might have contracted the virus, you'd better approach a hospital. The virus may be revealed any time between 3 weeks to 6 months, which is the window period. Pre-test and post-test counselling is done at all government hospitals in Andhra Pradesh. AIDS patients can survive for five or more years on ARV drugs. For HIV to change into AIDS it may even take twenty years, depending on the patient's nutritious intake and will power.

Q. *My 17-year old daughter died of AIDS. She had developed skin disorders and used to get fever. I have two other younger children. What are the chances of their having HIV?*

A. It is better to get their blood tested. The BCT test in government hospitals will not cost much. Weight loss and skin diseases are very frequently occurring symptoms. If you are at Hyderabad call 1097 for more information on HIV/AIDS.

Conclusion

The session concluded with Ms Padma proposing a vote of thanks.

Session on 'Communalism and Women'

Ms Noorjahan Siddiqui, who moderated this session, recalled in her initial remarks how during the 1990 riots in the old city of Hyderabad people could not come out of their house for 8-10 days due to curfew, even if they wanted to help out people. Such a situation is especially hard on women. Let us listen to the stories of people who suffered due to communal riots.

Case Study 1

Ms Shamim Begum narrated her own story:

I went through hard times. My husband was killed in the riots. I faced lot of difficulty with the police and the hospital staff soon after my husband's death. Instead of helping me they put me to more trouble. No one from even my own relatives and friends helped me out. It is these people (*pointing to Ms Noorjahan and others from COVA*) who supported my two children and me. After my husband's death our relatives

refused to help us. I am now working with Roshan Vikas. My sons often think of their father's death and hold the other community responsible for it. They refuse to go to school. My daughter studies well.

My husband was killed during the curfew when he went out to get milk for the kids. He happened to be at a Hindu house when the rioters came. They stabbed him even while he was crying that he too was a *musalman*. I just want to say that in the name of religion we forget the basic fact that we are all human beings.

Case Study 2

Ms Sujata narrated an incident that happened to her relatives:

My relatives had a bakery at Shah Ali Banda, which employed about 8-10 workers. It was burnt down completely during the 1984 riots. The devastating effect of this incident was immediate. Not only did the workers lose their livelihood, the owner also could not recover from the loss until now. His house was also burnt. His economic status instantly tumbled down. The family has turned poor.

Case Study 3

Ms Abeda Begum recounted a case study from her basti in the old city of Hyderabad:

In our basti there was a cowherd who used to supply milk to all of us. Being a Hindu, he never discriminated between Hindus and Muslims. During the curfew, children were crying for milk everywhere. This milkman ventured out to supply milk. The innocent man was killed on the way without his milk reaching the innocent children. He had four children. His wife is still facing problems that cropped up after his death. I still pray for them even though he is a Hindu. As somebody said, during the riots it is humanity which first gets killed. Allah does not command to kill. He wants all human beings to live together peacefully. The color of blood is red, whether it is a Hindu's or a Muslim's.

Case Study 4

Ms Syeda Taha heard a story from the past from her grandmother:

During communal clashes, a Hindu family found a stranded Muslim girl. They took her home and forcefully changed her attire to that of their own. The Hindu rioters mistook her for a Hindu girl and left her alone. Later the Hindu family, which cleverly rescued the girl, safely dropped her at her house along with all her belongings. Human beings should think of humanity, not of the differences of religion.

Case Study 5

Ms Prakat Kaur narrated a recent experience:

I used to live at Kishanbagh, where different communities live together. I am a Sikh. We worship a flag. It was burnt by a Muslim boy. Riots began. One Muslim was killed. He used to keep his auto-rickshaw in the garage of a Sikh. He was killed when he went to take the auto. He was the only son and breadwinner of his family. The family has still not recovered from this shock. One Sikh was badly beaten by some Muslims. All Sikhs sought shelter in the nearby Gurudwara. Trust suddenly disappeared from the locality. Both Sikhs and Muslims committed atrocities against each other.

Analysis

The panel members responded to the case studies. Ms Girija said that as managing home has been traditionally seen as women's responsibility, during riots women face most problems as essential commodities like milk become scarce. Secondly, as women are seen as upholders of family respect, they become targets for atrocities. She has to face intense sense of insecurity during such times. We, women, should all think of how to raise our voice against injustice around us. We should try to curb communal thoughts and ideas. Victims of riots and rapes are usually looked down upon for no fault of theirs. It will be good if we take care of such people in our own area.

Ms Yousufunnisa recalled how women, led by Ms Noorjahan, formed a human chain and stopped riots. Especially in areas inhabited by more than one community, women of that area should come forward to stop riots. Ms Noorjahan remarked that organisations like COVA can do something only if the women are prepared to stop communal clashes. She added that there are many instances of Hindus and Muslims helping each other. We should highlight and remember such instances.

Mr Shyam Agarwal advised that first we should think why riots happen. We should give our children secular education devoid of any particular religious teaching. Institutions like Legal Services Authority can help you get adequate compensation for your loss only after the riots. If you give your children proper education, they can economically prosper. Only with economic prosperity will communalism end.

Mr Vivek Anand, Coordinator, SAVAN, a network promoted by COVA at Saharanpur (UP), appealed to the participants not to generalise and stereotype about the other community. He remarked that such a tendency is especially intense during the time of riots when one hears of the atrocities committed by the other community. Mr Ashraf, Coordinator of J&K network of COVA quoted verses from Koran to the effect that we become human beings only when we are able to feel the pain felt by others.

The panel recommended that we should resolve to work towards creating ambience of peace in our respective areas. Women should become economically independent to have a say in the matters concerning the society.

The session was concluded with Ms Udaya proposing a vote of thanks.

Session on 'Violence against Women'

It is women's birth right to live with dignity. Still violence against women continues unabated in all countries. The government has formulated many policies and promulgated several laws to ensure protection of women's rights. But they seem to have no impact on the ground reality. This session 'Violence against Women' was initiated on this note by the moderator of this session.

Case Study 1

Ms Nasreen Sultana was to present her own case in this session, but since she could not bear to face her traumatic past in the narration, her sister made the presentation on her behalf.

After marriage, Nasreen faced the hell of her life. She came from a reasonably well-to-do family. Her husband was not happy with what he got from his in-laws. He started harassing Nasreen to bring more dowry as her brother was rich. When she refused to do so, he started beating her. Unable to bear this torture, she filed a case against him. In the investigation later, it became known that this was his fourth marriage. Before the marriage, even the neighbours cheated Nasreen's people by certifying his good conduct.

Case Study 2

Ms Radha Bai was also a victim of traumatic domestic violence. When she came on to the stage to present her case, she broke down and could not utter a single word.

Case Study 3

Saeed Bhai presented the case of her daughter:

Saeed Bhai thought he gave his daughter in marriage into a good family. Long after the marriage he came to know that his son-in-law was a maniac. By that time his daughter was dead and buried. He was initially told that she had died by accident. It was his grand daughter who confided in him that her mother was killed by her father himself. He immediately got the body exhumed and sent for autopsy, which confirmed that it was a murder. His son-in-law was absconding. Saeed Bhai was also not happy with the role of the police.

Case Study 4

Rukmini briefly narrated her story.

Her husband and in-laws harassed her pressurizing to bring more dowry. When she was pregnant, she was sent out of house. She is presently staying with her parents.

She is utterly scared of going back to her in-laws, who, she fears, might kill her this time.

Analysis

Mr Jeevan Kumar, Convenor, Human Rights Forum, remarked that when a woman was forced to stay away from the husband due to his aggression, he is legally bound to pay for maintenance of his wife and child. We all go to marriage parties and enjoy the dinner. Why do we not interfere when a woman suffers due to that marriage? We should learn to socially boycott families, which resort to harassment of women. Society should enforce pressure on such families. Then only there is a hope for such families to mend their ways.

Closing Plenary Session

The Closing Plenary Session of the two-day International Women's Day Celebrations began with Ms Asiya Khatoon inviting distinguished guests on to the dais: Dr Rehana Sultana, Legal Activist, Mr Jeevan Kumar, Convenor, Human Rights Forum, Ms Damayanti, IAS, Project Director, Andhra Pradesh State AIDS Control Society and Mr Ali Asghar, Executive Secretary, COVA.

Reports on Parallel Sessions

Mr Khajawali, Mr Ajay Kumar and Ms Manju Shree reported the proceedings of the three theme-based parallel sessions.

Resolutions

After the presentation of the report on each theme, the delegates of the Convention passed action-oriented resolutions on each theme through voice-vote. The resolutions emerged out of the basti meetings held the day before as part of the celebrations.

These resolutions are consolidated into the Andhra Pradesh Declaration appended at the end of this report. (Annexure 1)

After the resolutions were passed, the guests on the occasion addressed the gathering. (Abridged versions of their speeches are reported below.)

Dr Rehana Sultana:

The resolutions that you have passed on 'Violence against Women' outnumber those on other themes. This shows the relative urgency of this issue. Women face many kinds of violence, from home, from society, at educational institutions, from the state, and so on. Creating awareness on these issues and mobilizing women on them leads to their empowerment. We should review the work being done by many organisations claiming to work for our empowerment. Society cannot move forward without women's support. We are not able to recognize the importance of women's role in society.

Together can we make the state apparatus work. If the police do not take action let us stage a sit-in in front of the police station until an FIR is registered. Let us not rest till action is taken. Write to Legal Services Authority against the police if the police do not take action. We should be aware of all the rights we have and raise our voice to claim them. In this man's society, see where they are being stifled and use appropriate structure to protest and to complain.

Domestic violence not just means dowry-related harassment. Harassment can take many forms. If you do not get what you need that is violence. If you are not allowed to give your children proper education, if your income or part of it is snatched away, that is also violence. These are issues facing both Hindu and Muslim women. Let us all get empowered. Let even the name of dowry not mentioned in your houses. We habitually start accumulating towards a girl child's dowry. Assert that you do not accept anybody who demands dowry.

Mr Jeevan Kumar:

UNO has declared 8th March as International Women's Day. The day is meant to review the progress made by women. Let us today estimate the situation of women

in India and the world. Statistics show that in our country, 70% of women are away from education. 346 women out of 1000 are dying during childbirth. 540 girl children out of 1000 are dying below five years. In Andhra Pradesh, everyday 20 women are killed for dowry. In Hyderabad and Secunderabad alone 3 women are meeting unnatural death everyday. In India 970 women are killed for dowry everyday. A rape happens every two hours in India. Women are subjected discrimination every two minutes. This is the situation of women after fifty years of independence.

Women are the most affected lot whenever there are faction fights, communal riots, political riots, or displacement. In Asian countries, procuring water and firewood is still a woman's responsibility. The condition of dalit, minority and tribal women in India is still pathetic. Can we call this development?

A recent study has revealed that 7% of girls are raped by their fathers, 3% by their brothers, 2% by their close relatives and 1% by their neighbours.

We have many bodies that are supposed to be devoted to women's welfare. But we see no impact. The Congress party which cried hoarse as an opposition party for reservations for women in legislative bodies is now silent when it is in power.

In spite of attaining good education, in spite of various kinds of movements all over, women's situation has not changed much. We have recently interview 46 women *sarpanches* of panchayats. Forty-two of them do not anything about what is happening in their village. Their husbands run the show for them. We should not only provide rights, but also create right conditions for them to enjoy their rights. The latter is also our responsibility.

In most of the organisations we are not talking about rights. We are just talking about livelihoods. Last year, 2,063 farmers committed suicide in Andhra Pradesh alone. About 18 lakhs of people migrated from Mahboobnagar district in search of work. Most of them are women. Recently 24 unclaimed bodies of women were found in the outskirts of the city. Their attire revealed that they were migrant labourers who came to city to find work, were forced into prostitution. They must have been killed by hooligans.

Women should learn about their rights, about the responsibilities of the government, whether the government is being accountable or not. We should wage struggles after reviewing several political and social movements that went before. We should enhance our awareness and attempt to bring about change.

Valedictory Address: Mrs Damayanti

I was thrilled to see the Andhra Pradesh Declaration. Let me congratulate you for passing that. I want you to remind you on this occasion that only when we as women become economically independent can we move forward.

We are both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. If we look after our daughters-in-law as our own daughter the problem of domestic violence will be solved. We are all women. Don't blindly support your sons. Counsel them. Let us apply these resolutions first at home.

A woman I know got married at 17 and she contracted the HIV virus by 18 years of age. She was pregnant too by that time. The mother-in-law blamed her for the disease. Remember that tests for the man are a must before marriage. It is also our responsibility to educate our children on sexual matters. The women's groups should become proactive in supporting the HIV/AIDS victims.

Conclusion

The session was concluded with Ms Qamar Jahan proposing a vote of thanks.

Annexure 1

The Andhra Pradesh Declaration

3rd March 2005

On the occasion of the International Women's Day, 450 SHG leaders from 9 districts of Andhra Pradesh and 2000 women from the old city of Hyderabad have shared their experiences and reflected on the issues facing women, in a Two-Day event

organised by COVA, on March 2-3, 2005, in Hyderabad, in order to build solidarity among women across the State of Andhra Pradesh.

On the issues of “Communalism and Women”, “Violence Against Women”, and “HIV-Aids and Women”, the delegates passed the following resolutions at the Convention on 3rd March 2005:

“Communalism and Women”

1. *Taking note* of the urgency to bring together all communities to promote mutual understanding and cooperation and also to break negative stereotypes, we resolve that all our programs will ensure the participation of women from different communities and will provide space for mutual understanding and unity.
2. *Realising that* all communal riots are politically motivated, we, the women of the State of Andhra Pradesh, pledge to unite across religious barriers, and fight against and expose the vested interests behind the riots.
3. *In empathy* with the intense trauma and suffering that women and children undergo during communal riots, we resolve to actively involve in facilitating relief, rehabilitation and compensation for the victims.
4. *Recognizing* the specific impact of communal violence on women and children, we appeal for an in depth study of riots from this perspective and call for formulating measures to prevent riots and for immediate and exemplary punishment of the perpetrators.

“Violence Against Women”

1. *Strongly condemning* the discrimination against the girl child, we resolve to fight against it and secure equal provision of nutritious food, education and other needs for the girl child.
2. *Recognizing* that an uneducated girl child is most vulnerable to violence, we resolve to take up campaigns to promote education of girl children and against early marriages, to ensure that women become educated, confident, economically independent and aware of their rights.
3. *Finding that* the dowry system has been responsible for much of domestic violence perpetrated against women, we resolve to take up a campaign against this social evil.
4. *Identifying* Jogini as a most primitive, uncivilized and inhuman social custom still prevalent in our society, we undertake to fight against this system and rehabilitate the victims by bringing together all women’s groups.
5. *Acknowledging* that women from scheduled castes, backward castes, minorities and other marginalised sections of society are particularly vulnerable to various kinds of harassment at home and outside, we will strive to involve more women from these sections into women’s groups and organisations striving for gender and social justice.

6. *Realising* the acute economic disempowerment of women, we demand proportional employment and livelihood opportunities for women in the government and private sectors.
7. *Recognizing* that women are marginalised from decision-making processes at all levels, we resolve to pressurize the government and civil society to ensure the participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels to safeguard their interests.

“HIV-Aids and Women”

1. *Acknowledging* that women are most vulnerable to the deadly disease of HIV-AIDS, we pledge to take up a continuous campaign for building awareness on the disease and ensure its prevention.
 2. *To ensure* the safety of the future generation from HIV-AIDS, we urge for proper educating of children and teenagers in schools and bastis on its prevention and implications.
 3. *Resisting* the discrimination against HIV affected people, we resolve to actively fight against this discrimination and offer a helping hand towards the rehabilitation and socialization of the victims.
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Annexure 2

About COVA

COVA evolved out of the Communal Harmony Programme of Deccan Development Society that was implemented in the Old City of Hyderabad. COVA was formed with 8 community-based organisations in 1995. Since then COVA has expanded to include 750 community based organisations / voluntary organisations / NGOs in 10 districts of Andhra Pradesh and 4 other states - West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Gujarat.

The 750 member organisations of COVA have been federated into 16 networks, 2 organisations and one trust. The goal of all these spin offs of COVA is to promote

communal harmony through the creation of intercommunity platforms dedicated to the service of humankind across all community and caste barriers. We envisage that these networks and organisations will become financially and organizationally independent of COVA within 3-5 years due to the organisational development inputs being provided by COVA.

The key concerns that guides COVA's work are:

- A healthy and harmonious relationship between different communities can be sustained only if each of the communities are strong, secure and confident in themselves. As the Muslim Community in India is socially, economically and politically more backward than the Dalits who are considered the most deprived and marginalized sections of the Indian Society, their integration with the rest of the society becomes more difficult. It is therefore important to adopt strategic interventions to help the Muslim community participate in the processes of holistic development and bring them on par with other communities in order to enable the establishment of harmonious relations obtained on the foundations of an equal partnership.
- The condition of poor Muslim women is extremely pathetic. They suffer from triple discrimination. First because of their gender, secondly due to their class and finally by being members of a community which is a minority and suffers from various complexes.

Programmes

COVA programmes are designed in a manner to promote community participation at all levels. In the old city of Hyderabad COVA has promoted different Specific Activity Networks (SANS) / federations which are owned and managed by the people and will become independent of COVA in about 3-5 years. These networks/federations are: Mahila Sanatkar MACS, Roshan Vikas MACTS, Youth TRAC, Saheli, Koshish Theatre Group and Inter Faith Forum. COVA also works with children, both children in school and children out of school. Apart from this COVA has facilitated the emergence of PUCAAR (Peoples' Union for Civic Action and Rights) which attempts to bring together all women involved in Mahila Sanatkar and Roshan Vikas and men involved in different COVA programmes for securing civic, economic and gender rights for all marginalized communities in the old city of Hyderabad.

At the state level, COVA has promoted 10 District Level Networks comprising of small voluntary organizations, which work across community lines. The main objective of the district networks is, on the one hand, to enable organizations working for different marginalized sections to work across community lines and include all marginalized sections in their programme rather than work for one single community. On the other hand it enables Muslim Organisations who have hitherto worked on religious and charitable lines to also address issues of social development and to include people from other marginalized communities in their programmes.

At the national level COVA is attempting to replicate the work it has done in the 10 districts of Andhra Pradesh in 4 states, viz: West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Gujarat. COVA is also promoting the Inter Community Alliance for National Integration and Development (ICANID), which endeavors to bring together

religious and civil society organisations for the purpose of initiating interaction and interface between them to secure social development and intercommunity integration for harmony and national integration.