



Bulletin : 20

From **DURBAR**

15th November 2012

A different 'Puja'

"I never seen such big Durga ma, such lighting and big pandals in our village." said Nilmoni Shabar, a 12 year girl from Amlashole. Durga Puja is the major festival for the Bengalis. It brings enjoyment and happiness to all. In the urban and suburban



area the festivity, glamour including lighting and decoration is gorgeous. This is not true for the villagers who belong to tribal community.

Durbar took initiative to bring the Shabars (ethnic tribes) in Kolkata so that they can experience the

festive mood of the prime festival of bengalis. 23 Shabars was brought to Kolkata who stayed in DMSC's care from Panchami to sense the pulse of the city. All the

10 children were excited while they hopped from pandals to pandals. They all were given new clothes as part of this program so that they should feel and enjoy like the children of mainstream society. It is indeed a different puja for them.

Protest against Extortion

Kartick puja is a major festival in the life of sex workers. They pray for their children and Kartick is God of child as per the Hindu mythology. But it is also a very much favorable time for the local hooligans to demand a good amount of money as subscription in the name of 'Kartick puja' from the sex workers. They sometimes threaten and also pressurize sex workers to pay this subscription. Innocent sex workers having no other alternative were forced to pay handsome money to them. But Durbar started campaigning against this social evil and came in confrontation with the representatives from the political party including the sitting MLA of a red light district.

This year in Bowbazar red light district of Kolkata became disturbed as the local hooligans are extorting and threatening the innocent sex workers to pay a subscription ranging from Rs. 15000/- 50,000/-. Durbar protested this kind of violence peacefully in a street corner meeting sensitizing the community about this social evil on 7th November 2012 while Durbar members including the Secretary, Project Director and Ex Secretary were thrashed brutally by the local hooligans. We also observed police inaction during the incidence.

To protest this type of extortion and attack on Durbar, a rally was organized from College square to DC Central office. Sex workers from Kolkata and adjacent districts took part spontaneously in this rally. In addition to representatives from some Trade Union and some Civil Society Organization namely Sara Bharat Truck Parichalak Samanwaya Committee, We are the Common People, World human Service Society, Sangrami Sramik Front, HDRI etc also marched for solidarity.

The DC Central took positive initiative to stop this type of violence and also assured us to put an end to such type of social evil in future.

“Sunilda”- will be with us always

“I remember his honest confession that he knew nothing about the sex workers before attending the interactive workshop as early as 1994 and promised to lend support for the rights of sex workers who need to be considered as workers. There are people from mainstream who visit brothels for some reason or other and pretend to know everything about sex workers. But Sunilda was not among them. He was a different person.”-says Swapna Gayen. Sunil Ganguly was always vocal for the labour rights of the sex workers. In his writings he always advocated for this right without any hesitation. “Destroying places of religion interest is immoral-but not sex and sexuality.” he commented while inaugurating “peace festival” of Durbar as the chief guest of the programme during 2002. He also advocated against stigma and discriminatory practices by the members of the mainstream society.

He was a person with versatility but “Durbar” will always remember him as their “dada” who was always with us. For Durbar he was not ‘Sunil Ganguly’- probably the most popular author of contemporary literary world rather a human being with knowledge and perseverance to deal with marginalized community with empathy and dignity.

Sunil Ganguly will always be with Durbar like thousands other Bengalis. Durbar is really sad to lose another compassionate “dada” forever.

Expanding the organization in new areas!

“We also have started our own unit of –DURBAR in our area” uttered a common sex worker from a brothel in Bardwan district in West Bengal. DMSC is expanding the branches in new red light areas in West Bengal. The main motto of this initiative is to start the branch committee to strengthen the community on the rights and entitlements and raise their voice collectively to decriminalize the sex work. On the other hand DMSC is providing condoms STI services in those areas. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) started to providing support to some of the Red Light Areas (RLA), where HIV intervention programme came to a

grinding halt as the implementing NGOs proved to corrupt or not delivering quality services. DMSc took the challenge and started providing services among the sex workers in 21 areas which Panduah, Diamond-harbor, Berhampore, Domkol, Farakka, Dhulian, Nabadwip, Barasat, Madhyamgram, Bardhaman, Asansol and Malda etc.

Additionally DMSC also started the advocacy with other stakeholders, like local Police, Government Officials and others, regarding the activities of DMSC with special reference to violence redressal and anti-trafficking programme run by DMSC through Self Regulatory Board.

A participatory Exercise focusing Rights of Children

“I will keep the cards of foods, clothes, healthy and clean environment, TV and obviously chowmin (Fast food)” said Md. Chand a 14 years old child of Khidirpur red-light area. A training was conducted on needs and rights of the children



through participatory approach. The children of sex workers contributed through providing related to their life in a 1day programme.

The main motto of this training programme was to build awareness among the children regarding their rights and how to protect their rights being the children of sex workers.

The facilitator prepared few paper cards with images of daily activities and its interconnecting with the rights elements. Through the use of pictorial forms various rights and entitlements related issues were highlighted.

The Peers of 'Amra Padatik' the collective of the sex workers children participated in this programme. The Peers will act as trainer to sensitize other community children on their rights and entitlements.

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