



Bulletin -25

From **DURBAR**

15th April 2013

The first Secretary of DMSC, Ms. Sadhana Mukherjee passed away!

The founder secretary of DMSC, Ms. Sadhana Mukherjee passed away on 2nd of April in



Kolkata. She was the first sex workers' leader and the facilitator to help raising the voice of sex workers in various forums to get recognized as workers. She represented sex worker's issue in number of Local, national and international forums. It is a great loss for the entire sex worker's community not only in India but also in the South East Asia.

She helped capacity building of Asodaya Samity, a collective of male, female and transgender sex workers based in Mysore, Karnataka. From the very beginning of the Sonagachi project, her contribution to mobilize the community is noteworthy. She was the only women in the community, who has taken first initiative to mobilize the sex workers against the violence of local hooligans and babus (fixed customer). She also represented DMSC in various international forums in Bangladesh, Australia, Taiwan, Bangkok, Combodia, USA.

Self Regulatory Board protest against the financial extortion

“I am really happy to get twenty five thousands from my madam. Thanks to DMSC to rescue me from my madam and also collect my earning from madam!” Said Mita(Name changed), a sex worker from sonagachi. Mita was rescued with the help of by the self regulatory board of DMSC.

Self Regulation is considered to be an effective mechanism to address violation of rights of sex workers which includes harassment by police, local goons including trafficking in sex work and others. Since 2001, Durbar has been successfully removing minor girls and unwilling women from this profession and have arranged for alternative means of livelihood. Its activity is performed through self Regulatory Boards which is unique. SRB is a unique body with participation from the larger society (local councilor, Local Doctor, Representative from Government Social Welfare Department etc) but sex worker’s representation is major.

SRB is not only dedicated to rescue minor and unwilling girls into sex work trade, but it also involve itself rescuing adult sex workers who are exploited by madams, local goons or others. Mita is the example, where SRB proves its excellence in protecting girls to face violence. She was in sex trade since last 3 months and continuously harassed by her Malkin who deprived of her earnings. Few weeks ago she became pregnant and desired to leave this profession. But her madam denied to do so and compelled her to entertain customers per day. She reported to a member of SRB who took initiative to address her issues. SRB left no stone unturned to help Mita getting back her Rupees 25,000/- from the Malkin(madam).

Negligence or Discrimination- what is the root cause of this death

Shamu Das, a 16 year old transgender from Tarakeswar Chapadanga, had a Rail accident. He was taken to Burdwan Medical College and hospital by the GRP with serious injury. Instead of starting the treatment of Shamu, the hospital authority unnecessarily delayed early intervention as they were in a dilemma whether Shamu will be admitted to “male” ward or in a

“female “ward. Shamu passed away without getting any treatment for three long hours in the corridor of the hospital.

This incident clearly shows the lackluster attitude of the medical staffs towards a person from third gender. It also shows the level of stigma attached to the transgender for which Shamu died out without receiving proper attention. Although the national government is recognizing the third gender in its Census document, but it is not implemented at this service delivery outlets neither they are aware of this issue. This is one aspect of the incident but the other underlying insensitive and inhumane attitude of the service provider is also an important issue to be recognized.

Anandam, an allied organization of DMSC- working for the rights of LGBT community, put a complaint in the Human Rights Commission of West Bengal demanding a proper investigation of the incident. Honourable Justice Ashok Gangopadhay, Chairperson, Human Rights Commission was also apprised on the issue and assured members of Anandam to carry out a full fledged investigation of the incident. Anandam, will follow up the issue so that such incident would not happen in future.

‘Durbar Disha’ participated in the national level workshop of the domestic workers

Despite of the ILO convention focusing the rights of domestic workers in accessing basic rights of a worker which includes decent place at work the workplace. India still have to go a long way to get domestic worker’s right. The national government drafted a national policy on domestic workers in 2011, advocating for inclusion of domestic workers under the purview of various labour laws including Trade Union Act, Minimum Wages Act etc.

From March 19-20th an workshop was held in Kolkata with an objective to heighten the domestic worker’s issue and to get it addressed both at on political and social level. 6 organizations across India participated in the said workshop sharing their experiences in unionizing the domestic workers, getting their worker’s right. While Gujrat based Saath is

adopting a business model, Rajasthan and Maharashtra is adopting a union model, Tamilnadu is following a mix of the two.

The workshop was a great learning opportunity to interact and exchange the views of the workers. “You can raise your union fund by asking your employer to donate the used paper to you. If every member is doing the same, a huge amount of used paper can be collected and quite a good amount of money can be accumulated” - says Madhu Bilmore- from Kastakari Mahila Kamgar Union while sharing some fund raising ideas for the union to the Durbar Disha participants. Participants across India visited the Dumdum field and shared their struggle and activities to the members of Durbar Disha. The participants of the workshop took a decision to create a pressure group at the national level to press policy makers in implementing the draft national domestic workers policy.

Durbar participated to the convention to champion the issues for the Unorganized Labor

Sramajibi Swikriti Mancha, a forum of the unorganized workers in West Bengal, organized a convention on 25th March to champion the issues related to the unorganized workers in West Bengal. The convention was attended by various sections of unorganized workers including construction workers, *Jari* workers, sex workers, domestic workers, transport workers and others. As a member of Sramajibi Swikriti Mancha, Durbar participated to the convention to raise their voice to get recognized as worker. The convention was attended by 500 unorganized workers in West Bengal.

In this convention, Madan Mitra, honorable Minister of Transport and Sports commented that “the primary problem of the workers engaged in unorganized sector is lack of information and awareness regarding their rights and entitlements.” He also said that he will take proactive role to place an Information Officer in his department so that the transport workers get all relevant information related to their social and other entitlement to improve their quality of life. “We will also try to incorporate a representative from Sramajibi Swikriti Mancha in the Truckers Welfare Committee, Govt. of West Bengal.”

The convention was attended by Assistant Labor Commissioner Partha Biswas, while after his deliberation he also engaged into a question answer session. Question raised by a representative of Domestic Worker Organization regarding governments lack lusted attitude towards registering their union among others.

While challenged by a representative of sex workers organization Debanjani Chakraborty, representing CITU, said that demanding labor rights of sex workers is difficult to conceive in the present socio-economic and cultural milieu. However, he also suggested that things might change through social and political movement steered by sex workers collective.

The core demand of the convention was elaborated by Dr. Smarajit Jana, who chaired the



convention. He stressed on issuing labor cards to all workers engaged in stipulated occupation under labor Directorate. The labor card would provide dignity and recognition to the labor, he commented. Fixation of minimum wage of Rs. 400/-per day for 8 hours work should be strictly implemented for all 63 enlisted occupations. Ensuring employment guarantee for the urban & rural unorganized workers would be extend up to 200 days.

Strengthening universal public distribution system with

concessional supply of food grains at Rs.2/- per kg and 35 kg per household per month is another demand. Social security for all unorganized workers including ESI like scheme and pension for all unorganized workers should be ensured by the Government. The demands formulated in the convention will be put forward to the MIC of labor Govt. of West Bengal.

DURBAR shows solidarity with SHAHABAG movement

As the Shahabag movement demanding death penalty for crime against humanity during the Liberation war of 1971 in Bangladesh, the city is gearing up to show the solidarity with the Shahabag movement on 20th March. Near about 300 protesters including youths and many organizations gathered at the city's cultural epicenter at the Academy of Fine Arts.

As Durbar from its inception has always been engaged in raising its voice against religious fundamentalism, racism, cast and creed, participated and showed solidarity with this movement. Around 50 members from different red light areas especially youths and children of sex workers joined the rally, holding colorful posters, banners with songs, slogans, poems and Mukti Juddher Gan on their lips filled the air of Academy area.

Editor: Smarajit Jana

Bulletin team: Santanu Das, Paromita Chowdhury and Mousumi Chowdhury

Published by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, 44 Balaram Dey Street, Kolkata - 700006, India /www.durbar.org /for feedback: durbar10@gmail.com For facebook: www.facebook.com/durbar.mahila