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Durbar Bulletin -50

Komal Gandhar Performed in World Dance Day Festival

On 29th April, 2015 Komal Gandhar, the cultural wing of Durbar performed in the World Dance Day Festival organized by West Bengal Dance Group Federation which was held in Rabindra Sadan, Kolkata. After audition for the final performance in World Dance Festival, Kamal Gandhar was selected among 57 professional groups. The dance performances of Komal Gandhar were enjoyed and highly praised by the audience.

Demanding workers rights for the unorganized women workers

As a result of globalization, privatization and liberalization informality has become a common phenomenon for the working class all over the World. As a developing country, India is also following the same trend. Here the informal workforce is devoid of any legal protection as workers. Durbar is a founder member of Karmajibi Mahila Parisad – a forum of women workers engaged in 13 different informal occupations across the state of West Bengal. The forum is active in establishing the rights and dignity of workers engaged in sector with special focus to women workers.

Durbar as a partner of Karmajibi Mahila Parisad took an initiative to collect information about the vulnerabilities and extent of exploitation of women engaged in different informal occupations. Durbar compiled and streamlined underlying issues behind of informal labor and developed a Charter of Demand. There are several demands to which includes revision of the minimum wage of the tea garden workers, trade union recognition of Sex workers and domestic workers and others. In the month of April, Durbar as a member of Karmajobi Mahila Parisad submitted the Charter of Demands to the Minister in Charge of Labour, Government of West Bengal. The spokesperson of the forum discussed with the Minister at length on various issues pertaining to the rights and entitlement of unorganized labour sector and he assured to clear the dues of midwives and also promise to provide due trade union recognition of the domestic workers among others.

Where worker's right is a far dream

On April 2015, Durbar and other partners of Karmajibi Mahila Parisad organized a meeting with 37 Trained midwives in South 24 Parganas and the women engaged fishing and industry, specially these who are engaged in cleaning prawns. Trained midwives are the contractual workers under the Ministry of health, Government of West Bengal. Although they are engaged as midwives, now their primary duty is to serve as peon in those sub centres. Their monthly wage is only Rs. 550/- (for 3 working days in a week). While the national minimum wage for floor level workers is RS. 115/- per

day (for 8 working hour) and those Government contractual employees get only Rs. 550 for 12 days. The situation has worsened further for nonpayment of their dues since last 14 months.

The women engaged in fish and prawn cleaning activities have been facing extreme exploitation. They have to work from dusk to dawn and working hard one can earn as high as Rs. 100(as Rs 5/- is given to clean per Kg fish or Prawn). While cleaning the fish they develop several water borne skin diseases. The place of work is dirty and are devoid of any facilities e.g., toilet and provision of drinking water. Usually the workers develop skin infection as part of occupational disease. They cannot raise their voices due to tremendous insecurity and vulnerability and fear of losing the job. There are instances where the employer winded up their business without even paying the dues of the workers. Both categories do not enjoy any kind of social security or health care services as workers.

After listening the problems of these women Durbar and other members of Karmajibi Mahila Parisad prioritized the issues and incorporated their demand in the Charter of Demand which was submitted to the Minister- In- Charge of Labour the Government of West Bengal. The Minister took the issue of the trained midwives and nonpayment of wage for the running Year (2015). He assured that due will be cleared within 7 days and the workers are relieved for the time being but Karmajibi will continue to fight to extend its support to get the dues of previous year.

Durbar is providing medicines

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee has been running a number of Targeted Intervention which is being funded by National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India. NACO had been providing medicines since 2010 for the treatment of different Sexually Transmitted Infections, for the MARPs (Maximum At Risk Populations). These medicines were being provided in the form of Kits and were being given as per the NACO Syndromic Management Guideline. For the last two years they have stopped providing the medicines even there was no allocation in the budget. The sex workers who attended the different clinics were just diagnosed and prescribed and were asked to purchase the medicines which they hardly did. Kit 1 used for treatment of Cervical discharge and Kit 2 used for treatment of Vaginal discharge were the first to get exhausted. Under this circumstance, Durbar decided to purchase medicines from her own fund and since last six months Durbar is providing the community members with medicines for the treatment of Sexually Transmitted infection as well as some medicines for general ailments were also being provided.

Other branches of medicine starts off

Durbar has been so long for the last twenty two years providing treatment through the Allopathic Mode of Medicine. There has been demand for Homeopathic and Ayurvedic System of medicine from the sex workers especially for chronic non Sexually Transmitted Infection cases. Durbar has arranged for one Homeopathic and one Ayurvedic Doctor in the Sonagachi area, who are providing treatment since the last three months. The demand for these doctors has been increasing day by day as we often find patients waiting for hours for these doctors.

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