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Durbar Bulletin -55

Sex workers celebrated 20 years of successful running of their own Cooperative



Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd. an initiative of sex worker's collective organised 6 days open ground Fair 'Unayanner Disha Samabay Usha' (Usha establishes a model of development through cooperative) to celebrate 20 years of completion of its glorious journey. "It is our time not only to cherish the success but also to plan and act for sustainable development of under privileged community in

our country" said Ms. Bharati Dey, the convener of Usha Mela in her speech in the inauguration ceremony. The fair began on 27th September 2015 with a star studded inauguration ceremony attended by eminent scholars, academicians, human rights activists, MLAs and MPs and Ministers.

The representatives of different Self Help Groups of West Bengal and Sex workers from 16 states of India under the parasol of All India Network of Sex Workers gathered in Sradhananda Park in North Kolkata. Md. Mr. Inasuddin shared his vast experience working with Self Help Groups in several districts of West Bengal. He highlighted the basic principles of mutual understanding and cooperation not only to ensure economic security in addition to that it has boosted the self esteem, and confidence of sex workers community.

After the inaugural program the dias was taken over by the cultural troupe of Durbar with a marvellous performance of "Komolganhar" based on the theme to take forward the cooperative movements against the mushrooming business of chit fund.

Over 20 years, the USHA Cooperative has established itself as a pillar of economic security for the sex worker community. USHA began as a credit cooperative providing loans to its members. It has since expanded to include various economic ventures including social marketing of condoms and marketing of sanitary napkins and other grocery items. Following the principles of Cooperative movement Usha supported various community development activities which include residential hostel for the children of sex workers in Bariupur, a sports academy, an eco-friendly cultivation initiative, and other business endeavours.

Throughout the year 2015 a series of pre-mela programs in collaboration with different colleges and universities like Viswa Bharati University, University of Calcutta, University of Jadavpur, IGNOU were organised to sensitize the youths on cooperative related issues.

Each day was dedicated with different themes and the themes were:

- Day 1 (27.09.15): Role of Cooperative in Urban Development
- Day 2 (28.09.15): Role of Cooperative in Women empowerment
- Day 3 (29.09.15): The value of Cooperation in Protecting Environment
- Day 4 (30.09.15): Development through building aspiration
- Day 5 (01.10.15): Cooperative movement in unorganized labor sector
- Day 6 (02.10.15): Role of alternative media in women empowerment

In the inaugural address, Shree Jyotirmoy Kar, the Cooperative Minister of West Bengal thanked Shree Saral Deb, former Cooperative minister who in his tenure laid down the foundation of economic security of sex workers by registering Usha. Shree Kar believed that empowerment is an integral element of development which has helped sex workers to achieve success.

In those 6 days there were couple of informative sessions, debating sessions, discussions sessions, capacity building workshops etc which addresses a wide range of issues including Right to Information, Women empowerment, the value of cooperation in protecting environment, Mainstreaming Transgender community etc.

Eminent activists from different walks of life like Mr. G. R. Khairnar, Soni Sori, Former Cooperative Minister Saral Deb, and Mr. S. P. Udaykumar were felicitated in this auspicious occasion.

Like always, the special attraction of the Mela were the Documentary Films and the Cultural events. Each days ends up with colourful cultural events participated by renowned cultural troupes and organizations which includes Sinjon (Kohinoor Sen Borat), Sangstress, Raibese Dance, Mime Show, Calcutta Choir- Kalyan Sen Borat, Amlasole Birsha Munda Sanskritik



Committee, Gombhira (West Bengal Ioko Sanskriti department), Dance by Anandam(transgender group), Baul Gaan, Durbar Band, Komol Gandhar and Amra Padatik.

A global teleconference between University of Pennsylvania and Durbar

A global teleconference between the Philadelphia sex workers' community and the sex workers of Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd. And Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee in Kolkata took place on 29th September 2015. It was attended by members of Sex Workers Outreach Project Philadelphia,

of Project Safe from the Red Alliance in USA as well as at University Topics the and stigma sex work in States in



USA, representatives and members Umbrella New Jersey, social workers of Pennsylvania. centered on discrimination surrounding the United contrast to the

burgeoning solidarity and empowerment among sex workers in West Bengal made possible through Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) and Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd.

Ayesha Mohammed, a clinical therapist at Project Safe, Philadelphia mentioned the difficulties involved in providing mental health services to the sex work community in Philadelphia due to the tremendous amount of stereotypes surrounding sex work among the mental health professionals working in many government and non-governmental organizations. Moreover, in many cases, women who chose to enter the sex profession are viewed as mentally ill. Additionally, sex work itself is also considered to be the cause of deteriorating mental well being among sex service providers, making the approach of clinical therapy very biased and insensitive to sex workers rights agenda.

Melinie Dante Goodman from the Sex Workers Outreach Project in Philadelphia also elaborated on the lack of accurate data on sex work as well as trafficking. It is also very important to note that there has seldom been any attempt to appropriately differentiate between sex work, labor trafficking and sex trafficking which places sex workers in a more vulnerable position in regards to the law and criminal justice system.

Ms. Bharati Dey, Secretary of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee emphasized on the importance of developing a community-based organization which allows sex workers to actively take control of their rights and dignities, thus leading to empowerment. During the interactive session Ms. Bharati Dey emphasized to differentiate between sex work and sex trafficking. The Self Regulatory Board (SRB) initiated by the sex workers of DMSC has been able to effectively curb rates of sex trafficking by involving local doctors, politicians, and social workers in their anti-trafficking board, bypassing the need for constant police raids and monitoring in red light areas. Ms Cristin from New York expressed her joy and surprise how Durbar is doing to stop trafficking in sex work through establishing Self Regulatory Board which is a community led anti trafficking programme. She believes that this model

should be replicated everywhere. Over the years Durbar and Usha has been successful in preventing the entry of minor and unwilling girls in the sex trade and contributed to prevent trafficking. "Usha and Durbar have been successful enough to set an example and inspiration for us"- says Janet from Sex Workers Out Reach Project, New Jersey. Dr. Jana suggested that leaders and potential leaders from sex workers' community from USA can take the help of DMSC to get organised and to regain self esteem, through experience and exchange program between Durbar and sex workers' communities from USA.

To conclude, members of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee and Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd. offered their best wishes to the networks of sex work organizations in the United States, urging them to continue their struggle for decriminalization and believe in their rights.

Sex Workers' rally marks the International Day of Non Violence



As part of the 6 days fair, the sex workers came down on road on 2nd October 2015, the last day of the open fair to mark the International Day of Non Violence commemorating the father of nation, Matamta Gandhi and Shree Lala Bahadur Shastri.

Thousands of sex workers marched on the street with colourful placards with a message "Jounokarmi kare Pukar-Hinsa Dwesh Dur Korar" (sex workers are appealing to end violence). "Today's silent march is dedicated to champion our non violent movement to get our rights and entitlements", voiced Ms. Kusum, the President of AINSW.

The objective of the rally was to spread the message that although the sex workers are victims of all kinds of violence perpetrated by police, administration and local goons, they never took a violent stand, rather they followed a non violent strategy through debate, discussion, conferences and believe in democratic mode of communication. Sex workers have always demanded to repeal the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act 1956 which is used to mistreat and harass the sex workers and their children. Sex worker demanded workers right which is the only way to stop violence and exploitation on the sex workers.



More than 2000 sex workers and their children from across 16 states of the country participated in the rally started from Sraddhananda Park moving across B.B Ganguly Street, College Street and Mahatma Gandhi Road culminated by flying pigeons as a symbol of peace and brotherhood, attended by renowned film maker Mr. Goutam Ghosh.

Durbar Sports Academy: Moving ahead to its success

Playing football is a great way to get fit. Apart from physical benefits, it's a lot of fun and it gives the players the most intense experience, with the most touches of the ball. No wonder the game proves so popular with millions of people all over the world and the sex workers children finds interest for the same and practice hard to innate the game in their life resulting success one after another.

This year i.e., in the year 2015 the 3rd Division team of Durbar Sports Academy played Calcutta Football League organised by Indian Football Association, secured 3rd position by scoring 36 points with a close fight among 17 teams.

Celebrated 84th Birth Anniversary of A P J Abdul Kalam at IGNOU

On the eve of the celebration of the 84th Birthday of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam IGNOU, Regional Office Kolkata had organized a program to observe the day. The event took place at Vikash Bhawan, Regional head office. The main event was staged at the Delhi Head quarters and a parallel program was facilitated at IGNOU regional Centre Kolkata.

The focus of the program was commemorating the day on the splendid work of Our 11th President of India and his initiative to foster Open University and encourage the lesser privileged children and youth into education. The different study centers of IGNOU in Kolkata, their Directors, and Centre coordinators along with counselors were also part of this eloquent initiative. The representatives of the study centre of IGNOU run by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee were also part of this program.

The event was inaugurated by the Director Dr Kiran Shankar Chakraborty. In his welcome address he emphasized the important contribution of Shri A P J Abdul Kalam towards education and his visit to IGNOU. He was a man of inspiration and knowledge. Other eminent guests were Dr. Partha Sarathi Chakraborty , Geoinformatics and Remote sensing Cell, West Bengal State Council of Science and Technology, Department of Science and Technology, Government of West Bengal, Bikash Bhawan, Dr Amrita Dutta, Principal Sabitri Girls' College and other dignitaries.

Shri Banshi Badan Chattopadhyay anchored the event and highlighted the role of Open University education and it's inter-relation to the aspirations of A.P. J. Abdul Kalam as remarkable and commented that this is being manifested in the work of Durbar.

Durbar is a member of the state level campaign Beti Bachao and Beti Padharao

The Regional Girls Count workshop was held at the Indian Institute of Training and Development (IITD), Thakurpukur Kolkata on 8th and 9th October 2015. Reach India Trust organized a two day Regional Consultation on 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP): Building a Collective Response - Strengthening Civil Society Engagement and Community Action' on behalf of the Girls Count .The Consultation was supported by National Foundation for India, IPAS, UN Women and UNFPA. This important consultation meet was with a view to evolve a shared agenda for addressing declining sex ratio in the country with a holistic approach. The consultation timings are 10 am till 5.30 pm on the first day and on the second day it started at 10 am and over by 3.30 pm. The objective of this Consultation was to bring together different stakeholders in development, to discuss and deliberate on underlying issues and root causes such as sex ratio at birth (SRB), child sex ratio (CSR) and different forms of discrimination against girls and women, and finally evolve a common strategy and road map for the year 2016. The Consultation attempted to build a collective response on

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (literally meaning save and teach the girl child) initiative and also develop stagey for civil society engagements aligned with this national initiative in a cohesive and consistent manner. The participants were from diverse civic action groups, civil society organizations from Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal, national and international development including UN agencies, academics and government agencies and departments working on women and gender issues. Girl Count is an independent national level coalition of around 200 civil society organizations and individuals in the country working to address decline sex ratio. Resolutions undertaken by Kolkata Team:

1. Campaigning in the Durga Puja through street plays, Prabhat Pherry, essays, painting and slogans in all government and non- government schools.
2. Campaigning in their respective organizations through various awareness programs in their respective fields and community.
3. Organizing meetings and discussions with the different stakeholders and raise awareness of the issue in West Bengal.
4. Taking initiative in the uploading of whatever initiative has been taken be it small or big. Upload it in the face book and contact the regional centre for more help.
5. Attending the various program initiatives taken by the respective responsible organization in promoting Girls Count.
6. Perspective Building on the Implementation of gender related laws, regulation on gender biased sex selection
7. Forming a state level monitoring and evaluation team with stake holders, CSO and Government on the Girls Count issue.

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