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Durbar Bulletin -56

Anandam formed a Self Help Group in collaboration with Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd.

From the last 2 decades Usha has been working hard to help develop financial security of the sex workers and their family members. Based on the successes of the Usha, present present plan is to expand the model to incorporate other marginalized women in the country.

On 30th October 2015, Anandam, an organization of LGBTKH (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender formed a Self who are purview of group started members.

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perpetrated against the Transgender. Anandam fights against all kinds of exploitation including economic, physical, sexual, emotional, social and state mediated violence. Following human rights they has strategized to prevent violence which also includes criminalization of same sex practices as articulated in India's Anti-sodomy law, i.e. Indian Penal Code under Section 377.

Transgender kids are often disowned by their families and cannot find social space to access education and career building opportunities. Because of this, many members do engage in sex work. They are often denied to open their account in any bank and in any insurance company etc. With this perspective the members of Anandam felt the need to strengthen their collective initiatives to address economic insecurity through the help of Usha Cooperative.

Durbar Durgotsav 2015

The sex workers of Sonagachi started worshipping Maa Durga into overcoming series of hardship imposed on them, but finally they could manage to achieve successes this time around. In the third year, the sex workers of Sonagachi brought the puja out of their office building to an open ground, organizing it in a public place.” We are using the adjacent space of the Subham Hall managed by the Corporation. Through this puja we succeeded in claiming social space



year, the sex workers successfully moved from their open ground to the adjacent public space of the Community Hall in Kolkata. Through this puja we succeeded in claiming social space

for the sex workers community” says Ms. Bharati Dey, Secretary DMSC.

This year Durbar planned to celebrate their puja in a grand way against the bureaucratic, police and public apathy towards sex workers community. The police and the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) turned down their request to set up a big Pandal, compelling them to approach the Calcutta High Court, yet again and ultimately the court allowed Durbar to host puja in a bigger way , inside the red light area.

“Next year, we will move the Court again so that sex workers be allowed to hold Puja in the same venue where Kalipuja and Gaanesh Puja by the business community.”, said Dr. Smarajit Jana, Chief Advisor of DMSC.

The theme of the puja was ‘ Amar Santan Jeno thake Sob pate’ (Wishing equal opportunity for children of sex workers in all aspects of life). The inauguration took place on Sunday i.e, on 18th October 2015 and was inaugurated by the Minister of State for women and child welfare, Dr. Sashi Panja. The inaugural ceremony was also graced by Shri S. Suresh Kumar, Principal Secretary, Disaster Management Department, West Bengal, Shri Robin Chatterjee, Councilor, Shri Dipankar Mukherjee, an eminent writer, Dr. Smarajit Jana, Chief Advisor, DMSC, Ms. Bharati Dey, Secretary, DMSC, Dr. Debopriya Mallick, eminent social activist and physician. Representatives from I R Foundation and Sramajibi Swakriti Mancha were also participated in the program. 500 sarees were distributed among the aged sex workers from the puja fund created by Durbar.

Like the last two years, this year too, sex workers participated in the rituals, of the puja including offering their “anjali” to Maa Durga and prepared and distributed Bhog to thousands of sex workers and their family members on the day of Maha Ashtami. They took part in “Sidur Kehla” on the day of Maha Dashami also.

The celebration ends with the immersion of Maa Durga in Aahiri Tola Ghat. The sex workers took a big and colorful procession attended by three thousand sex workers who danced all the way to the ghat to the beats of dhak(drum).

Durbar is going to launch a demonstration project on PrEP

Oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a new HIV prevention method in which people who do not have HIV infection could take a pill daily to reduce their risk of becoming infected. This is promoted for them who are HIV negative and who are at substantial risk of getting

HIV infection. So PrEP is an important tool for HIV prevention among Female Sex Workers (FSW) who might not be consistently using condoms, and a demonstration project will be launched in Sonagachi red light district soon to assess the impact and feasibility of the use of PrEP as an HIV prevention intervention tool to provide additional protection to those who are most at risk.

Initially 1000 female sex workers will be included in the project and will be provided the medicine for a period of 16 months. The sex workers who will be taking part will be screened first and after one month they will be enrolled in the project. 'Follow-up visits' will be conducted in the months 4, 7, 10, and 13 from the first study visit. The 'Exit visit' would take place in the 16th month.

The main objective of the project is to:

1. Identifying female sex workers in need of HIV prevention and willing to take oral PrEP
2. Sustained uptake and adherence to oral PrEP among female sex workers
3. Oral HIV PrEP as part of a combined prevention package delivered safely for female sex workers.

Field work has already been started and as soon as the drugs arrive, the work on drug distribution will commence.

A PROTEST PROGRAMME BY DAS THEKE DAS HAJAR

From Sharmila's 15 years of struggle is a struggle that is an unparalleled example of stamina of a woman to protest against the imposition of undemocratic rules and policies. Sharmila is on fasting since 2000. She is protesting to repeal Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA 1958). Different mass organizations, women organization decided to observe 2nd November (15th year completion of Sharmila's fasting) in support of Sharmila's demand across India.

DMSC, a member of the network Das Theke Das Hajar (From Ten to Ten Thousand), is one of the vibrant network who decided to take part in this protest program. Several organisations and networks got together from September 2015 to plan a common day of action in Kolkata through a series of Street level campaigns at various locations in Kolkata. Durbar as an integral part of the network actively participated in the street corner.



Prof. Kunal Chattopadhyay, Jadavpur University in his speech explained the scenario in Manipur and other provinces in the North East India where promulgation of AFSPA continued over decades. He also urged people to look at the fact that a hunger strike by mainstream politicians or even by civil society figures for a few days forces policy makers to engage into discussion where as from Sharmila who has been on hunger strike for fifteen years received lukewarm response. The state

authorities on the other hand has repeatedly arrested her, filed cases against her on the ground of “attempt to suicide” and to forced her into a life where she survives only with a Ryles Tube compulsorily stuck on her nostril.

Kuhu Das on behalf of the Association for Women With Disabilities, impresses on the necessity to strengthen the campaign and the burning need to express our solidarity with Irom Sharmila and all that she stands for.

Amitabha Chakraborty of Nari Nirjatan O Durbrittayan Birodhi Samity, argued that the development promised to North East India is in truth geared by profit motives of the global capital and India’s super rich, and the AFSPA plays a crucial role in trying to keep the people silent in the face of oppression and exploitation. He asserted that repression has not been able to silence people, and will not be able to do so forever. He also asserted that the struggle of Sharmila is tied up with the struggles of other women, such as Soni Sori.

Seema Phokla of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee demanded for immediate repeal of the AFSPA, and allowing Irom Sharmila to live a normal human life. She also condemned the Government for repeatedly arresting Irom Sharmila and bringing cases such as “attempt to suicide” against her. Ms. Seema also talked that this is also an issue of state violence which they too face as sex workers.

The speeches were followed by films shown by the group called” Cinema of Resistance”.

This was followed by screening of a documentary film named “My Body, My Weapon”, based mainly on an interview with Irom Sharmila. The final film was on the killing of Thangjam Manorama and the protests that gripped Manipur in its aftermath, as well as depicting regular show of violence on the people living in the north east of India. One could see how the police coolly and brutally beating protesters even as journalists are not spared.



The street corner was successful enough and has been able to create an impression on the mass who attended the street corner.

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