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Durbar Bulletin -66

BinodiniSramik Union-the union of sex workers join the protest

New Trade Union Initiative is a non-party affiliated Trade Union primarily for the informal workers supported the nationwide General strike against the Anti-labour policies by the government, called by 10 central trade unions.

The West Bengal State organizing committee of NTUI where BinodiniSramikUnion(Trade union wing of Durbar) is a founder member also supported the cause and organized a number of street corners in various locations of Kolkata and West Bengal.

In the Haatkholo(a place in North Kolkata) street corner Rama Debnath from, BinodiniSramik Union commented that, "While the Government cannot ensure bare Minimum Wage for a worker, not ensuring safety measure at the workplace and basic entitlement of a worker. It is hard to live with dignity if those policies are not implemented." Comrade Ravi Pallur and Comrade AbijitMajumder also emphasised the upcoming changes in the labour law. "The government is advocating that the small enterprises employing less than 50 workers need not to be registered under The Factories Act 1948, this will create informalization of labour further which was regulated by the government till date." Comrade Abhijeet informed.

Apart from Haatkholo, street corners are organized in Bagbazar of Kolkata and in other districts of West Bengal. BinodiniSramik Union and Durbar DishaMahilaGrihasramikSamanwayaCommittee(the domestic worker wing of Durbar) were key constituents of those street corners.

Sexual violence in continuum

The night of the 31st August, shattered the city dwellers with its brutality. Drunken App cab driver, picked up a 12 year old homeless girl from Brabourne Road footpath, gang raped her throughout the night in the cab which roamed in the streets and flyovers of the city, Kolkata. Finally, the girl was murdered and left in TopsiaCanal(a canal in the east side of Kolkata near EM Bypass). The incident remained unnoticed by the police, who were in charge of night patrol.

Such incidents show the attitude of a commoner towards women and girls. This incident is not the only one. In the last couple of months incident of sexual assaults occurred from SaltlakeSectorV to Baghajatin of South Kolkata. It has become a culture which is practiced in our day to day life where the women are harassed sexually at public spaces, at work stations as well as in as in domestic sphere. However, the cab driver was arrested later.

But this is not the solution. As per the order of Supreme Court of India(dated 10th February 2010 and 5 May 2010) in a PIL lodged by PUCL, every city with a population must have night shelter for homeless persons. For every 1 lakh population, there should be a homeless shelter(open for 24X7) with adequate place to eat, sleep and sanitation. But in Kolkata, due to lack of monitoring and political will of the Government, night shelter facility is not operating properly and the homeless

people are not using the facility. Homeless shelter in Kolkata are not matching with the present demand.

To critique lack of monitoring and night patrolling by police, demanding the adequate number night shelter for the homeless, Das Theke Das Hazar (an independent platform of organization and individuals against sexual violence), organized a street corner under the “Maa” Flyover near Park Circus Seven Point crossing on 7th September 2016.

In her speech, veteran social worker Krisna Mira Roy said night shelter cannot be a permanent solution rather every citizen must have the right to housing. Abir critiqued the Government model of development and questioned why the people have to live beneath the sky after so many years of independence. Professor Soma Maarik and Professor Kunal Chattopadhyay questioned about the policy, law of the Government in ensuring a dignified life for a women. Roopkatha critiqued the “Rape culture” and patriarchal norms in maintaining the power structure on the women leading to increasing number of violence.

The programme was attended by more than 200 spectator and bystanders. “DidieatakiamaderChobi”(Is this our picture?) asked the street children living nearby street while listening to the speeches. A number of homeless people attended the speech and associated with the cause, which shows that this type of street corner are still relevant to express pain and agony.

The women network in west Bengal –Maitree also organized a street corner on 14th September at Brabourne Road where street hawkers and vendors including the homeless people participated spontaneously.

Inauguration of the resource centre for the Nachnis and their children in Purulia

“Jhumur”, “Ghoranach” are another form of folk performance which is not recognized as the art form. The performers named as “Nachnis” are exploited by their partners or “rasiks” and remained secluded from the society. Their children are also deprived from all social entitlements including their citizenship identity who are not given equal status. Those children cannot claim inheritance to property of their biological father.

In order to establish “Jhumur” as a folk art form, Durbar mobilized the nachnis and advocated for their rights from 2005. Nachnis were recognized as performers by 2007 by the Ministry of Culture, Government of West Bengal.

But even today the nachnis and their children are yet to get their due rights as citizen of the country. In order to establish their rights, Durbar in association with Indienhilfee.V – Herrsching created a safe space and support system for the Nachnis and their children which will be used as a resource centre for the nachnis, an activity and day care centre for their children.

The activity was officially inaugurated on 2nd September 2016, in the presence of Honorable Minister in Charge of Paschimanchal Unnayan Shri Shanti Ram Mahato, Local General Secretary of Trinamool Congress Shri Nabendu Mahali, Officer in Charge of Arsha Block Neel Ratan Ghosh, Social Activist Bidyadhar Mahato, Ex panchayat Pradhan Ankurmahato, Secretariat of Education In Arsha Block, Shri Param Singh. Durbar’s Secretary Smt Kajal Bose, Deputy Manager of Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Smt Satabdi Saha, representative from Indienhilfee.V – Herrsching Smt Rucha Mitra and Aparajita Ghosh were also present in the ceremony.

“We will extend our support and assistance towards this noble initiative” said Shi Nabendu Mahali. He also mentioned the Durbar’s long battle against all odds and hindrance. Minister In Charge of Paschimanchal Unnayan Shri Shantiram Mahato appreciated the role of Durbar in the development of marginalized community. “Social exclusion is the primary reason behind poverty”-he commented and assured for administrative support in the development of the region.

Opening of Free Legal Aid Clinic by DLSA in partnership with Durbar

A free legal Aid clinic for the sex workers community has been inaugurated on 30th August 2016 by the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) in association with Durbar at the premises of Durbar office which is adjacent to the Sonagachi red light area. The clinic inaugurated by Hon’ble Judge Mr. Uttam Bhattachary, Dr. Smarajit Jana Chief Advisor of ,Durbar, Ms. Barati Dey and other members of DLSA and Durbar were also present in the inaugural programme. Mr.

UttamBhattyacharya mentioned that the newly opened clinic would be a bridge between the sex workers community and the legal system. He described that this is the first initiative taken for the sex workers in our state, which can be a historical footsteps to ensure the rights & justice of the marginalized community. Three para legal volunteer chosen, from among the community members namely Puja Roy, LokenthBhattyacharya and Rajkumar are the members of AmraPadatik ,a forum of sex workers children duly trained by DLSA. DLSA would assist the legal clinic which will operate thrice in a week. Mr. Bhattyachaya mentioned that the free legal support will be provided to the community by an experienced Advocate from DLSA once in a week who will be assisted by the para legal volunteers. He also said that depending on the need and the success of the free legal clinic number of working days may be increased which could be extended according to the need of the local community members and support services to be extendedup to the Supreme Court. Dr. Smarajit Jana, Chief Advisor of Durbar greeted the initiative. He mentioned that being a highly stigmatized & marginalized community the sex workers are commonly deprived from their rights as well as in acquiring justice. He stated that the initiative is a unique opportunity to the sex workers community to address various types of injustice meted out to them. Para legal volunteers in the clinic will empower community members to raise their voices in line with legal justice. Ms. Bharati Dey, Mentor, of Durbar said that from its inception Durbar is engagedin addressing various legal problems such as eviction, violence by Babus, Pimps/Madams, local goons or Police. Durbar holds its own legal cell to combat various injustices by appointing legal officers and Advocates. Newly opened legal Aid clinic could create an opportunity to access justice for the sex workers community which includes their children.

Inauguration of Self Regulatory Board in Kochbeher-strengthening the community ownership

Self Regulatory Board is a model adopted by Durbar with an aim to reduce violence and discrimination toward the sex workers and their children including preventing entry of minor and trafficked women in sex trade. The strategy developed by DMSC emulates self-regulation through ownership building of and by the community bas a responsible citizen of the country .

On 22nd August 2016, Self Regulatory Board was formed in Cochbeher red light district “SRB is not only preventing entry of minor girls in the red light districts but also facilitate the sex workers in getting their citizenship documents and other entitlements.” Commented President of Durbar ,Smt Putul Halder.

Dr. Jana, the Chief Advisor of Durbar tagged it as historical day while constituting of SRB in Cochbeher. Presently SRB is operating in 23 Red Light Districts in West bengal. SRB became a vehicle of progressive change in those red light area where the sex workers and the local stake holders join hand in hand for the development of the area including sanitation, infrastructure, health, violence in addition to addressing social discrimination etc.

In the said meeting Chairperson of Cochbeher Municipality Smt Reba Kundu, Local Social Activist Shri AbirKar, Chief Medical Officer of HealthDr.Shyamal Soren were also present. Rita Roy shared the information that SRB modelprofoundly appreciated by the Supreme Court panel and recommend Government to adopt similar system which could be an effective tool to control human trafficking in sex work.

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