

15<sup>th</sup> November 2016



# Durbar Bulletin -68

## Sex worker mother came down to street demanding maternity benefit

On 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016, Durbar on behalf of Karmajibi Mahila Parishad organized a street cornering in Sonagachi red light district on maternity benefit to generate awareness among the sex workers regarding the issue.

Durbar being an active member of 'Right to Food' movement campaigned on the issue and started organizing different program like rally, street corner, protest demonstration etc on different areas of West Bengal. Around 200 sex worker mothers of Sonagachi were assembled in the program to show their solidarity.

Sex worker Mother came out from the brothel holding their kids to raise their protest. Their demand was to provide Rs. 6000/- for maternity allowance which is stipulated in the government scheme.

Recently 'Right to food' Committee of West Bengal has started a campaign to press their demand to disburse maternity allowance what they are entitled to receive. On the eve of 2016 West Bengal state assembly election, government of West Bengal declared that they would implement as per the State Food Security Act 2013. However, not much movement could be seen from the respective department. According to the Section officer the state government is liable to pay Rs. 600/- to every pregnant women. The law was passed 3 years ago but till date there is no real concern on the part of the government. Sex workers of Sonagachi red light district held this demonstration to 'activate' the respective Ministry and department who are accountable for the said policy and program.

## Protest Demonstration against Police atrocities on Social activist

On 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 at Kalighat metro station police came up with innovative ideas to harass people. While a lawyer (practicing in the high court) handed over some important document to one of our activist friend who was waiting outside punching machine (to punch electronic ticket to travel by Metro) the lawyer was arrested by the police for "break journey" and was taken to the office of the Station Superintendent of Kalighat Metro Station. The lawyer, accompanied by the social activist (and scientist as well) demanded the rule of the metro rail for such offence. The police and civic police abused the lawyer and the activist physically and verbally. Finally when both of them tried to lodge a formal FIR against the Metro railway Police and Civic police, Kalighat Police Station refused to lodge a complaint, in the meantime the Metro Railway Police lodged complaint against them. On the

basis of the FIR registered by the police the lawyer and the social activist was arrested immediately who got their bail afterwards.

Durbar MahilaSamanwaya Committee, as a core member of the network named Das Theke Das hazar, participated in the protest demonstration against such police atrocities on 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 in front of Kalighat metro station.

“We condemn physical and verbal abuse by the police on women and innocent people” commented Krishna Hazra from Durbar MahilaSamanwaya Committee. Veteran activist Ranjit Sur added that the democratic space is shrinking gradually which is a dangerous trend. All India Progressive Women’s Association, APDR, Nari Nirjatan o DurbrittayanPratorodh Mancha, joint Action for Social Justice, Hawker Sangram Committee also took part in the said event. The street corner was followed by a deputation to the Superintendent of Kalighat metro Station and Kalighat police station.

### Seeking justice

In the month of June a worker, who is a daughter of a sex worker engaged in a bag factory in Rambagan red light area fired from her job without showing any cause. Loosing the job, horrified worker knocked every door including the local councillor of the area. Finally she informed Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee as a core member of Karmajibi Mahila Parisad (a women workers council in West Bengal).

Karmajibi Mahila Parisad representatives communicated with the employer demanding reinstatement of the worker, but the employer is refused to accept her back. The worker with necessary help and support from Karmajibi Mahila Parisad lodged a formal complaint to the labour commissioner seeking justice. The case was raised in the labor court and is now been considered for reconciliation under the Industrial Dispute Act. The employer accused the worker that she is a chronic absentee and also accused gross misconduct and the other hand despite of employing more than 50 workers at the time of termination the establishment did not follow the provisions of the Industrial Establishment Standing Order Act and the gross misconduct was not defined and no domestic enquiry was held against the worker by the management.

As per the provisions of the Industrial Dispute Act, the worker is entitled to claim certain compensation including Gratuity which will be decided in the next conciliation meeting.

### **Durbar participated in the state level convention on Lokpal Bill**

A State Level Convention on LokPal Bill was organized on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2016 at Indian Association Hall (Bharat Sobha Hall) Kolkata by the forum of Voluntary Organisations. The forum was established in the year of 1996 by the affiliation of 160 volunteer organizations and Durbar is one of the active members of the organisation. The convention was organized with the concern that the Central Government has hastily introduced and passed Lokpal Bill without any consultation with the representatives of voluntary organizations.

The voluntary organizations raised their voices whenever any policy direction of the government tries to overlook, or fails to notice the obvious eventuality and scope of further widening of the existing gaps in the society.

The convention was presided over by Mr. Biplab Halim, Executive Director of IMSE and Mr. Manabendra Mondal delivered the inaugural speech. The discussion leads to raise many questions on the coherence of the relevant state policy. The motion of the meeting has raised several questions e.g, 1. Are voluntary organizations are private organizations or public organizations? 2. Can an employee or functionary of a voluntary organization be treated as a ‘Public Servant’?

Mr. Amiya Samanta in his speech discussed at length regarding the ongoing onslaught against democratic practices in the country whereas Dr. Smarajit Jana, Chief Advisor of Durbar pointed out the squishing of democratic space by the government leaving hardly any scope and opportunities to raise issues and challenges of the marginalized communities in the country. A resolution was taken by the participants of the convention to repeal several provisions of Lokpal Bill, 2016, participating to civil society organisation.

### Sex workers of South hold hands with the North

Except in NAVADA, sex work in USA is illegal. However in USA there are thousands of sex workers who practices in different cities and in streets sometimes under guise of other occupations. A sex worker with the help of civil society organizations has started raising their voices with the help of the Social Work department of Upenn university in the recent past. Sex workers has started building their own collective in city Philadelphia. The University of Upenn helped them to develop a bridge between sex workers of Kolkata and sex workers from few other cities namely Philadelphia, New York and Los Angeles and others. These has been few interactive session over the skype between sex workers belonging to few wide apart continents.

Dr. Jana while visiting USA on behalf of DMSC meet with the sex workers collective of Pheladelphia representing primarily street based sex workers on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2016. Braving the rain and chill around 30 sex workers attended the meeting in the evening of 27<sup>th</sup> October to listen from Jana few sex workers in Kolkata get collectivized and fought for their rights. There was a question answer sessions which continued more than an hour or so followed by Dr. Jana's presentation on Durbar and sex workers movement in India. They were extremely excited about the progress of DMSC and all of them expressed their willingness to visit Kolkata. There was a decision that atleast two of them needs to visit Kolkata to get exposed to the sex workers movement and the ground reality of sex workers organization in Kolkata. However they have to plan to raise funds to make their dream fulfilled.

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