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Durbar Bulletin -73

First Lok Sanskriti Sammelon (Folk Art Conference) of Manbhum Lok Samskriti and Nachni Unnayan Samity



To celebrate the successful completion of 10 years of the recognition of Nachni community as a folk artists, Manbhum Loksanskriti O Nachni Unnayan Samiti in collaboration with Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee organised a 3 days (1st April-3rd April 2017) long open ground fair 'Lokosanskriti mela 2017' at Surulia, near

Deer Park, Purulia. The fair got few essence of the almost extinct folk art of Purulia.

The year 2017 is a landmark in the history of Nachni community. They got their recognition as folk artists by the government of West Bengal by 2006 and completed 10 years of their journey. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee as part of their mission stands in support of the marginalised communities and help them to fight for their rights and recognition. "It is our time not only to cherish our success but also to plan and act for sustainable development with equal rights and dignity like any other artisan of our country" said Postobala Devi, the convener and Secretary of Manbhum Lokosanskriti Mela 2017 in her speech in the inauguration ceremony.

The inauguration program started by lighting of the lamp by eminent personalities named Mr. Sushil Majhi(District Karmadakshya), Mr. Nabendu Mahali(District Core Committee Member), Ms. Sunita Singha Mallya(Member of Zila Parishad), Samim Datkhan(Councillor), Anand Rajwar(Panchayat President), Dr. Smarajit Jana(Chief Advisor, Durbar)and Postobala Devi(Secretary, Manbhum Lokosanskriti o Nachni Unnayan Committee). Other members

who graced the occasion were member of Panchayat Samiti, Purulia, Joint Director Cooperative Society, a representative of Indienhilfe e.v Germany, representative of NGO members from Purulia and Kolkata, scholars, academicians, human rights activists and few well wishers and friends of Durbar and Manbhum Loksanskriti O Nachni Unnayan Samiti. The guests were graced by the children of folk artisan for whom special permission has been estated by DMSC to improve their health and nutrition of Senabona Day Care Centre. After the inaugural program the dais was taken over by Bimala Devi, a Nachni with her traditional folk song.



The stage was dedicated to the famous folk singer Late Kalika Prashad Bhattacharjee who demised on 7th March, 2017 in a road accident. He served Durbar in the early part of 90's and enriched Komal Gandhar (a cultural wing of Durbar) with his folk art. He was a staunch supporter of sex worker's rights movement.



Sabar Pita Gopi Ballav Singh Deo whose contribution cannot be over improvised in the development and improvement of the quality of life of tribal communities in the district of Purulia was felicitated in the program.

Mr. Sushil Majhi in his speech shared about the struggle of Nachni Community to get their rights and entitlements. He also added that how Durbar supported the folk artists community to achieve their success.

Ms. Bharati Dey (Mentor of Durbar) stated, "Community Collectivization is the main strength for the development of the marginalized Community".

In his speech Dr. Smarajit Jana said that we tried to put our endeavour only, the folk artists are the real soldiers. The entire credit goes to the artists who have succeeded in upholding their art form against all odds in a technologically advanced society.

Mr. Nabendu Mahali praised the effort of DMSC in expanding the horizons of folk artisans of Purulia and with the support of the government of West Bengal, now Nachnis are allowing lands and housing grants. This would help them to regain their rights and dignity. This also helped to negotiate new form of relationships with the rasiks based on equal rights and receptivity.

Mr. Nirmal Halder, a writer who is associated with the folk art appreciated the work of Durbar and expressed his willingness to support all kinds of effort to uplift the moral of folk art and the artisans.

Pushpa Mahato, a Tushu artisan stated, " We are not only taking our art form as a socio cultural identity of Manbhum but also wish to broaden up our traditional heritage of art form across the country with the support of Durbar".

“Though Purulia is the land of various folk arts, these cultural forms are slowly losing its patronage and gradually becoming endangered because artisans are getting impoverished and unable to maintain their livelihood and no space to protect their arts. In such a situation it is a very good initiative of Durbar to give them the opportunity to showcase their culture at their own soil,” expressed by an audience present in the fair.

To achieve such level of success the fair got support from many stakeholders including government representatives, civil society leaders and donors.

The closing ceremony of the conference of folk culture was enriched by the presence of



Honorable Minister of Paschimanchal Unnayan Parshad, West Bengal, **Mr. Shantiram Mahato**. In his speech he appreciated the initiative taken by Durbar for the reversal of the extinction of Nachni community. “The Chhou Art is nowadays internationally acclaimed and West Bengal Government is also promoting other folk art forms of Bangla. This platform is helping folk artisans to revive the culture and heritage of Purulia. Apart from Nachni community Durbar is also working with other marginalized community for their

existence and rights.” He assured the members of Manbhumi Lokosanskriti o Nachni Unnayan Samity to help them to expand their Purulia office by next four months. He also promised the community to provide the facilities of Gitanjali Scheme (which is a WB govt housing scheme for the economically weaker section.

Each days ends up with colourful cultural events participated by renowned cultural troupes and local artisans of Purulia.

The event ended with stunning performances of various folk dances like Chou, Jhumur, Natua, Tushu, Bhadu, Karam, Ghora Nach, Baul and Pata nach, Hari Sankirtan which were highly acclaimed by the audiences present there. The event attracted more than 5000 people including local collectives, bank officials, academicians, scholars and NGO members.



Another feather towards getting rights for the unorganized worker

Radha Dutta, a daughter of sex worker from Rambagan red light district was an employee of a private company engaged in making purses and bags. She was working there for more than 10 years. The office was run by a Manager who was strewed and used to take punitive measures against for the workers at her whims. Radha, who was suffering from a prolonged illness, took leave to carry out some medical tests for a day. Immediately after she joined in service the manager issued a termination letter with immediate effect. Radha was confused as well as helpless after losing her job and contacted local councillor with an appeal for reinstatement. But all her efforts were in vain. She contacted with Karmajibi Mahila Parisad—a council of women functioning primarily for the women of the unorganized shelter.

Representatives of Karmajibi Mahila Parisad visited the bag factory and tried to negotiate with the management regarding her reinstatement which bore no fruit.

To gain her rightful entitlements the worker with help and support from Karmajibi lodged a complaint to the Labour Department, Government of West Bengal. After completion of three tripartite hearing called by the Assistant labour Commissioner, the employee was forced to pay all her dues. Radha got 1 month salary of the notice period which was supposed to be served before termination, her gratuity as per the last salary drawn as per the Industrial Dispute Act and payment of Gratuity Act.

“I never knew about those provisions of the laws to ensure workers’ rights” commented Radha overwhelmed after the decision of the Labour Department. “I got a draft of Rs. 85000/- and will get another 65000/- very soon”.

“Indeed it was a great feeling” said Rama Debnath, convener of Karmajibi “we are going to address similar cases in future also”.

Commemorating Women’s Day

Das Theke Das Hazar (DTDH) - a forum of individuals and organization against sexual violence organized a workers convention on 27th of March at Lokayata Sabhagriha. Durbar and the allied organizations actively participated in the programme as a founder member of DTDH. 23 Workers representatives from various occupations including rag pickers, domestic workers, agricultural workers, cook of mid-day meal program, trained dais, fisherwomen, NREGA workers, tea garden workers, women drivers actively participated and raised their voice during the discussion session.

“We face tremendous pressures from the local political parties as well as from the teaching staff and often being blamed as thief” said Namita Gayena, the cook of a mid day meal program. Bubby and young Pinky the women driver shared that she faces tremendous taunting and teasing from others as women workers. On behalf of MGNREGA worker Astabala Maity commented that despite of the provisions of crèche, toilets under the NREGA scheme the women workers do not enjoy those basic facilities. “Women workers are forced to go far away from their home to attend duties, even our monthly payment are delayed.” Astabala demanded for 365 days work for a family so that they can survive with dignity. Baby Naskar, a domestic worker from Dumdum sang a song to express their daily agony and pain at the workplace. Other domestic workers also shared irregularities in payment, discriminatory practices and absence of paid leave and maternity leave etc. The rag picker representative put emphasis on their homelessness. She also shared about their occupational diseases including skin disease, respiratory trouble and demanded for safety equipment. Susmita from Sappho shared about the negative attitude of the societal members towards sexual minorities which adversely affect their job and livelihood opportunities.

In the panel discussion on the impact of Globalization on the women workers, Sonali Biswas from All India Bank Employees association throw light on the conditions of the organized women workers. “There are certain rights what we enjoy but there are certain lacunae in the provision of entitlement among the organized workers” she commented. Professor Samita Sen, Director, School of Women Studies analysed the sectorial differences of the unorganized women workers”. While the tea plantation workers in Kerela have been refused to get trade union rights, the domestic workers in West Bengal who shared the same fate. The trade unions in India were essentially affiliated to political parties. But due to the process of globalization women employment are losing opportunities. Archana Ghatak

from All India Progressive Women Association also shared their ground level experiences. Sarbani Bhattacharyya from AITUS shared the risk of unsafe migration leading to trafficking as well as various exploitative practices which are rampant in the work place.

Uniform Civil Code and Triple talaq- a discussion

Triple Talaq and Uniform Civil Code is the latest discourse in the women's movement of India. The law commission of India has tried to capture the opinion of people through implementing a study using a short close ended questionnaire and the Muslim Personal law Board has filled up more than 3lakh questionnaire to stop Uniform Civil Code for the Muslims, advocating for the Triple talaq.

To understand the feminist perspective on the issue, Maitree-the women network of West Bengal organized a discussion on 28th March at Sahid Surya Sen Bhavan. In her opening statement the moderator Ruchira Goswami shared about the definition of Secularism adopted by the Constitution of India which is different from the European idea of secularism. She commented that in a democratic country like India, it is important to understand the constitutional provisions for the minorities which is enshrined in the Articles 25-30. She mentioned about the history of Uniform Civil Code discourse which was started in the 80s and mentioned the Shah Banu case in this regard.

Zakia from Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolon which is present in 9 states of India, pointed out the very culture of the Muslim leadership which has always been patriarchal. She said the present Civil law which guide the day to day practices of the muslim women including Divorces, Custody of Children, Maintenance, Property rights is based on the patriarchal Shariyat Law. She shared the principles of Quaraan which is based on Gender Justice (justice, equality, compassion, kindness and wisdom) and which has been ignored by the Shariat law.

Hasina from Bebaak Collective shared her ground level experience from Mumbai. She shared that media can play a very dirty role in hate politics and can actually disturb the history of coexistence. She shared that the movement should accommodate other identities including sexual minorities among muslims which it failed to address.

Khadija shared her grass root level experience from working with the Muslim girls in Murshidabad. She also explained about the principles of Quaraan and explained the Triple talaq process mentioned there which require three menstrual cycle. She criticised the Shariat Law for legalizing Child marriage. She strongly advocated for Universal Civil Code. She also mentioned about the Meher which could be binding in the agreement of marriage. Rahima shared her experience by being tagged as BJP agent while she advocated against Triple talaq. The discussion was ended with a note that instead of a Uniform Civil Code which do not accommodate diversity the speakers advocated for a Common family Code to address civil matters related to women.

Trafficking –a view from sex workers perspective

Regional Labour Office, Ranaghat organized capacity Building Programme for the unorganized women workers on 26th of March 2017 at Ranaghat Municipality. The said workshop is an initiative by the labour Department, Government of West Bengal to sensitize unorganized women workers about various legal and social provisions endorsed by the State. More than 100 women workers attended the programme.

Mr. ParthaSarathi Chatterjee, Chairman Ranaghat Municipality, shared various welfare schemes of the Government. The Director of Employment Shri Kuntal Chakraborty shared the important role of employment exchanges. He also shared about the skill building programme by the department. “Despite there are legal provisions to prevent sexual violence on women at workplace, such incidences are underreported” said Sejuti Sengupta, Advocate Calcutta High Court. As per the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act 2013, women workers employed in unorganized sector or where there is no internal Complaint Committee can lodge a complaint at Local Complaints Committee at district level.

Migration is a common phenomenon in present scenario but generally it is controlled by various mediators and agents making it unsafe for the workers. Trafficking is one of the consequences of unsafe migration. Rama Debnath from Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee who has depth of knowledge and experience regarding human trafficking as Durbar through its Self-Regulatory Board presently operating in 33 red light districts across West Bengal addresses trafficking and entry of child into the sex trade. Rama shared about the importance of community based safety net followed and utilised by Durbar in preventing trafficking. “Trafficking is the end results of several related socio-economic phenomenon from poverty to lack of information and access to various entitlements.” She concluded.

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