

15<sup>th</sup> June 2017



# Durbar Bulletin -75

## A promise to break the shame



Although menstrual hygiene is an issue that every girl has to deal with in their lives, there is lack of information and no explanation regarding the science of menstruation. In general menstruation is a taboo with stigma sense of impurity and shame. Because of the shame and superstitions belief centring this natural phenomena women became the victim. As a result the issue is hardly discussed in the family and not in any social institution. Since

2013, to break this taboo a day has been chosen (28<sup>th</sup> May) as Menstrual hygiene day all areas the Globe. Amra Padatik (the organisation of the children of sex workers) in association with Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) has been celebrating this International Menstrual Hygiene Day at Sonagachi red light district in successive years. This year also DMSC arranged a program in the heart of Sonagachi which was participated by sex workers and neighbouring communities. Representatives from Doctors, educationist and other deliver lectures to sensitize sex workers living in the red light district as well as people living in the vicinity of red light district regarding menstruation and how to maintain menstrual hygiene.

Speakers spoke about the necessity to recognize that menstruation is a natural event what should not be mixed up with impurity of women. Dr. A.K. Singh discussed about physiology of Menstruation. He explained how one can be infected with illnesses due to unhygienic menstrual practices.

Ms. Taposhi Koila, Director of Health, Durbar gave an insight on how to maintain proper hygiene during menstruation.

Former teacher Mr. Bangshi Badan Chattopadhaya discussed about the social taboos associated with menstruation and menstrual waste disposal.

Ms. Putul Halder, President, Durbar in her speech said that the reason behind the lack of knowledge of such an important issue like menstruation is the attitude of many individuals who are 'Least bothered to know about the issue', so the education on menstrual hygiene should be included in school and college level curriculum.

The program with the leadership of DMSC advocated the importance of sanitary napkin usage as well as took an attempt to break all kinds of myths varied associated with menstruation. Followed by sanitary napkin was distributed with subsidised rate price.

### **A tribute to twin bards**



On 11<sup>th</sup> June 2017, Durbar organised a different kind of program in Coochbehar red light district situated in the north of West Bengal, around 800 kilometers from Kolkata for the 1<sup>st</sup> time to pay homage to two great poets and literary masterminds of Bengal. Cultural troupe performed songs and music as part of the program to pay tribute to Rabindra Nath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam, the legendary

literary visionaries.

In the evening, the sex workers forgetting their busy professional schedule joined the program. After hearing the sound of music no one in the area stayed back in their house but assembled in the venue and spend hours till the program completed. The children of sex workers presented colourful performance, they sang songs recited poems composed by Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Dance-items, based on Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul geeti were also presented by the children of sex workers. The children and their mother enjoyed the program. The program was graced by the presence of Mr. Partho Protim Roy, Member of Parliament. In his inaugural address, he appreciated Durbar and lauded the participants for presenting such a beautiful program. "It is a delight to see these children perform," he said. He also expressed his hope that this kind of programs should be organised more and more in the years to come.



### **Right to Food and Work campaign- submitted a deputation**

On 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017, members of the Right to Food and Work Campaign-West Bengal submitted a deputation to the head of Food and Supplies Department. The participants came from the Himalayan foothills of North Bengal, the islands of Sunderbans, the burning red laterite zone of western West Bengal, the areas bordering the Bangladesh and the green plains surrounding the Hooghly river. Amongst the participating organisations, who are the

members of the Campaign, were Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity, Shramajeevi Mahila Samity, Udayani Social Action Forum' self-help group members, TUCC, Swayam's Nari Suraksha committees, Durbar Disha Mahila Griha Sramik Samanwaya Committee (DDMGSSC), Durbar Mahila Samanvay Committee (DMSC), BMCDM etc. Around 300 members from DMSC and DDMGSSC participated in the campaign.

Those who took part in the processions belongs to sex workers, mid-day meal workers, agricultural workers, van rickshaw pullers, members of self-help groups, domestic workers, tea garden workers among others.

This huge gathering consisting of over 5000 people from 17 districts of the State of West Bengal representing their various organisation and a rally held a sit in demonstration in front of the 'Khadya Bhavan' (Food Building). Throughout the rallies their main slogan was **“Work in every hand and Food in every plate”**, interspersed with songs and dances.

Finally representatives from among the participants' formed a team of delegation who met with the Secretary of the respective Ministry. The Secretary and the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Food and Supplies assured the participants us that necessary measures would be taken by the Department so that the management of tea garden does not get space to exploit tea garden workers by replacing its food grains component of wages –in-kind as per the Tea Plantation Act with the subsidized provided by the Court.

The Department was already considering the Campaign's demands to give wheat instead of bad quality atta (wheat flour).

The delegation was assured that Vigilance and Monitoring Committees would be formed and made functional soon and representation from Campaign Committee would also be ensured. The officials said that allotment copies of the amount of food grains transferred to each ration dealer would be provided to the members of the campaign Committee. Regarding all other issues raised by the campaign committee which includes universalization of the rationing system, formation of the Food Commission, bringing of all food schemes under Food Security Rules and to ensure all ration card holders to procure 14kgs of food grains, 1.5 kg pulses, 800 ml edible oil and 1 litre kerosene oil at subsidized prices were forward to their superiors,as it relates to policy issue.

While the Department felt that the PoS machine could be used to stop corruption, they agreed to look at the Campaign's experience in other states and to see that PoS machines and absence of Aadhar cards do not make it a means of exclusion.

The delegation was assured that food grains meant for due to beneficiaries saved due to various reasons in previous quarter would be immediately disbursed to the beneficiaries.

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