

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON

# VICTIMS OF CRIME & VICTIM ASSISTANCE

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BEST PRACTICES AROUND THE WORLD

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B L O O M S B U R Y

# Victim Assistance Programs in India

## *Governmental and Non-Governmental Initiatives*

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### 1. Introduction

India has travelled a long way from the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1993) to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG, 2000) and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG, 2012). Although women's rights are as important as any, they are still denied equality and the proper access to justice. Even though many countries are trying their best to adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforce strict laws, crime against women is still rising.

Violence against women takes many forms, such as female foeticide, female infanticide, deprivation, child marriage, rape, sexual assault, outraging modesty, trafficking, acid attacks, honour killings, and domestic violence, with domestic violence reported as the most common form worldwide. Violence against women is defined by the United Nations as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" ("Violence against Women", 2017).

Routine activity approach by Cohen & Felson (1979) suggest that for occurrence of crime three main causal factors are motivated offender, suitable target and absence of capable guardian. The response should also



be three pronged approach, factors like ending impunity, certainty of punishment, accountability can reduce motivated offender; factors like reducing vulnerability, target hardening can reduce suitable target; bystander apathy, vigilant society, active government and citizens, to react to injustice, etc., can reduce absence of capable guardian which in turn will reduce the causation crime against vulnerable group.

Justice Verma Committee recommended administrative reforms for governance failure and bringing in amendments in the penal law for the existing loopholes in the law so that with these changes in attitude can lay out quicker trail and enhance punishment for criminals who are accused for committing crime against women (Justice Verma Committee, 2013).

The UN Declaration on Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime & Abuse of Power 1985, as mentioned it is exclusively related for victims. This declaration includes victim's access to justice, compensation, restitution and the proper assistance to victim. This declaration is basically a Magna Carta for the victim, advocating victim's rights.

Access to justice has been a problem for women in India. In a country with 48.5% women population, it is highly essential that they get access to justice for healthy growth of the society and nation. Access to justice is a basic principle of the rule of law. It is more than just providing access to legal services; victims also have the right to be treated with respect, dignity and also have the right to be informed about their rights. Gender justice, social justice, economic justice and Criminal justice system are encompassed in access to justice for improving the quality of access to the victims. Various points in the continuum to access to justice include awareness, protection, prevention, redressal and justice for the victim.

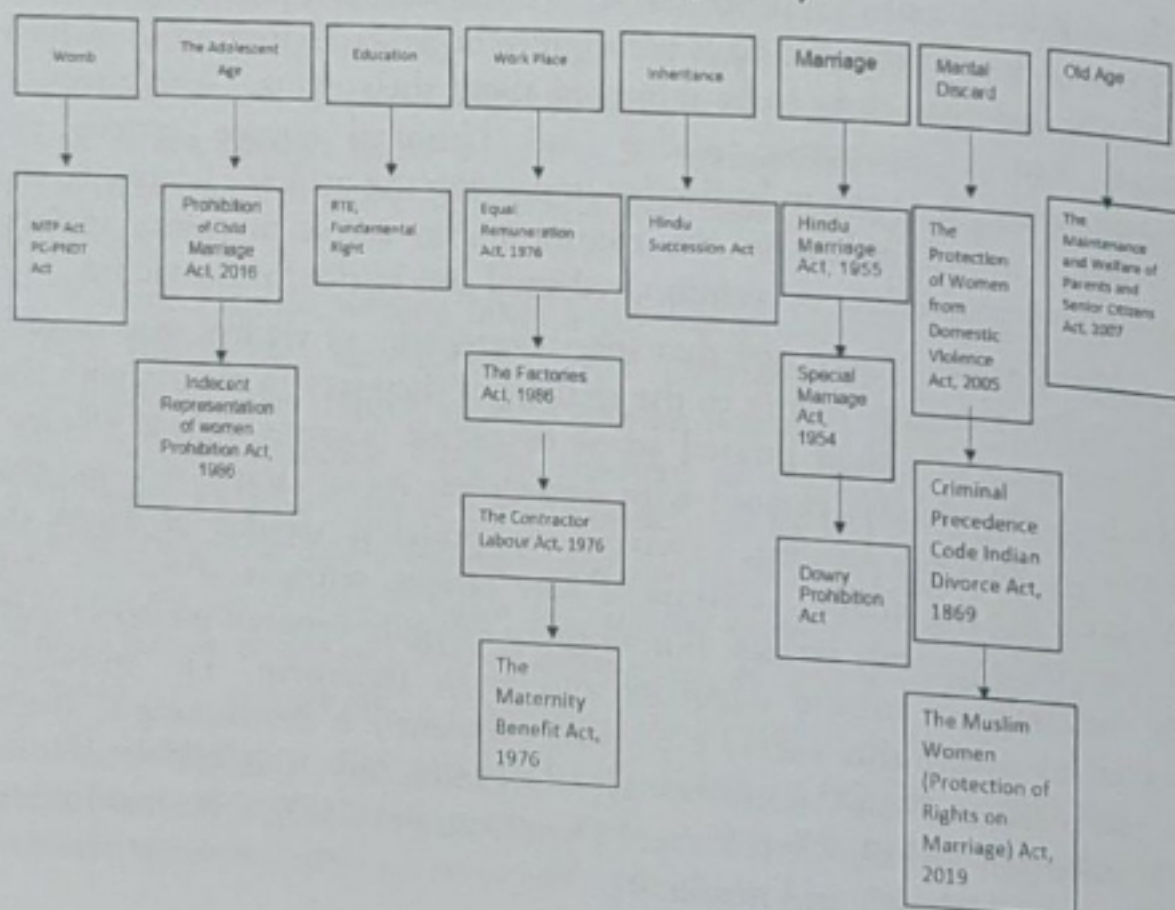
Many states have noted that special categories of victims may require particular attention, owing to the challenges they face in coping with the victimization and their limited access to justice. Victims include women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, sexual assault victims, and domestic violence victims, survivors of homicide, victims of drunk or drugged driving crashes, victims of hate crimes, refugees as victims and victims of large-scale crimes. For all these categories special measures may be necessary to ensure adequate and equal treatment. The workable model to ensure this measure to work efficiently is networking through academicians, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)/Non-Profit Organization (NPO)/Civil Society Organization (CSO), Criminal Justice System professionals and media.

The infamous Nirbhaya case in 2012 was an eye opener for the government, civil societies and the citizens to address the challenges lay a roadmap for the future to ensure access to justice. Rights of Women have been protected with several laws in India. The importance of the protection has been extended by new and changed laws on protection of women's rights. Along with rights, women's safety is also a prime concern and this article discusses related Laws and Legislation; Nation-wide initiative for safety of women; Institutional framework; Public private partnership innovations: Police Initiatives; Initiatives by (NGO)/(NPO)/(CSO) and Initiatives by Academia. These initiatives help women, children, transgender and senior citizen in many ways and improve their quality of life.

## 2. Laws and Legislations

There is a *common saying in India....* Gods reside in places where a woman is worshiped. But it's hard to believe this statement in the present scenario, although many reasons are attributed to the deterioration of the

### Womb to Tomb.....Journey





status of women. The world has witnessed a significant change and attitudinal move in both women's and society's notions about women's equality and emancipation in the recent years. However, there is always scope of new improvements and all countries are trying their best to adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the access to justice. Here is a short synopsis of Indian legislations which play a very important role in women's life right from her birth until her death i.e., from womb to tomb.

### 3. International and National Commitment

India has sanctioned several international conventions and human rights to assure equal rights of women. An important one is Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. But in Present era, Sustainable Development Goals plays a key role in Gender Justice. The key components related are:

- *SDG-5* which talks about Gender equality as a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.
- *SDG-16* focuses on providing access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions ("Sustainable Development Goals", 2012).

The Constitution of India lays down exhaustive guidelines to make gender equality a reality in India. The Preamble of Indian Constitution embarks on the Social and Economic Justice (*Constitution of India*, 1950). *Article 14* of constitution of India ensures equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. Various laws and acts in India, which ensure protection and helps enforcement of legal rights to women was introduced because of this provision:

- *Article 15* ensures that no one should create any sort of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth within the territory of India.
- *Article 16* ensures equal employment opportunity to every citizen of India.

But there existed a constitutional discrimination against women in one of the state in India. An article in constitution which was actually violating all these international conventions for the last seven decades and

that was *Article 35-A* which is just recently abrogated in 2019. This Article was incorporated in the constitution of India by the then Government in the year 1952, a big blunder against the women of J&K. Article 35A allowed the Jammu and Kashmir assembly to define who permanent residents were, and once women from the state married outside, they lost their rights to hold immovable property, to work in permanent positions in the state, the right to scholarships and such other forms of aid as the state government provides. With the scrapping of the controversial Article-35-A by the Government of India in 2019, the women of J&K are no longer deprived of their property rights in J&K if they get married to a non-resident.

The Indian Penal Code is the main criminal code of India. Crimes against women which includes, kidnapping, rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, honour killing, dowry deaths, women trafficking, assault to outrage women modesty, acid attacks, gender harassment, defamation, etc., all are dealt in various sections under this Act (*Indian Penal Code*, 1860). Anyone found guilty of such crimes is punishable under the IPC. IPC also contains sections against wrongful restraint (S 339), criminal intimidation (S 506), confinement (S 348), obscenity (S 292–294), and cruelty by husband/relative of husband (S 498 A).

The Criminal Law amendment act 2013 has made many amendments after Nirbhaya case. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act also known as (Nirbhaya Act) is an Indian legislation which provides for amendment of Indian Penal Code, Indian Evidence Act, and Code of Criminal Procedure, on laws related to sexual offences.

*The Information Technology Act, 2000* punishes the online transmission or publication of sexually explicit acts. *The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961* was enacted to prevent the occurrence of dowry in Indian society. *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005* was enacted to protect the women from acts of domestic violence which includes other forms of violence such as emotional, mental, sexual and financial violence.

The Supreme Court's proactive role lays down the foundation for the amendment in the existing laws or makes new legislations. In 1997, while passing an order on work place sexual harassment case, the court for the first time drew upon an international instrument – CEDAW, to pass a set of guidelines that are popularly known as *Vishaka Guidelines*, which makes it mandatory for organisations to establish a mechanism for redressal of



sexual harassment complaints. Later The Vishaka guidelines have laid the foundation for *the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013*.

Another big step was taken for gender justice recently in 2017. The Indian Supreme Court declared instant triple talaq unconstitutional. Triple talaq, as it is known, allows a husband to divorce his wife by repeating the word "talaq" (divorce) three times in any form, including email or text message. Now, Under the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, divorcing through instant triple talaq will be illegal, void and could attract an imprisonment of three years for the husband."

#### 4. Nationwide Initiatives

Safety of women can be ensured by strengthening safety measures, speedy and effective justice system, providing safer environment for women, and also by helping the victims in rehabilitation and changing the attitude of society. It is imperative for schemes, projects, laws and institutions to address the issue of access to justice for women in a manner to involve them in all steps of implementation. Starting from policy formulation to execution at all levels, women must be stake holders and involved so as to ensure that they constitute the agency for empowerment.

Initiatives taken by Government of India to ensure a better tomorrow for women include *National Commission for Women* which was established in 31 January 1992 under the provisions of the Indian Constitution, whose general concern on all policy matters affecting women ("*National Commission for Women*", 1992).

*National Mission for Women Empowerment* was introduced to give a credible response to emerging situation of crimes against women, especially minor girls; to focus on time bound implementation of measures with tangible impact on women safety; to ensure School Education, Health, Diet, Legal Affairs, Information & Broadcasting and to improve time bound prosecution and investigation in cases of rape and other matters related to women ("*National Mission for Women Empowerment*", 2010).

*National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development* is an autonomous organization under the aegis of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. They promote voluntary

action, research training and documentation in the overall domain of women and child development ("National Institute of Public Cooperation And Child Development", 1966).

*Nirbhaya Fund* was an initiative which was announced by the Finance Minister in his 2013 budget speech, with Government contribution of Rs. 1000 crores for empowerment, safety and security of women and girl children. Ministry of Women & Child Development is the nodal agency for the recommendation of the project to be funded.

*Central Victim Compensation Fund* was an initiative by Ministry of Home Affairs (2015, August 21<sup>st</sup>) which has been funded under the Framework of Nirbhaya Fund to support States/Union Territories for their Victim Compensation Scheme (Rs. 200.00 C). According to section 357A of CrPC, the government shall prepare a scheme for providing funds for the purpose of compensation. If the victims are less than 14 years of age, the compensation shall be increased by 50% over the amount specified above.

*Ministry of Women and child development* is the nodal agency for women empowerment programmes. Some of the schemes introduced by this ministry include:

- *One Stop Center* (2015) was set up to support women who are affected by violence, and offer emergency services, rescue services, shelter, legal, medical, psychological and financial help under the Juvenile Justice and the POCSO Acts. These one stop centers were set in all the 718 districts of the country.
- *Fast track courts* were first established by the recommendation of the Eleventh Finance Commission (2000) to exclusively for disposal of rape cases and cases under POCSO Act, 2012 and strengthen deterrence framework of sexual offenders. There are around 1023 fast track special courts.
- *The Grievance Redressal Cell* deals with grievances related to women and children. Complaints can be registered online.
- *Sexual Harassment electronic-Box* (2013) was introduced to provide access to women for registering complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace online complaint management system, regardless of her workplace.
- *Universalization of Women Helpline* (2016) is a 24 hours emergency and non-emergency response to women affected by violence, are open



and when contacted are linked with appropriate authority and help is provided.

- *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* is a national initiative jointly run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Education (2015, January 22<sup>nd</sup>). This is a flagship programme which focuses on change of mindset of people towards girl child through education, training, community mobilization, awareness and advocacy campaigning.
- *Scheme for Adolescent Girls* (2010) was implemented to improve the nutritional and health status of adolescent girls of age 11–14 years and also motivates out of school girls to go back to formal schooling to upgrade their skill training.
- *Swardhar Greh* (2015) is homes for Widows to provide safe and secure place of stay, health services and nutritious food, legal and counseling services.
- *Poshan Abhiyaan* is a scheme for Holistic Nourishment in 2018 Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan. This aims to reduce mal-nutrition among the girl child in a phased manner, through the life cycle.
- *Pradhan Mantri Vandana Yojana* (2010) is a Pan-India implementation of Maternity Benefit Programme to eligible pregnant women and lactating mothers. The Scheme providing incentives directly to the Bank/Post Office Account.
- *Mahila E-Haat* (2016) is a unique direct online e-marketing platform to support Women entrepreneurs, who can showcase their products and services. This has a huge impact on women entrepreneurs.
- *Rashtriya Mahila Kosh* (1993) focuses to meet the financial needs of poor and support them with a livelihood or income generating activities.
- *Gender Budgeting* (2004) was initiated in India with a goal to focus upon women to achieve time bound targeted results. The government of Odisha was the first state to practice gender budgeting.

Some of the schemes introduced by other ministries which help women and children include *Safe City project* (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2018) that focuses on providing women with empowering environment. First phase of this project was implemented under the Nirbhaya Fund and *Cyber Crime Reporting Portal* This was launched by Ministry of

Home Affair (2019, August 30<sup>th</sup>) to address the growing menace of cyber-crimes, especially against women & children and for them to report crime online. Complaints can be registered in this portal which will be dealt by police or law enforcement agency.

## 5. Institutional Frameworks

Not just central government, initiatives such as schemes, has been taken by state government and civil society organization as well to actively work for betterment of women and children. Some of the initiatives with focus on Odisha and Delhi government include.

## 6. Schemes

- *Mahila Sisu Desks* in each police station is supposed to help the victim's easy access and a friendly environment where they feel at home. There are around 537 Mahila Sisu Desks ("Mahila & Sishu Desk. | Odisha Police", 2013).
- *Maadhyam* (2014) is a Women's Support Centre established to give handholding support and consultation to women in distress by providing them with shelter, counselling and legal aid ("Maadhyam Women Support Center – Institute for Social Development", 2014).
- *Mission Shakti* (2001) Financial and training support on capacity building and skill development are provided under Mission Shakti to make these women financially independent and to stand up for their rights. Mission Shakti is the nodal agency for women empowerment through Self-help group (SHG) formation ("Mission Shakti", 2001).
- *ANWESHA* (2015) free education for tribal girls through "Anwasha" scheme has been a drive towards empowerment of SC/ST girls and ensuring women as agency of intervention. Under the scheme 50,000 tribal students are targeted to be educated in the first phase in public school format.
- *Sadhana Foundation* (2013) has organised a lot of leadership training camps for youths, gender sensitisation programmes and has been a partner with other women organisations in the state to raise the issues concerning violence against women ("Sadhana Foundation – Saathi Re", 2013).



## 7. Political Empowerment

*The women reservation act in Odisha has ensured reservation of 50% seats in the three tier Panchayati raj system and has produced a lot of women leaders at the grass root level. Women have started to come out and assert themselves. It is remarkable to note that out of 21 members of Lok Sabha from Odisha 7 are women i.e. 33% representation against the national 11% seat sharing.*

*The 33% reservation in jobs also helped women come out on their own. The economic independence has given a voice to the working women and it is very often seen that they are more forth coming to express themselves against any kind of exploitation than the dependent women.*

### *Innovations with technology and quick response:*

- The state government in Delhi for the first time has installed more than 3 lakhs *CCTV cameras* in the state to ensure that the roads are safe for women. They have also installed CCTVs in class rooms to ensure that the children are safe at school and they are properly taught. By announcing free ride for women in all buses they have tried to provide safe transportation for women. Again, all buses are laced with panic button and CCTV cameras along with Bus Marshalls who are trained officials to protect the women from any harassment. They also have mapped all dark spots in the state and have planned for two lakhs street lights to ward off any dark spot in the city guaranteeing the safety of women.
- *Women helpline 181 and children help line 1098* are working 24 hours throughout the state to receive calls from people in distress and provide immediate assistance from the police.
- *Special Unit for Women and Children (SPUWAC, 2017)* is a special body of police, which aims to safeguard the rights of women and children and provides counseling, mediation and self-defense.
- *Special Unit for North-East Region (SPUNER, 2014)*: The Special Police Unit for North-Eastern Region team works in helping and providing safety and security to children and they work round the clock.
- *Parivartan* came into being in 2005 and its mandate was to check the rising incidence of rape and sexual assault against women in the city. It was launched in northwest Delhi and essentially operates at two

levels: first changing the mind-set of the community towards Violence against Women and second changing the attitude of the police force itself. Police personnel were given gender sensitivity training to improve their understanding about Violence against Women and women's safety.

- *Mo Sathi* (2015): In Odisha the state government has started a mobile application "Mo Sathi" in the twin city of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar for the women in distress. One has to download the application in their mobile and press the power button if you face any threat from any source. It will immediately send an alert to the police control room through GPS technology, and their parents and three friends whose numbers are registered with police will also be alerted.

These initiatives not only help women who are already victimized overcome it but also help women from any kind of victimization with technological advancement and innovative initiatives.

## **8. Public Private Partnership Innovations**

Public private partnership (PPP) approach created large number of success stories in various sectors of economy including agriculture, health, science and technology, education, and infrastructure development in India. The focus here is to bring forth some of the best practises for safety and protection of women and children in India with collaborations and partnerships between various stakeholders such as NGO/NPOs, corporate, government, community etc.

## **9. NGO – Corporate – Government Based Work**

*Vasavya Mahila Mandali (VMM)* is an established non-government organisation (NGO) in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, India. This organisation has developed and in collaboration with the police force, runs a programme called *Mahila Mitra* (woman's friend) in the city of Vijayawada from 2017 and expanded and embedded into the system in the entire state of Andhra Pradesh in 2019. The Mahila Mitra concept is a social movement aimed at empowering women. The programme has a triangulated partnership between: VMM – HCL Foundation – Department of Police, Government of Andhra Pradesh ("Mahila Mitra", 2017). They are trained to identify domestic violence in the community,



assist sufferers of domestic violence in filing complaints, counsel sufferers and perpetrators of domestic violence, and sensitise the public on gender equity.

SHE Teams stands for *Safety, Health and Environment*, a division of Telangana Police. The division was started on 24 October 2014 for fighting crime against women and children. The unit operates 24/7 and is monitored by the teams, conducting decoy operations, SHE Shuttles, counselling and guidance sessions are proving to be effective in curbing the crime rate. They now operate online too.

*Meghalaya Model – combating* is operating comprehensive framework model that has been working on child trafficking since 1999 by reaching to women, girls and youth, sets out a framework to combat human trafficking. The aim is to track and rescue trafficked girl children, facilitate rehabilitation, provide families with livelihood alternatives, prosecute offenders, and raise awareness on the issue (*"Meghalaya Model – combating human trafficking through a comprehensive framework that engages stakeholders"*, 1999). They focus on five "Ps": Prevention, Protection, Policing, Press and Prosecution.

*MahilaBol* has changed the way women feel about Sexual Harassment at their Workplace. As a step forward to previous year, in December 2017 MahilaBol started in India in Partnership with Government of India and United Nations. Thousands of women have spoken from across the country, from the rural most districts to the most developed districts. Together the women of India have made this change and started a revolution called MahilaBol. The movement is highlighting the fact with data and proposed solutions so women can see a change in their everyday work life and being treated with respect and dignity (*"MahilaBol – making the voice of women heard"*, 2017).

## 10. Safety of Women in Tech Era

Technological advancement has an important role to play when it comes to providing innovative solution such as apps, wearable devices, and GPS trackers, etc. address a range of women's safety issues. Some of the common app that are helpful include:

1. Letstrack
2. Safe

3. Safetipin
4. Safelet
5. Eyewatch SOS for women

### 10.1 *Disha SOS*

To address crime against women and help women in distress, Disha mobile application was introduced in Andhra Pradesh. An SOS along with video and audio recording of the women in trouble can be sent directly to the nearest police patrolling vehicles with the help of this app ("Andhra Pradesh: Disha app launched to help women in distress – ET Government", 2019).

## 11. Police Initiatives

Female police officers have changed the way of crime against women being reported. Women were seen comfortable sharing and reporting violence happening against them. Even with awareness women finds it challenging to come out and talk in presence of male persons in cases particularly relating to sexual violence and abuse inhibits the victim to express herself openly and freely. With all women police station, women feel little less uncomfortable and hence can report the violence without intimidation ("All-women police stations come under law & order DCs", 2020).

## 12. Journey of AWPS

The first All women Police Station was inaugurated in Kerala, India followed by Tamil Nadu in the year 1973. The next All women Police Station was opened in Sao Paulo, Brazil. A total of 479 All Women Police Station is there in India. With the starting of All Women Police Station, there has been 22% hike in reporting cases of violence against women. After the Nirbhaya Incident in 2012 contacts of all the states/districts all women Police stations personnel are displayed.

### 12.1 *AWPS Scale Up*

In 1975, an All Women Police station in Tamil Nadu on a single day received 3000 complaints from women which shows how crimes goes unreported because of fearing the stereotype and certain level of discomfort in explaining the ordeal she went through in front of opposite sex.



Around 25 All Women Police Station scaled up. By 1993 there were around 196 All Women Police Station. Grave offences were the type of crime that was reported often. An initiative taken by Tamil Nadu Police to help women and elderly people who feel threatened or vulnerable was launching an SOS mobile application called *Kavalan app* in June, 2018 which is available 24/7. During emergency all they have to do is open the app, within 5 second, live location of that person will be shared with police along with live video feed ("Kavalan Application", 2018).

### 12.2 Functions of the AWPS in India

Deal with family violence and dowry disputes

- Frisk and Escort women detainees
- Provide immediate relief to women in distress
- Rescue girls and missing children
- Assist policemen in the raids to curb immoral trafficking
- Public order duties at large congregations of women
- Investigate crime cases against women under Indian Penal Code & other laws
- Provide 24x7 women helpline and child helpline services.

## 13. Women in Police Force

In India there is 33% reservation for women in police recruitment. A positive association has been shown between presence of women police officers and crime reporting by women. Hence the women in police workforce have increased to 16% in 2020 up from 8% in 2019. There are number of police training colleges to train with women friendly initiatives included.

## 14. Initiatives by NGO/NOP/COP

NGO-Government have initiated innovative programme for providing victim assistance. Health, education, mass movement for short term/long term goals, family welfare, income generation for self-reliance have been the most common starting point. Initiatives for children/senior citizen mostly seem to be welfare measure. Main focus is given here for women, transgender, children and senior citizens although support programmes

are seen to be of assistance to women and transgender and initiatives for children/senior citizens mostly seem to be welfare measures.

### 14.1 Women

- *Prarthana Samaj*: The Prarthana Samaj is one of the prominent reform movements in western India which was started in 1867 by Dr. Atmaram Pandurang, Mahadev Govind Ranade and Ramakrishna Bhandarkar, which worked against the caste system and the practice of untouchability. They also focused on improving the status of women and advocated widow remarriage. The samaj sponsored education for women ("Prarthana Samaj | Hindu reform society", 1867).
- *Maharshi Karve Stree Shikshan Sanstha*, Pune, established by Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve, today offers education to women from Nursery to Higher Education/Vocational training. The primary issue addressed at the inception of the organization was exploitation of widows/child widows/child marriage related exploitation ("MKSSS – Maharshi Karve Stree Shikshan Samstha (MKSSS), Pune", 1896).
- *SEWA – The Self-employed Women's Association* – Gujarat – focussing on Gender related injustice, unfair treatment to artisans, launched a cooperative movement with women labourers and artisans in Gujarat for social justice, equality and fair treatment. SEWA is now working in 26 cities all over India. It is a path breaking programme that gave courage to women to stand up for their rights helping each other ("Self Employed Women's Association", 1972).
- *CORHP* – A rural hospital based organization, in drought prone backward area of Maharashtra, worked on drought related poverty, social discrimination and exploitation of women related to gender hierarchy, alcoholism, domestic violence, health issues. The women managed to first stand up against their exploitation and bring justice to entire communities at various levels besides making victims of social injustice self-reliant through micro enterprises, unified action, mentoring and other support programmes.
- *Women and Land Ownership (WGWLO)* – Movement for land ownership rights for women with a network of 23 NGOs in Gujarat was successful in curtailing victimization of women ("Working Group for Women and Land Ownership", 2002).



- *AMUL-ya, Gujarat* – Now a huge giant and responsible for white revolution in India – started out as a cooperative movement that largely relied on small farmers and women's cooperatives. It has been successful in empowering women against oppressions.
- *SHG (Self Help Groups)* – This movement is one of the most successful endeavours in recent times that has helped woman become financially independent by using local women's skills as base for cooperative income generation through micro financing, training, mentoring and marketing support thereby gaining confidence for self-reliance. This is promoted by state and local governments with involvement of banks and NGOs, with a unique feature of groups lead by local, often semi educated women. With discovery of power of unity these groups are now a movement for victim support.
- *Support group – "Abhaya" for single women*: Initiated by Pune based NGO Vanchit Vikas, as a support group and a platform for exchange, sharing, counselling, legal support basically for single – never married, widows, divorcees, abandoned women has become a saviour also of a large number of women from apparently normal family situations facing degradation, absence of voice, exploitation, domestic violence, sexual harassment. The support group became a platform to voice unrecognized injustice, learn about rights, and gain strength and confidence to stand up against this injustice as individuals and group ("Abhaya – Support group of the single women. – Vanchit Vikas", 2014).
- *Support Initiatives for Armed forces Widows*: Indian armed forces take utmost care of armed forces widows as well as dependents of their personnel. A Pension Cell was opened in Pune, led by an officer of high rank who would reach out to the remotest village to ensure that the widow got her dues. Air force, Navy, Army each additionally have association offices to assist in the matter and provide counselling. Guidance and counselling are provided to counter the injustice and victimization.
- *Women's Movement – Goa*: A successful movement was launched by the women of Goa to combat the negative impact of tourism promotion measures in the state- that lead to objectification/ exploitation of women and children as also drug mafia, casinos taking over sea shores, ecology being adversely affected rendering sex workers

homeless with attempts to grab their property and attacks on their human rights and dignity, trafficking of women and children ("Women's movement-Goa", 2021). This is an on-going movement effective in its goals and a pressure group to reckon with.

## 15. Transgender

Inhuman living conditions, social discrimination, sexual exploitation, degradation, trafficking of young boys and exploitation to continue the legacy, were issues that needed to be addressed. Counselling for acceptance, and sensitization programmes were taken up by several local NGOs. Peer leaders were identified and educated along with creation of support groups. SHGs were created, and vocational training schemes and mentoring facilities were provided. These efforts have helped to wean away the transgender from begging, forced trapping and brutal conversion of young vulnerable boys and lead to self-reliance and dignified living with united action to stand up against any kind of injustice. Efforts by NGOs in changing community outlook and better acceptance of LTBTQ community have also helped.

## 16. Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs)

Living in squalor and exploitation, NGOs and local government have been organizing sensitization programmes and also providing legal, health assistance and support services. Joint efforts by several NGOs over decades, SHGs and network of peers created, counselling, small saving schemes and health facilities provided have meant more professional attitudes and near perfect awareness about health care, financial management, legal rights and facilities.

## 17. Senior Citizens

Health emergencies, crime against seniors, cyber-crime, and abandonment by children, physical abuse, and loneliness are some of the major problems of seniors in the city. Pune Police have established Bharosa cells with a 24 hour helpline for senior citizens in distress. They provide emergency aid, counselling and legal services often collaborating with local NGO. The senior citizens cell registers all senior citizens under every police station. Regular visits are paid to such persons to ensure their safety



and provide any needed help. This is a 24 hour service with dedicated hotline number for the purpose.

## 18. Children

*Childline:* This is a 24 hour helpline for children in distress – a GOI-NGO partnership all India initiative. Childline primarily addresses issues of child abuse, child protection and overall insensitivity to child rights amongst adult groups. Childline rescues children from physical, emotional, sexual abuse, trafficking; rescues and rehabilitates child labourers, child beggars, child marriage victims, finds shelter for homeless/abandoned/orphan children, restores missing/runaway children to their families, provides medical assistance, guidance, emotional support and much more.

A dedicated 24 hour toll free number 1098 is available for access to childline. The rescued children are helped through legal processes. Childline outreach ensures wide sharing of the service and sensitization of different sections of the population about child rights and child protection issues.

*Gammat Shala:* A child centred community development programme – Launched by NGO Dnyanadevi, Pune, and Gammat Shala is a play based non formal education programme. This child centred community development programme that has rescued and rehabilitated child labourers, out of school children and waste pickers from slum communities. These were easily trapped into drug mafia – as peddlers and substance users, got into delinquent behaviour, were abused, eventually becoming frustrated adult abusers of women themselves. Girls were married before they turned 14 and were rendered victims of domestic violence (“Dnyanadevi Dnyanawridhi Dwara Desh Vikas – Saathi Re”, 1983).

The juvenile offenders in the observation home through a theatre based version of the Gammat shala moved away from criminality, got a positive outlook to life, sensitized legal fraternity – effectively bringing down their exploitation and abuse. The child to adult programme has helped improved quality of family and community life.

## 19. Special Legal Assistance for Children

- *Special Children's Courts – Goa* – these are one of its kind child friendly courts specially established by Goa Government. Care is taken to make the ambience and functioning child friendly.

- Under the *Juvenile Justice act for care and protection* several child protection and victim assistance programmes are established:
  - *Bal Police Pathak* – Juvenile Aid Police Unit now merged with SPJU is established in every Police Commissionerate.
  - *District Child Protection Units* operate through a battery of child protection officers providing victim assistance in every district.
  - *Juvenile justice boards* for assisting and rehabilitating children in conflict with law
  - *Child Welfare Committees* for children in need of care and protection.
  - *State/National Child rights commissions.*
  - *Drop in centres for homeless* at dedicated observation/children's homes.
  - *Shelters* for children in need of care and protection and those in conflict with law.
- *POCSO* – Law for prevention of child sexual offences- Supports sexually abused children through special fast track courts and regulations that ensure child friendly legal procedures (*The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012*).
- *NGO forums* working on diverse child rights issues are found in most city centres. They meet, partner and provide victim assistance and also work as pressure groups. Police partner with these groups too.
- *Child Labour Task Forces* have been established in every city headed by the district collector with childline, labour department, women and child development department, police and NGOs.

## 20. Initiative by the Academia

The advancement of women's studies centres in University and Colleges in India have been discussed here. As a pioneering event in the history of the development of women's studies centres in India, in the year 1974 the Srimathi Nathibai Damodar Thackersay (SNDT) Women's University was set up in Mumbai as the first University Research Centre for Women's Studies in India. Some of the initiations take by the Government of India include the establishment of Institute for Social Studies Trust (ISST), The Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the Indian Association for Women's Studies (LAWS).



Another important milestone is the enactment of National Women's Empowerment Policy (NPEW) in 2001, which sets out a rigorous liberal agenda for advancing, developing and empowering women with adequate policy proposals and strategies. The NPEW's amendment has mainly focused on the equitable availability of educational, health and employment opportunities for women that are to be ensured.

The various activities conducted by women studies centres in India include teaching, conducting research, advocacy/advisory and consultancy services, training students on gender related issues, organizing seminars and conferences, extension activities, publication and documentation, partnering with Governmental and Non-governmental organizations, providing scholarships and fellowships for girl children, and addressing grievances of women and girl children etc.

Some of the success stories of women studies centres in India include:

### **20.1 Sensitization**

- GLIDE – Gender Lab for Inclusive and Diversity Education, Chennai.
- This gender lab was set up to create workshop modules on gender sensitisation, prevention of sexual harassment and other women related topics.
- IAWS – Indian Association for Women's Studies.
- Feminist Film Making – “Juice” “Please Mind the Gap” etc., Delhi.
- Atyachar Devi Ki Leelayaein is a street play conducted by Centre for Struggling Women (CSW) and a college in Delhi and showcasing the violence faced by women in public and in the domestic sphere.
- Jaana Natya Manch, in Mumbai is using puppets called Char Rang focuses on emotional independence of women and the debate between irrationality and scientific thinking (“Jana Natya Manch”, 2021).
- Chennai Kalai Kuzhu is a theatre company operating in a college in southern part of India doing plays on rights of women and girl children.
- Wash – Menstrual Hygiene and Health, Trichy.
- Wash is an initiative by the Women's Studies Centre in South India to promote Menstrual Hygiene through Sanitary Napkin Campaign in colleges by provided in a eco-friendly way.

## 20.2 *Advocacy and Consultancy*

- *Gender Park, Kerala*: The park has facilities like SHE Taxi, Gender Library, Gender Museum and Women Trade Centre ("Gender Park, Kerala", 2021).
- *Gender Clubs, Trichy*: Gender clubs are established including college boys and girls as members, to ignite them to participate in gender mainstreaming dialogues. Various competitions are organized under *Gender Fest* to exhibit their views on gender equality through various forms of performing arts such as skit, dance, essay writing etc.
- *Nukkad Natak – "Hamari Betiyaan", Jammu*: Nukkad Natak on the theme "Hamari Betiyaan" is conducted to celebrate National Girl Child Day on 24<sup>th</sup> January every year.

## 20.3 *Capacity Building*

Under capacity building various skill development activities like bangle making, kite making, bamboo basket making, heavy vehicle operators, crane operators, training to climb coconut trees to pluck coconuts were given for women to build their capacity in accordance to the employment opportunities available in the society.

## 20.4 *Research Contributions*

- *Archives* are set up to preserve and showcase and document the achievements of women. *Avabai Women's Archive (AWA)* is one such initiative to honour the lives of women who leaves a mark in history and helps make a difference. It aims to preserve the history and helps facilitate research, organize conferences/seminars and develop a vigorous publication programme to spread more awareness.
- *The Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), University Women's Association (UWA) and the Publishing houses* are established to encourage women to pursue research and publish their work. Eg. *Manushi/Kali – Feminist Magazines*.

## 20.5 *Industry University Partnership*

The recent trend in India is the corporate companies are coming forward to invest their resources under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) scheme along educational institutions. The women studies centres are



fore-runners in mobilising these resources to strengthen their centres are departments. The best example is GLIDE.

## 20.6 Policy Intervention

Women academicians are actively involving in policy making decisions of Government of India. They serve as Standing Committee Members in policy making. For example a Women Studies Centre in Southern part of India is identified by the National Commission for Women with the directions of the Supreme Court to conduct a study on the prevalence of Devadasi System in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka of India.

## 21. Conclusion

The struggle for equality still continues and justice through the legislations is the best way to support the journey of women rights and previous century has witnessed how legislations have curbed the atrocities against women. NGO plays a major role in providing access to justice in India. Government may not have reach everywhere whereas NGO have a wide reach and hence collaborating NGO and Government can help victims get their access to necessary needs. They represent the Human Face of the CJS and make the process more Victim friendly. Not just NGO, but academicians, researchers, media, Government agency and citizens all play a major role in this system. Many schemes, policies are implemented with innovations to help victims from further victimization and improve their quality of life.

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