



women's feature service

**WOMEN, SAFETY AND
THE CITY**

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SERVICE



A collection of 12 feature articles

How can Indian cities be made more secure for women to protect their right to freedom of movement and safety? This series will focus on violence in the public domain and the responses, strategies and campaigns to resist such violence and make urban spaces safer for women at all times of the day or night.

* In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly established the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). UN Women combines the mandates and assets of UNIFEM, OSAGI, DAW and INSTRAW, with an expanded mission and vision. (for more information see <http://www.unwomen.org/about-us/about-un-women>)

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INDIA COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, GRAPHIC NOVEL STYLE

By Shruti Parthasarathy

New Delhi (Women's Feature Service) - Despite women's increased visibility in public spaces, better education and work opportunities, and changing social attitudes, women continue to experience physical and emotional violence, both within their homes and outside.

How does one address a crime as insidious, damaging and invasive as this in ways that are positive, interesting and relevant? This is what Jagori, the Delhi-based women's training and resource centre, had in mind when it asked documentary filmmaker Sehjo Singh to create advocacy and communication material for its ongoing campaign on violence against women.

While violence affects women across class, it is the lower middle and working classes that are the most vulnerable to it – the group that Jagori works with across northern India. Known for its attractive advocacy tools such as creative songs, diaries and posters, Jagori had a few pointers for Singh: First, the material must do more than just provide information on rights and laws; it had to focus on the social aspects surrounding violence so that the viewer would be forced to think about the issue. Second, it had to be youthful in its appeal, portable, cost-effective, interactive and communicate the non-negotiable message that violence



was unacceptable even as it fostered a positive approach to taking action when one confronts such violence oneself. Finally, it had to reach out to both men and women and challenge the notion that this was a 'woman's problem'.

Keeping all these factors in mind, Singh came up with interesting, easy-to-follow interactive panels in the graphic novel style, with fictional protagonists and scenarios that the viewer can relate to. They are in Hindi and inspired from the scores of real life stories in Jagori's files of women who have emerged victorious from one form of violence or another. The violence has been divided into four broad areas: Public space, domestic/marital space, parental space and the workplace. An interactive element has been included to foster further viewer engagement.

Working on finding characters that told a compelling story on each issue, Singh created four protagonists. There's Tai, who addresses public safety; Pappu, who focuses on sexual harassment at the workplace; Meeto, who fights familial discrimination; and a man and woman, who intervene in domestic violence. "For me the characters were very important," says Singh, "They had to be recognisable, and like the viewer, troubled by violence but not know how to counter it." These protagonists then decide to 'do something' about the situation, taking action that is realistic, compelling and inspiring. By being male and female, these characters subtly imply equal male responsibility in ensuring women's safety.

Here's Tai's story board: Tai is an ordinary and yet strong, elderly woman living in an urban 'basti' (slum) and she addresses safety in public spaces. Noticing local boys harassing girls and women on her street, Tai steps in and stops it. She craftily recruits the same young boys to watch the streets, making potential perpetrators responsible for women's safety, and appoints the old men who sit playing cards and the vegetable vendors with their well-lit carts to become the eyes and ears of the community - bringing everyone together through building awareness and developing a sense of responsibility. In the last interactive panel, she invites the viewers to share their responses to the harassment women face on public transport.

Workspace issues are seen through Pappu's eyes. Pappu is an office boy who notices with dismay the various subtle and overt ways in which women employees in his office are harassed by their male colleagues and superiors. Coming across the Supreme Court's guidelines on sexual harassment in the workplace - that lists the different forms of behaviour that count as harassment and are discriminatory on grounds of gender - he distributes copies among colleagues. This initiates discussion and debate, paving the way for increased awareness and a more gender-sensitive working environment. Copies of the guidelines, containing a small tear-away section for queries, are given away which the viewer can drop into a box.

The panel, 'Tring Tring', deals with domestic violence, building on the popular Bell Bajao campaign. Two neighbours, a man and a woman, ring the doorbell and interrupt

a husband beating his wife. Their intervention halts the violence and while the woman takes the wife for first aid and counselling, the man addresses the husband. Through examples of other conflicts that he resolves without violence himself, the husband is made to realise that violence is not a compulsion but an active choice, one he exercises each time he beats his wife. The onus of responsibility for the violence is thus placed squarely on the perpetrator, and the presence of the male and female protagonists underlines the fact that such violence is not a woman's problem alone. There is a bell provided for the audience to ring if they agree with the panel's message.

The fourth protagonist is Meeto, a bright and ambitious girl expected to abide by her parents' wishes: Privilege the comforts of her brother over her own, marry early and have children. Meeto challenges these stereotypes by studying hard, working and choosing her own life partner.

The Meeto panel, Singh recollects, was very special, as her story could have ended up as a tragic one. But after several brainstorming sessions with Jagori members, the story emerged as one that could inspire hope when told in flashback by a grown-up girl. Meeto's story uses an interesting device: It shows her having to choose between being 'good' and being 'strong', and she chooses the latter each time. The viewer is called upon to make their choice, with a red sticker.

In addition, a fifth space has been created to symbolise a woman's inner space, reflecting the ways she often inflicts violence on herself by internalising the discrimination and violence done to her. But, ultimately, this site is also about self-realisation and growth. Six inspiring real life stories from Jagori's files, of grit, struggle and success are placed here, depicting a woman's journey from "victimhood to selfhood", as Singh says.

Printed on lightweight, roll-up flex sheets, these panels were utilised successfully during the Safe Cities campaign, which was anchored in India by Jagori. Currently they are on display in public and community spaces in Delhi. Says Suneeta Dhar, Director, Jagori, "They are part of an ongoing structural intervention on violence against women." Jagori, which is working with UN agencies and the Delhi government to develop long-term programmes to ensure women's right to violence-free lives, feels these panels can be useful to others working in this field as well. Dhar explains, "We want these panels to travel, to be used by other NGOs, activist groups, and state governments as part of a wider initiative against violence on women." In fact, a women's groups collective in Pune (Maharashtra) has just translated these panels into Marathi – the local language - and will soon begin to use them.

Adds Madhu, head of Jagori's youth programme at Madanpur Khadar, near Delhi, "As they are visual and in an easy-to-grasp format, they are ideal for neo-literates in the communities we work in." The youth of Madanpur Khadar often intervene in instances of domestic violence in their community by throwing in a cricket ball or talking loudly

in front of the house in an effort to stop the violence they see - in uncanny resemblance to the Bell Bajao advertisements.

As Nilanju, head of Jagori's Violence Intervention team, puts it, "Jagori has always been a space where women can come, create, sing, laugh and cry." It is interventions such as these that continue to make it a warm space of support, camaraderie and empowerment.

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GLOBAL

WOMEN-FRIENDLIER CITIES: EXPERIENCES FROM

61 COUNTRIES

By Geeta Seshu



New Delhi (Women's Feature Service) - At the crux of the issue of safety for women and children, said Dr Pregs Govender, deputy chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission, was the need to look at inclusive cities within inclusive countries in an inclusive world. She was speaking at the Third International Safe Cities Conference held recently in New Delhi, India.

"The inclusive city was a building block for an inclusive country and an inclusive world. Otherwise, it will fall into an agenda of an exploitative world, with the terms of urbanisation set by those who own land," she said, sounding a note of caution on treaties like the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) that allowed for the privatisation of resources like water and health, the increasing food crisis that impact women and children the most, unemployment and the increasing inequality in the world.

Indeed, the lack of safe public utilities such as public toilets and transport was a running thread throughout the three-day conference, which drew in more than 270 participants

from 41 countries, small and big. Increasing urbanisation and spatial segregation is on the rise, women make up a growing proportion of the over 175 million international migrants worldwide and participants from 61 cities as seemingly diverse as Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea), Cairo (Egypt), Kigali (Rwanda), Paris (France), Quito (Ecuador), Tokyo (Japan) and Sydney (Australia), affirmed the need for women to be part of a decision-making process that would respond to their needs.

The conference was organised jointly by the Montreal (Canada)-based Women in Cities International (WICI) and New Delhi (India)-based Jagori, along with Huairou Commission, UN Women, UN Habitat and Red Mujer y Habitat America Latina. The Delhi declaration, that emerged at the end of the deliberations, is “a major step forward in affirming the need to forge partnerships with governments and administrations of urban bodies, UN agencies, community organisations, academics and the private sector to ensure the safety of women,” said Kathryn Travers, senior analyst of WICI.

Building such a partnership has become absolutely imperative. With more than 3.4 billion people in the world now living in cities, the safety of half this population is at a precarious state. And there’s plenty of evidence of this. Sexual harassment and street violence is at a high - 35-60 per cent of women surveyed in an International Violence against Women survey said they experienced physical or sexual violence by any man since age 16 and while a major proportion of this would be by an intimate partner, the assault by other men is on the rise.

Femicide - or the killing of a woman merely because she was a woman - was six times more likely to occur than homicide, with 33 per cent of femicide occurring with the use of firearms, revealed Anna Alvazzi del Frate, senior researcher at the independent Small Arms Survey, based in Geneva, Switzerland. The organisation has been monitoring increasing armed violence by individuals since 2006 and researched the use, frequency and extent of small arms and its impact on violence against women. “We are [also] seeing a trend towards women who use arms or want to own arms,” she said.

Sonal Marwah, a consultant with the organisation’s India chapter, added that in Delhi alone there is an average of one woman applicant for an arms license, especially from areas like NOIDA and Gurgaon. Women are insecure and feel the need to protect themselves, she said.

This growing unease among women is not surprising considering that their safety is further compromised by the very people assigned to protect them. In fact, New Delhi’s Minister Of State For Women And Child Development, Kiran Walia candidly admitted at the inaugural session of the conference that the police reflect the prevailing social situation where women’s rights and safety is routinely disregarded. “Privately, the government admits the problem,” she said, adding that when attempts were made to raise the issue, all she got in response was laughter!

Such responses only increase the need for actions like the safe cities movement that has been growing steadily. Outlining the history of the movement since March 1976, when

the first 'Take Back the Night' protest was organised in Brussels, Belgium, she said, that the three keys to a safe cities movement was to make spaces safer by improving urban design and paying attention to public and private spaces; by making space safer by focusing on housing, transport and other support services and by ensuring safer discursive space with policy and leadership. Supportive politicians, public officials, community leaders and researchers made up four legs of a stool, she added.

Echoing this, Axumite Gebre-Egziabher, Director, Global Division of UN-Habitat said that where women are part of an urban design process - building of homes and communities - the results clearly show that they give priority to safety, ease of movement and equitable access of all facilities. "The safe cities campaign is not just about lighting or transport but about buildings and cities," she emphasised.

As cities expanded, they failed to develop any capacities to deal with the expansion of their population, said Patricia Morey, director of the women and gender programme of the University of Cordoba, Argentina.

In Quito, newer forms of violence are beginning to emerge, where perpetrators are younger now, observed Olenka Ochoa, a council board member of the Huairou Commission in Lima, Peru. "As women assert themselves and seek more autonomy, they are facing a backlash. Young minor boys are committing crimes against women and are being sent to prison. There is no strategy to rehabilitate them and they are ... becoming a high-risk category who don't even realise they have done something wrong," she rued.

In Rwanda, the assertion of women has ensured their safety, said Solange Mukasonga, executive secretary of Kigali. Apart from helplines where police and even the army can be summoned at short notice, several women are part of the low-level village justice systems, participating actively in the reconciliation process between the Hutus and Tutsis and, with women occupying 56.5 per cent of seats in the Parliament and the President of the Supreme Court being a woman, things are beginning to change, she added.

The conference discussed a plethora of issues related to women's safety. In a session on migration, Holly Kearle, programme manager of the American Association of University Women, USA, asked whether the segregation of women in public transport was a desirable trend. She said that while it may provide temporary relief it didn't stop men from harassing women at bus stops. In the same session, Mary Ikupu of the Women with Disabilities Network in Port Moresby, spoke movingly of the invisibility of people with disabilities. "Disabled women are confined to their homes because they have no access. This in turn, affects their chances at education or earning a livelihood. My own disability made me knock at every door for help. These physical and social barriers must be broken to make a truly inclusive world," she said.

In the final analysis, the safe cities movement must look at the continuum of violence - whether political or domestic, said Urvashi Butalia, feminist and publisher of Zubaan

Books. The women's movement has always been talking of violence, raising a voice against it in the private domain. But it is now that the discourse has begun assertively claiming safety in public spaces too, she said.

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INDIA

WOMEN'S SAFETY CAN CITIES KEEP THE PROMISE?

By Geeta Seshu



New Delhi (Women's Feature Service) - Barely a day before the shocking rape of a woman BPO employee in a moving tempo in the country's national capital was reported, more than 270 participants from 41 countries adopted a declaration at the concluding session of the Third International Conference On Safe Cities For Women And Girls in New Delhi, that asserted the right of all women to live free from violence and fear, in more equitable, democratic and inclusive cities.

It noted that 'The safety of women in urban areas is welded to a truly inclusive city that affirms the special needs of all citizens, especially those who are disabled, poor or belong to different ethnicities and participatory decision-making that involves strong partnerships between civil society organisations, governments and urban local authorities, law-enforcing agencies is the need of the hour.' Endorsing this declaration, senior Supreme Court lawyer and Additional Solicitor-General of India Indira Jaising said that the partnership that was a dominant theme of the three-day conference must be a true partnership of values between equal partners. "The violence that often defines women in society has reached endemic proportions, becoming ordinary instead of extraordinary. Women and children often give up on the right to education or a livelihood as a trade-off for safety," she added.

A safe city is a 24-hour city, encouraging street life to flourish, hawkers plazas and people's cooperatives, not a city like New Delhi, Jaising said, which has been built on the principle of 'beautification'.

The conference was jointly organised by the New Delhi-based women's organisation Jagori and the Montreal (Canada)-based Women in Cities International (WICI) along with several international organisations that work on urban safety and planning, including the Red Mujer y Hábitat de América Latina, the Huairou Commission, the United National Development Fund for Women and the United National Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat).

The envisioning of a 'safe city' created by a partnership between administrative authorities and civil society was the undercurrent of the meet, with concurrent sessions on diverse themes such as gender and essential services for low-income communities, local policies and programmes for improving women's safety, fighting displacement, migration, transportation and security, urban planning and design, the economics of safe cities for women, gender-based armed violence and demands for small arms by citizens in urban areas.

In cities all over the world, women and girls face the threat of sexual harassment and violence in public spaces, states a 2006 report of the State of the World's Cities (UN-Habitat). More recently, in New Delhi, a 2010 study by Jagori has revealed that a rape was reported every 29 minutes and as many as 82 per cent women reported that buses were the most unsafe places in the city. Women in other countries too have reported similar experiences - on the streets in Cairo, Egypt, at least 83 per cent of women experienced sexual harassment, while in Sao Paulo, Brazil, a woman was assaulted every 15 seconds!

The statistics are endless, presenting a grim picture of sexual harassment, assault and abuse in cities across the world. "Today, it really feels like a movement for safe cities," says Marisa Canuto, Executive Director of WICI. The organisation spearheaded the first international conference in 2002 in Montreal, and the second in Bogota, Colombia, in 2004.

The Delhi Declaration on Women's Safety stressed the need to promote awareness on safety, for women's safety tools, the use of technology to network and generate collective ideas and strategies, strengthen links between local authorities and grassroots women's organisations and it called upon governments at the national and local levels, international agencies of the UN and other non-governmental organisations to join hands.

"Of course, there is a continuum of violence on the streets and at home and we have to go to the root cause of this," Canuto emphasised. Recalling the initial efforts to get the campaign going, she said, "It was difficult to get women to get together to discuss the issue of violence. In some cities, women would be reluctant to discuss domestic violence but would be willing to come for a meeting to discuss violence in public spaces.

So that's what we did, we organised these meetings and brought women out."

From those early days, today, the voices demanding safety for women in urban spaces have only grown louder. And the Delhi Declaration was a major step towards making the issue of safer urban areas a movement, felt Suneeta Dhar, Director of Jagori. The fact that it was such a pressing issue was also indicative from the response of women's organisations as well as academics and representatives of law-enforcing agencies and civic administration from diverse countries including India, Bangladesh, Philippines, Nepal, Canada, Kenya, Nigeria and Indonesia.

The last two international conferences laid the ground-work for collaborative partnerships to reduce violence against women and girls. Gender auditing and a women's safety audit was a significant tool devised to monitor the level of safety in any community or city. The Jagori study has become a bench-mark for assessing the precarious sense of security experienced by women in Delhi, informed Kalpana Vishwanath, who is project director of the Gender Inclusive Cities project run by Jagori and WICI. The most important aspect that the Jagori study has reflected is that 40 per cent of the women who had experienced some form of sexual harassment in public spaces reported it. The breaking of their silence on the issue is a major step forward, said Rajiv Kale, Director of the Department Of Women And Child Development of the Delhi government.

The conference also saw the launch of a five-city programme by UNIFEM for the 'Safe Cities Free of Violence Against Women and Girls', which New Delhi, Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea, Pacific), Cairo (Egypt, Northern Africa), Kigali (Rwanda, Sub-Saharan Africa) and Quito (Ecuador, Latin America) will be part of. Ines Alberdi, the executive director of UNIFEM, said that the programme will develop a model on how to prevent and reduce violence against women and girls in public spaces in these five pilot cities that can be adapted by cities around the world.

An unprecedented 3.4 billion people now live in cities worldwide. Crime rates are high, but municipal development and safety plans frequently overlook specific threats to women and girls. Just last week yet another woman working in Delhi was gang raped in the early hours of the morning, as she was returning from work. Zero tolerance for violence against women - that's the need of the hour.

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INDIA FREEZE FRAMES: FEMALE IN THE CITY

By Monobina Gupta

Transportraits

Women And **Mobility In The City**

An exhibition by

Jagori and Women in Cities International

Curated By Gauri Gill

Including work by the artists Amruta Patil, Priya Sen, Ruhani Kaur and Uzma Mohsin; and the collectives Blank Noise and Lucida, in collaboration with the young people of Madanpur Khadar ; as well as a wide selection of entries from the public- contributed by professionals and amateurs from across the world.



Delhi (Women's Feature Service) - Cities usually tend to be defined by the images of cement and mortar they bear on their bodies; their innumerable highways, imposing and formidable; their structures born out of architectural genius; seductive malls, multiplying by the day. Rarely, do cities find an expression in images crafted around the diverse experiences of women, their fears and anxieties, as they access different urban spaces. Perceiving and experiencing a city through the eyes and the sensibilities of a woman, as she navigates it – secluded and crowded – braving the anxieties for her own personal safety, is indeed not a common phenomenon.

In the absence of this genre of constructing city spaces, 'Transportraits: Women and Mobility in the City', an exhibition of photographs organised by Jagori, which was on display in New Delhi to mark the Third International Conference on Women's Safety in Delhi, is truly remarkable. The collage of spaces, sometimes cast in shadows, at other times illuminated by a patch of light, reveals the often invisible subtext underlining cities. The pictures capture these spaces as they are experienced by women, regardless of their age, class or creed. Like the varied subjects in the photographs, those who have wielded the camera have drawn upon their diverse skills as writers, artists, activists, community workers, photographers. 'Transportraits...' includes a wide selection of entries from the public - amateurs and professionals – and will travel in Delhi and to other cities in India.

A series of images woven around the theme 'Streetlights' brings to the fore how the absence of basic infrastructure such as streetlights can contribute to women's vulnerability, as they negotiate the streets and the alleys, particularly after dusk. An eerie quality fills the image of Jaya Das returning home in Delhi's Madanpur Khadar after a day's work, picking her way under the gaze of unknown men hanging around the place. The image of a lone woman in a patch of light, walking down a street shrouded in shadows, is a jolting reminder of the 'empowering' function of streetlights, which can go a long way in making public spaces safe.

What makes this and other pictures, in the section 'Safe in the City' from Madanpur Khadar, remarkable is the fact that they were shot by the residents of the area: young girls and boys between 13 and 18 years of age who are often unable to fearlessly and freely access public spaces. The group put together the pictures and the accompanying texts at a workshop conducted by LUCIDA, an organisation founded in April 2010 by four post graduate students of the Photography Design programme at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

Through the medium of photography, the young residents have conveyed their perceptions and their experiences of safety in public spaces. "Near school, two guys were going on a bike. Seeing a girl coming, they started laughing and staring at her. That is when I clicked the photo," recalls Amresh Chand. "I feel unsafe on the way to school as it is deserted, but as there is no other way, so I am forced to go," says Sarita, while Preeti adds that she 'hums' to herself whenever she feels unsafe.

In 'Her Walk Home', photojournalist Ruhani Kaur captures the loneliness and the uneasiness of a lone woman walking down a lonely street, with the shadow of a man trailing her.

'Y R U LOOKING AT ME' – an exhibit put together by Blank Noise, a volunteer-led collective, which has initiated a public dialogue on 'eve teasing' – shows their 'action heroes' at a traffic signal in Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai, with each one of them carrying on their person an alphabet, which strung together spells the title of the work.

Delhi-based photographer, Gauri Gill, who is the curator of 'Transportraits...', writes in her curatorial note: "The theme of this conference is 'Building Inclusive Cities', and the aim is to bring together a diverse international community that is working in the fields of safe cities for women, women's rights and violence against women." She adds, "I hope the space of the exhibition is one for sharing experiences and for questioning, commentary and humor. In the age of homogenising Capital and Markets; of Art from Nowhere, applicable to Anywhere – and frequently about Nothing; it is a privilege to have had the opportunity to work with local groups and be thinking of local audiences and to respond to a specific issue that effects a lot of people right here."

'Transportraits...' is extraordinary in framing city spaces within the feminist grid of anxieties; insecurities women have to contend with as they access the city. Beginning

with poor infrastructure, unsafe public transport, male dominated parks, and bus stops, these anxieties stem also from the city's hostility towards 'Others' like women and men from the Northeast. "In documenting the lives of young women from the Northeast in Delhi, I was confronted with a two-fold dilemma that the women face: gender inequality and racial discrimination. A big city usually provides possibilities of integration into modern society free of social structures and prejudices. The anonymity it offers not only empowers but also enables the evolution of one's identity and dreams. This is not true for majority of the women of the Northeast staying in the city," says Uzma Mohsin, a graphic design specialist whose work is on display in the exhibition.

In the course of their journeys, women through the ages have searched for, explored and discovered new paths to reach their destinations safely. Delving into mythology, writer-artist Amruta Patil uses the fascinating character of Draupadi as one of the subjects of 'Navigation and Safe Passage', which documents four such journeys. "She (Draupadi) navigated through the land using five imaginary body guards as her shield," Patil writes.

A visual manifestation of the ways in which women relate to cities, the exhibition is put up at a time when violence against women is on the rise, notwithstanding countless laws that exist on paper to protect women. Even as cities acquire new accessories of modernity, women, increasingly have to restrict their mobility and devise strategies to ensure their personal safety, as they access public spaces.

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GLOBAL INTERNATIONAL VOICES FOR SAFER CITIES

By Pamela Philipose



Cities should be spaces for opportunity and personal growth. But going by the experiences of women across the world, they are more often than not sites of exclusion, harassment and assault. Today, there is a growing realisation that if our urban centres are to be made safe for everyone living within their peripheries, they have to first be made safe for the most marginalised among those who live, work and commute in them: Women.

This is why two organisations - Jagori, headquartered in Delhi, and Women In Cities International (WICI), which works in five continents - have decided on the theme of building inclusive cities as the central focus for an international conference they are organising in Delhi later this month.

Women's safety

The idea is to get participants from diverse countries and backgrounds to view women's safety and inclusion against the present background of rapid urban growth, large-scale migration, insecurity of employment, and lack of access to essential services.

The Delhi conference will be the third international conference of its kind. The first, held in Montreal, Canada, eight years ago, put women's public safety on the table, perceiving it as an issue that required the involvement of different organisations, institutions and actors, including men. A second international conference, which took place in Bogota, Columbia, in 2004, specifically urged various agencies, ranging from national governments and universities to the police force and the media, to get actively involved in preventing violence against women and girls and building an urban culture of mutual respect, inclusion and human solidarity.

Interestingly, while cities may differ in terms of their location and ethnic composition, they share some striking similarities, too. When WICI initiated a Gender Inclusive Cities Programme in partnership with four organisations - the International Centre and Network for Information On Crime, Jagori, the Information Centre of the Independent Women's Forum in Moscow, and Centro de Intercambio y Servicios Cono Sur Argentina - in the four cities of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Delhi, Petrozavodsk (Republic of Karelia, Russia) and Rosario (Argentina), respectively - one of the most significant and consistent findings that emerged was that the women living in them felt that it was their gender that was the single biggest reason for their lack of safety.

Feedback from this programme, which is being supported by the United Nations Trust Fund, also points out that in all the cities, public transport was seen as unsafe and or/ not inclusive for women. Another common factor noted across all the cities was the presence and use of alcohol and drugs, especially in association with men and youth.

The data from the programme also revealed that no matter where they lived, women generally did nothing when faced with sexual harassment and/or assault. Few women in any city - seven per cent of respondents in Dar es Salaam, five per cent in Delhi, eight per cent in Petrozavodsk, and seven per cent in Rosario - asked bystanders to help. What does this indicate? It seems women and girls either do not acknowledge sexual harassment and/or assault, or decide to address it themselves. And clearly they have little confidence that the general public would support them.

Such pointers have helped the various partner organisations to firm up action plans, although each of them have adopted different modus operandi. Observes Marissa Canuto, Executive Director, WICI, "The approaches that our implementing partners are undertaking in each city to create safety for women are highly variable. In Delhi and Petrozavodsk, for instance, the groups have partnered local governments and transport authorities to improve the quality of service for women and raise awareness.

In Dar es Salaam, the attempt is to work with the local community and the police to create volunteer community police groups. In Rosario, the approach is to work with local women to engage with decision-makers and community organisations in specific areas in order to build a consensus-based approach to creating safer cities for women."

A successful part of the campaign has been the use of safety audits to highlight problem

areas in a city and build greater public involvement in creating a safer local environment. In Dar es Salaam, for instance, the city used the audit process to upgrade settlements within its precincts, while in Warsaw social audits helped to engender the participation of residents in local decision-making.

Women's public safety has several dimensions, and perhaps the most disturbing is the pronounced vulnerability of those living in poverty. Kathryn Travers, Senior Analyst and Project Officer, WICI, explains, "Poor women and children are more vulnerable to unsafe public environments because poverty robs them of the resources that they could use to avoid unsafe environments. Homelessness, for instance, makes for a very unsafe public environment, or women living in poor areas may not have adequate and safe toilet facilities."

She also points out that apart from gender and class, factors like race, disability, age and whether a person belongs to the area or is an immigrant, render people as targets of attack.

Policy makers have generally not paid sufficient attention to these aspects, which is why the example of Ottawa is so interesting. The Canadian city developed in partnership with a community based organisation, the City for All Women Initiative, an "equity and inclusion lens". The lens is essentially a teaching tool for those who administer to citizens' needs, so that they can acquaint themselves with 11 marginalised groups within the city - like Aboriginals, individuals with disabilities, the gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender community, people living in poverty, senior citizens, and so on - who are generally left out or forgotten.

Equality

These may be isolated attempts at re-imagining urban spaces in ways that make them truly inclusive, but they are helping to bring equality - especially gender equality - to decision making at every level. As Canuto puts it, "Many women and girls face multiple discriminations and are systematically excluded from decision-making. This exclusion means that city spaces are not shaped with their needs in mind. We are hoping our work will force state authorities and society in general to realise this and take action."

Suneeta Dhar, director, Jagori, couldn't agree more, and sees the 'Safe Cities' work that her organisation is currently doing in Delhi, Mumbai and cities in Kerala like Thiruvananthapuram, as a way forward to make urban centres in India safer for all women. The international conference to be held in Delhi in the third week of November, Dhar believes, will be a great opportunity for India and the Indian women's movement to understand the issue and take action. "It will help us get to know about how the imaginations of women around the world have transformed cities for women from diverse backgrounds."

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INDIA

FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY, WE NEED WOMEN POLICE. BUT WHO WILL PROTECT THEM?

By Renu Rakesh



Kota (Women's Feature Service) - There were five stabs on her body - three on the neck and one on each breast. There were two gaping cuts on her head. Her fingers were chopped off and a bunch of hair was yanked out of her scalp. It was indeed the most brutal murder Rajasthan had seen in the recent past. Two policemen had raped and killed young constable Maya Yadav, 22, in a police guesthouse room at the Chechat police station in Kota district.

Yadav had finished her duty at 6.30 pm on September 29, 2010. She saw driver-constable Deshraj, 35, going to the market to fix the tyres of a police jeep. She wanted to pick up some groceries so she hitched a ride with him. After returning from the market around 7.30 pm, Yadav went to her room, 20 metres from the police station. In an hour, she reported back for wireless duty. Later, she retired for the day at 10 pm.

Meanwhile, Deshraj, who had left for night patrol with another constable, returned with liquor. He was joined by the police station cook, Tulsiram Rathore, 25, in a drinking session. The room they were drinking in was separated from Yadav's room by a small pantry and a toilet.

No one knows when the two drunk cops decided to kill Yadav in cold blood. The next morning, when she did not report for duty, a constable was sent to her room where her mutilated body was discovered. When the news spread around Chechat, the 700-

year-old village was filled with outrage. A mob of 500 gathered outside the police station demanding the suspension of all the staff. Agitators turned violent and at least six policemen sustained injuries in stone pelting. Finally, tear gas had to be used to control the situation.

Chechat is a few kilometres from Khemaj, a small town on National Highway 12, between Kota and Jhalawar. Villagers agitated for two days before word reached Jaipur, the state capital. On October 2, Chechat Station House Officer (SHO) Amilal Chaudhary and sentry were suspended and the remaining staff was sent to the Lines. A “shocked” Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot took 48 hours to order a compensation of Rs 10,00,000 (US\$1=Rs 44.3) and a government job to one member of Yadav’s family.

The gruesome nature of the murder has ensured that it will not be forgotten for some time to come. But just six days later, on October 5 at around 7 pm, Pushpa Jat, a constable posted at the Jaitaran police station in Pali district, consumed sleeping pills when she failed to fend off the advances of the SHO. She was rushed to the hospital and then sent on ‘medical leave’. There was no hue and cry in the village so the police could easily hush up the matter.

But cases like that of Yadav and Jat are not isolated ones. Sexual harassment of women constables at the workplace is increasing in the same proportion as their numbers in the force. Today, women constitute 5.6 per cent of Rajasthan’s constabulary and this change has largely come about because of 30 per cent reservation for women in the recruitment of constables. Eventually women are expected to make up 30 per cent of the constabulary. This of course is a positive trend. The ‘Safe Cities For Women & Girls’ campaign’s Bogota Declaration specifically called for an increase in the number of police officers, especially to attend to cases of violence against women and girls. The ‘Safe Cities For Women & Girls’ is an international campaign, which is partnering Jagori, a national women’s resource centre, in India.

The question however, is, who will protect the policewomen themselves from violence and sexual harassment? For policewomen, the joy and pride at making it into the police force comes with an often horrific consequence: The risk of discharging their duties at odd hours surrounded by foul mouthed and drunk colleagues. Says Nina Singh, Inspector General of Police (Planning, Modernisation and Welfare): “Twenty years ago women constables were a rare sight in police stations across Rajasthan. Today, things are changing in what used to be a predominantly male institution. The duties and presence of women constables have conspicuously increased. Among other benefits, this has had a sobering influence on the attitudes and behaviour of their male counterparts.”

Police officers admit that the sexual harassment of women constables does occur but most cases don’t get reported. “When women discuss it with their colleagues, they are advised to keep quiet and be more careful in future,” says a Superintendent of Police (SP) unwilling to be named. Another district police chief claims that he has, post-

Chechat, made sure that women constables are posted only in pairs at police stations. "The idea is that the presence of another woman at the workplace will give them a sense of security," he explains.

A woman constable has to perform all the duties that her male colleagues do. Every SHO wants at least 50 per cent of police station staff to be on call so they insist on these women staying at the station's premises. It is for this reason that women's rest rooms are now being constructed at police stations for women constables.

Incidentally, Singh - the senior-most lady officer in the state - although she detests the prefix 'lady' and maintains that "a cop is a cop, lady or otherwise" - is in charge of welfare activities for the force. "In the modernisation plan, too, there is an emphasis on constructing separate barracks, toilets and rest rooms for women constables."

Today, out of the 711 police stations in the state, about 350 already have rest rooms for women. But Singh admits that there's a lot that still needs to be done to create a more enabling environment for women in the force.

During the recently concluded two-day Collector-SP conference, Chief Minister Gehlot had observed, "If a crime is committed next to or inside a police station, nothing can be more shameful than that. This incident has shaken me." Following the statement a circular was issued by the Director General of Police (DGP) making SHOs directly responsible if a policeman is found inebriated on the premises of the police station, during or after duty.

Ironically, the Vishaka guidelines (to prevent sexual harassment of women at the workplace) have their genesis in Rajasthan. Bhanwari Devi, a social worker (saathin) at a state government development programme aimed at preventing child marriages in villages, was gang-raped by five men in front of her husband in September 1992. The trial court acquitted the accused, but Bhanwari fought on, her determination inspiring fellow social activists and women's groups across India to launch a campaign for justice. In December 1993, the Rajasthan High Court sentenced the accused for gang-rape.

Women's groups and NGOs then filed a petition in the Supreme Court(SC), under the name of 'Vishaka', asking the apex court to give directions on sexual harassment at the workplace. The SC responded by drawing up the Vishaka guidelines on August 13, 1997. The guidelines not only defined sexual harassment at the workplace but also stipulated the creation of an appropriate complaints mechanism in every organisation.

The measure has still to be mainstreamed across the country, and the institution of the police is no exception. The 'Safe Cities For Women & Girls' campaign's Bogota Declaration calls for an attitude of service and civic responsibility within the police "in order to ensure a more adequate response to the needs of women and girls who are victims of violence". But in order to do this, the police authorities must also ensure that

the women in their ranks do not themselves become victims of violence and assault, like Maya Yadav and Pushpa Jat.

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GLOBAL WOMEN ONLY: FROM DELHI TO MEXICO, MAKING PUBLIC TRANSPORT SAFER

By Shipra Narang Suri



New Delhi (Women's Feature Service)

- "Public buses? Don't step into them ever if you want your sanity and safety!"
- "In Delhi nothing is safe... not an auto, bus, not even the metro!"

These were opinions voiced by young, professional women in Delhi last year during a discussion organised by JAGORI, a women's training, documentation and resource centre in the city. Of course, the recent announcement by Delhi Metro - that one coach on all its trains will be reserved for women has been greeted with obvious relief by women commuters.

Indeed, in a recent survey of over 5,000 persons conducted across Delhi by JAGORI and New Concept for the Government of Delhi, over half of the women respondents reported that public transport was the most unsafe 'place' for women in the national capital. The survey was released in July this year. Forty per cent said that waiting for public transport was equally risky. Yet, using public transport is not optional for most women, whether in Delhi or elsewhere. A safe and women-friendly public transport system - not only the various modes of public transport like buses, metro, auto-rickshaws and taxis but also associated infrastructure such as bus stops and metro stations, pavements and other waiting areas - is, therefore, central to improving women's safety, and enhancing their access to their city.

In New York City, a web-based survey conducted in 2007 on the city's subway (metro) system revealed that over 70 per cent of the respondents had been sexually harassed or assaulted in the subway. Most incidents took place during morning or evening rush

hour, when compartments are particularly crowded. Less than four per cent of the victims reported the incident to the police or the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). Responses to this problem included increasing police presence on the subway system, and launching a campaign to educate commuters about the risk of sexual harassment, preventive measures, steps that victims can take, and the importance of reporting such incidents.

Other cities have also made improvements in their public transport. In March this year, the Greater London Authority unveiled a strategy titled 'The Way Forward: Taking action to end violence against women and girls'. Improved service provision and making London's transport network safer for women are central to this strategy, which is the city's first ever comprehensive effort to tackle violence against women and girls. Along with increasing the number of Safer Transport Teams, the city is running awareness campaigns on planning journeys home and advising against using illegal minicabs. It will work closely with the police and Transport for London (TfL) to make the pan-London Cab Enforcement Unit (CEU) more effective. Then, increasing women's perception of safety on public transport and their confidence in travelling, as well as improving the reporting of sexual offences experienced, are also part of this strategy.

In the developing world, Mexico City leads the way in improving public transportation infrastructure. One of the first cities to designate women-only entrances as well as subway compartments during rush hours, the city also launched the Athena program – women only buses – in 2008. Currently, there are 67 Athena buses covering 23 of the 91 routes across the city. Easily identified by large letters in pink saying, "Exclusive Service for Women", these buses run from 6 am to 9 pm. Pregnant women, elderly people and those with disabilities travel free.

These examples show that improving the public transport system from the viewpoint of women's safety does not require overly complicated or expensive solutions. What it does need is political will, a long-term vision, and sustained efforts, which combine improvements in infrastructure and services with sensitisation, capacity-building, as well as strong punitive measures.

Senior officials from the transport department in Delhi acknowledge that lack of safety is a huge deterrent for people wishing to use public transport. In 2003, the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) had committed itself to improving the safety of women passengers through actions such as clear display of helpline numbers both within and outside buses, instructions to drivers and conductors to report any incidents of eve-teasing or molestation, and permitting women to board from the front door. However, no training was imparted to bus drivers and conductors, and DTC buses continued to be extremely unsafe for women. To address this gap, JAGORI initiated a series of sensitisation campaigns among drivers and conductors five years ago, as part of its Safe Delhi project. Since then, a women passenger helpline has been launched, advocacy material developed, and a number of workshops on 'gender and safety in buses' conducted with DTC instructors, bus drivers and conductors. It is hoped that through such training sessions, the staff of DTC (predominantly men) will gain insights into their

own values and behaviour, break their silence on harassment of women, and help in providing better service to women commuters.

A number of other efforts have also recently been initiated: Biometric identification and police verification of all drivers of public service vehicles, renewable every three years, has been made mandatory; the Global Positioning System (GPS) system has been extended to 500 blueline (private) buses, in addition to DTC vehicles; and CCTV installation has begun on major transport interchanges.

While these are important steps, they need to be mainstreamed and accompanied by appropriate governance reforms. Installation of CCTV cameras can serve as a deterrent to perpetrators of violence and sexual harassment, but basic infrastructure improvements at bus stops, metro stations and subways, such as enhanced lighting, electronic signage, audio announcements, convex mirrors to remove blind corners, and permitting hawking platforms, can be equally useful. In addition, clear written and audio announcements of helpline numbers and electronic messaging on women's safety inside buses and at bus stops, can build confidence among women. A review of bus stops in terms of location, lighting and amenities, should be conducted. Identification of intermediate stopping points for night-time bus services can be yet another easy but important step.

In Delhi, for autos and taxis, simple measures such as making the display of drivers' identification, service standards and helpline numbers mandatory, can go a long way in deterring crime against women. Eventually, linking all auto-rickshaws and taxis registered in Delhi to a GPS system and a central control room can be a win-win solution for all - auto-drivers will generate more business, the transport control room will be able to monitor their movements, and passengers' safety will be enhanced. Introduction of a night-time radio-taxi service for women, monitored by the Delhi Police, or, alternatively, auditing and certification of existing radio taxi operators from women's safety perspective can be a useful intervention. Ten women taxi drivers have recently been inducted into the fleet of taxis hired for the Commonwealth Games, an initiative that must be scaled up.

As more and more women step out of the confines of their homes in Delhi and other cities, their safety in public spaces is emerging as a major concern for policymakers as well as the civil society. An extensive, reliable and safe public transport system can make a city more accessible and inclusive for women, including those working in the formal or informal sectors, students, housewives, the poor, or the disabled and will expand their choices on where they can live, study, work or spend their leisure time.

(Dr Shipra Narang Suri is an urban planner and international consultant working for various UN agencies.)

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INDIA SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON WHEELS

By Shwetha E. George



Thiruvananthapuram (Women's Feature Service) - A 16-year-old girl is on a crowded city bus. She holds on to the overhead railing with one hand, while hanging on to her school bag that straddles her body with the other. It's only when she gets off the bus that a friend points to a stain on her skirt and asks what it could be. Imagine their shock when they realise that a male passenger on the bus had masturbated on the skirt.

A random survey taken of 200 women, who commute within the city of Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala, recently revealed that 99 per cent of respondents felt the city was not safe for women. This comes as a surprise. Thiruvananthapuram has a reputation for being relatively secure for women in comparison to a city like Delhi, for instance, where a recent Jagori study revealed that women and girls in public spaces were subject to sexual harassment at all times of the day and night. It seems now that the reality is no different in Kerala's capital city, and that 'yathrapeedanam', or 'abuse on wheels', is a recurring experience for most women on city buses.

Says Rajitha G., Programme Co-ordinator, Sakhi, which had conducted this survey, "We were taken aback, especially at the attitudes of bus conductors who witness such incidents on a daily basis." During Sakhi's hour-long session at a conductor-training programme, the disturbing conclusions of the survey were met with a lot of apathy. "The conductors argued that when women themselves do not come forward to help

a fellow commuter, why should a male conductor get involved. Some said they would have liked to intervene but were not sure what stand the victim would later take," reveals Rajitha. Most conductors are part-time employees and have other occupations, such as teaching. They seem to have no real stake in making life more secure for women commuters and profess that they do not wish to get embroiled in such "trivial issues", especially when they believe women often "ask for it by dressing provocatively". These personnel seemed more interested in talking about their grievances at work - the poor monetary compensation, the strict time-schedules, the hassles over shifts, and so on. Genuine grievances certainly, but something that should have contributed towards making them more sympathetic to working women who use public transport. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

In fact, many women are being forced to shift to the more expensive private modes of transport, even if they can ill afford to do so. Says R. Parvathydevi, an activist and freelance journalist based in Thiruvananthapuram, "I am in my 50s now and I can tell you that I felt safer on the buses when I was in my 20s, although there was less choice of transport then. There is more harassment now. So much so that women in this city are opting for more expensive modes of transport like autorickshaws and AC coaches, not because they can easily afford them but just in order to commute peacefully and safely every day."

Being the state capital, all public buses in Thiruvananthapuram are run by the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), a government institution. The buses that KSRTC plies have a serious design flaw: They have only one door at the rear end of the bus that serves as both the entrance and exit. The women's seating arrangements are also at the rear end. This means that if a male passenger chooses to sexually harass someone as he enters or gets down from the bus, it would be difficult to accuse him of deliberately coming into close proximity with women commuters.

Interestingly, the segregation of male and female commuters seems to be the generally acceptable suggestion for dealing with the problem. Sakhi's coordinators, who attended conductor-training sessions in Palakkad, Kochi, Malappuram, Kannur and Trichur, found the male viewpoint strongly endorsing segregationist arrangements. But, as feminists in Kerala have argued, this is not just about seating arrangements, it is about educating the public to recognise and fight sexual harassment. Says well-known feminist K. Ajitha, President of Anweshi Women's Counselling Centre, Calicut, "In Kerala, you will never find a man and woman who are complete strangers sitting together on a bus. If they do, it is the woman's morality that will be questioned."

According to Ajitha, Malayali women are not aggressive enough. "There is some change and the fact that the vernacular media is beginning to publish reports on women who have reacted to sexual harassment on the streets and lauding their efforts for having done so, is an indication of this. But the pace of change is still too slow. Women have to learn to react," she says.

This perception was endorsed by conductors that Sakhi contacted. According to them, female commuters in Kerala fail to react when harassed. Observes Rajitha, "Once the

bus crosses the Tamil Nadu border, things take a very dramatic turn. Women in Tamil Nadu respond very strongly to the slightest suspicion of misbehaviour.”

Sakhi is now working to create greater public awareness on this issue and has set up panchayat resource teams of 25 gram panchayat members each. Through posters, newsletters and regular public meetings, it hopes to educate the public to react to such unacceptable behaviour. “The idea is not to create a scene but to ensure a hostile response - whether by making eye-contact or loudly confronting the attacker,” explains Rajitha.

The campaign is all set to carry on. Sakhi has released 14,000 and 10,000 stickers each to the KSRTC and the police of Thiruvananthapuram district, which have the words ‘Stop Abuse of Women in Buses’ on them, with two helpline numbers printed across in bold red ink. But sometimes even these stickers fared poorly. Sakhi members found some of them scribbled with obscene graffiti and with the numbers scratched out in the city’s bus depots.

There is also a plan to undertake a more detailed and extensive survey in one more city in Kerala - Kozhikode (Calicut) - by using the methodology evolved by Jagori in partnership with UNIFEM. It will have questionnaires as usual but it will also have focus group discussions that include women from physically challenged or deprived backgrounds who use public transport regularly. There will also be a ‘capacity gap analysis’, while pinpointing loopholes in existing policies through measures like a safety audit for women in public places. Such a safety audit will zero in on the most danger-prone areas and check out aspects like infrastructure - the presence of street lamps, for example. Each area will be mapped both during the day time and night, in terms of security. Whether, for instance, there are sufficient “eyes on the street”: The presence of vendors and hawkers - which help to make public places more secure - and whether there is a police station or assistance booth in the vicinity.

But most important of all for Sakhi is to raise public awareness about what constitutes sexual harassment in very clear-cut terms. “It was difficult to explain this for the first time. Sexual harassment can be anything from a slight brush of the hands to groping,” says Rajitha, adding, “Women are subject to lewd comments or have someone break out into a song full of double-entendre in their presence. They have to face ‘flashers’ and strangers driving up to them in cars with offers of lifts.”

The question ultimately is this: When will society understand that sexual harassment, no matter what form it takes, is unacceptable and needs to be confronted by everybody - from the women commuter herself to the casual bystander.

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INDIA PLANNING CITIES AS IF WOMEN MATTER

By Pamela Philipose



As in other parts of the world, India's urban population is registering an inexorable rise. Saugata Roy, the minister of state for urban development, plotted this graph in Parliament recently. The number of urban Indians, he said, is projected to increase from 286 million in 2001, to 320 million in 2011 and 530 million by 2021. This means that the nature of the country's towns and cities, and the way they grow, will be crucial in determining the future well-being and ways of life of a little less than half the country's population in the near future.

For women specifically – who constitute half the urban population – the nature of the urban environment is of even greater concern since it involves their personal safety and mobility. A recent study, 'Safe City Free of Violence Against Women and Girls' – a joint action research initiative by Jagori, UNIFEM, UN Habitat along with the Delhi government – underlined the omnipresent and persistent nature of the threat. It revealed that women in the Capital face all kinds of harassment at all times in all manner of public urban spaces. While Delhi was the focus of this particular study and is arguably India's most dangerous metro for women, no Indian city or town can claim to be free of such crime.

"Attacks on women in public spaces point to the serious gender inequalities and biases marking the use and design of our cities," remarks A.G.K. Menon, architect and convenor of the Delhi Chapter of INTACH (Indian National Trust For Art and Cultural Heritage). INTACH is a non-profit organisation involved in protecting and conserving India's vast natural, built and cultural heritage.

One woman who is working to change the scenario is Romi Roy, Senior Urban Designer and Planner. She is currently a senior consultant at Unified Traffic & Transportation Infrastructure (Planning and Engineering) Centre (UTTIPEC), Delhi Development Authority. Roy feels Mumbai and Kolkata are much safer than Delhi, “For me as a designer, what strikes me about a city like Delhi – and this is precisely what makes it unsafe for women – is the fact that it has been designed in a very American way. That is to say that everything is oriented to accommodate the car.”

Cities need to cater to the rights of everyone living in it. Shipra Narang Suri, a Delhi-based urban planner, observes, “Different people have different needs. The poor are routinely overlooked by city planners, although they constitute the majority of a city’s residents. We also need to remember that 50 per cent of city-dwellers are women, many of them moving for work or leisure, using public amenities and transport.”

But Indian cities, according to Gautam Bhatia, well-known architect and the author of several books, including ‘Punjabi Baroque and Other Memories Of Architecture’, seem to lack a larger vision. “Tragically, developers have come to define urban lifestyles in India today,” states Bhatia.

Given that planning for cities in India has been generally blind to the needs of the people who live in them, especially women, what can we do to change the scenario? Menon believes the times demand out-of-the-box thinking. “Today, the realisation is growing that a city’s architecture is man-made and that we need to stop seeing the world as an environment for the adult male. The time has come in urban India to retrofit our urban spaces to conform to the principles of equity,” he says.

One of the ways to do this is to encourage mixed use of urban land, so that the spread-out, low density, unsafe areas are eliminated and the non-sexist cities of ordinary people can emerge. “Our zoning regulations ensure to keep people apart. We create our own city blocks, so that where one shops is very far from where one lives. We don’t plan keeping these factors in mind, we don’t plan keeping Indian conditions in mind,” rues Bhatia.

Roy points out how after dark no part of Lutyens’ Delhi is safe for women, although in the crowded areas of the Old City things are far more secure, “Any area that caters only for single use and which has big boundary walls makes you feel totally unsafe.”

She also talks about how most of Delhi’s shopping areas – even the new malls – don’t rise from the streets like they do in many European cities. Says Roy, “In cities where you have shops rising from the footpath or pavement, you have a feeling of safety because you feel there is activity on the edge. Delhi’s shopping areas are designed with the presumption that people will be driven to the shopping area. In actual fact, of course, only 15 per cent of Delhi’s population drive vehicles, 85 per cent of people walk. In fact, when foot activity increases, so does safety.”

There are a lot of guidelines on how a city can be made safer. According to Roy, one of the most basic and fundamental principles, is to ensure eyes on the street. "But this can only happen if you have mixed use of land, when all city activity is interlinked in some manner," says Roy.

It is an argument that Suri concurs with, "The safest parks are those which involves activities in which the whole neighbourhood is involved in, which have swings, walking paths, areas for games. Those beautifully landscaped green areas which no one visits can soon deteriorate into becoming sites of criminal activity."

A feeling of security is also linked with something as basic as locating civic amenities. One of the issues that emerged very strongly in the Jagori study was that women felt insecure when men's toilets opened straight on to street. They also felt safer when there was commercial activity on the street. Menon, who is advising the Delhi government on how to plan the area around the new 28-storey Civic Centre that has come up in the heart of the Capital, points out that the Jagori study suggested that women felt much safer in areas where there was commercial activity, "So one of the suggestions we made as to the Delhi authorities was to have more kiosks in areas where people wait for their transportation, for instance, in order to ensure 'eyes on the street'," says Menon.

The problem, according to Menon, is that it is difficult to change the mindsets of officialdom. City administrators typically dislike kiosks and vendors because they feel they create chaos and dirt. Safety of women is not really a priority for them. As Menon puts it, "They don't realise the import of what we are trying to say: That a city's design can play an important role in creating a safe working and living environment."

For far too long, women have had to accommodate themselves to the dangers that confront them when they go out of their homes. They have had to constantly restrict themselves: They hunch in a public bus or avoid walking on a narrow pavement for fear of being groped. They always have to think of the safety implications of where they go and what they wear. "We need to democratise public space and for this safety has to become a priority for both opinion makers, politicians and ordinary citizens," reasons Suri.

The battle for safe public spaces has a long history. It was in the early seventies that the slogan "Women Unite, Take Back The Night" first reverberated on the streets of Los Angeles and New York (USA). These words continue to be relevant in India today. But women need to take back not just the night, but the day as well – going by the number of daylight attacks. And it is not a women's issue alone. Security for women translates into security for everyone in the city.

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INDIA EXCUSE ME! CAN I JUST LIVE FREELY IN THIS CITY?

By Kalpana Viswanath



New Delhi (Women's Feature Service) - Over the past several years, it has become apparent that women's safety, or the lack of it, plays a central role in determining their mobility and access to a city. The data recently released by the Delhi government, of a joint survey with Jagori and UNIFEM conducted by New Concept Information Systems, highlights and reinforces earlier studies and media reports on how violence and the fear of it have come to define women's experience of the city. These surveys and reports clearly indicate that women and girls face constant threats to their well being in carrying out daily activities such as going to work, school, college, market, and so on.

The data from an extensive survey of 5,010 people covering all the nine districts of the national capital at 22 locations with both men and women respondents has thrown up several interesting findings. Delhi seen through a gendered lens is not a pretty picture. Women's daily experiences include being stared at, followed, catcalls, and other forms of sexual harassment that is often referred to as "eve teasing". The survey reported that over 90 per cent women and 85 per cent men felt that just being a woman was a vulnerability. Over 70 per cent women were routinely subject to staring, leering and verbal forms of harassment and 30 per cent reported fearing a violent physical attack.

It is clear that these are not issues to be dismissed or taken lightly. It is, therefore, important to name it as sexual harassment and not the more trivialised 'eve teasing', which gives it a light hearted touch and is often misunderstood as "harmless flirting". A whopping 66 per cent women respondents also reported that they had faced incidents

of violence and harassment between two to five times in the past year, while 28 per cent had faced them more than five times. This reveals clearly that it cannot be seen as harmless fun, but as something which affects their ability to move around the city freely.

In the week following the data release, several news channels interviewed women around the city and their experiences completely supported the findings.

Young women, especially school and college students reported the highest number of cases of verbal harassment (87 per cent) and staring (75 per cent). Unfortunately, girls and women in this city learn very early that it is a jungle out there. They learn to avert their gaze, carry safety pins and not stay out after dark among other things.

“Ever since childhood we are told - Never walk too close to a car, walk away, walk fast, look at all sides, observe shadows and one thinks - ‘Excuse me! Can I just walk on this road?’”

Despite these dire findings, it is heartening to note that women are not taking this lying down. In fact, one of most interesting findings of this survey is that more than 60 per cent women confronted the harasser in some way. This was uniformly high among women from different age groups and in different occupations. Even among younger women in schools and colleges, as many as 50 per cent reported responding to the harasser in some way. This finding echoes those from an earlier survey women conducted by Jagori in 2009. It is, therefore, important to recognise that while safety continues to be a concern for women, they are no longer ready to be only at the receiving end. Their responses included answering back verbally, shouting at the perpetrator or even responding physically. One woman’s response was:

“Ek 30-35 saal ka aadmi mere peeche khada ho kar mujhe haath laga raha tha. Achanak maine uska haath pakda aur uske mooh par do thappad mare” (A man of 30-35 was behind me and tried to feel me. I caught his hand and gave him two slaps!)

Women’s silence and the apathy of the public have often been cited as reasons for the impunity with which men are able to get away with sexual harassment and public violence in the city. Unfortunately, this increase in women’s confidence to deal with situations of sexual harassment has not been accompanied by increased support from the public at large. The survey threw up the fact that 69 per cent men and 54 per cent women preferred not to get involved when they witnessed sexual harassment in public places. This lack of support from the public is echoed by the women themselves as only 17 per cent of them said that they had ever sought the help or support of bystanders.

Surprisingly, women’s own response has been supported in many cases by families. It is noteworthy that nearly 65 per cent of the women reported that they had turned to their families when faced with situations of sexual harassment. This was reported by women across all ages. This points to a significant change in the attitude of the family.

While there are still many cases where the family may choose to restrict a woman's mobility due to fear of violence these results point to the fact that attitudes may be changing. There could be several reasons for this, including sound economic ones.

Family response and support is the key to boosting a woman's confidence and her ability to deal with violence in her daily life. Traditionally, the Indian family has been known to see women as bearing the 'honour' of the family and place severe controls upon them. These ideologies are played out most starkly in the "honour killings" that have come into the limelight of late. While it is often the more heinous and violent crimes against women that come into the public glare, this survey also points to a more quiet change that is taking place. It is interesting to note that over 50 per cent of the women said that families had prepared them and even motivated them to be independent. When they shared incidents of sexual harassment at home, less than 10 per cent reported that their mobility was restricted for fear of violence.

It is encouraging to note women's increasing confidence to assert their rights and the growing support of the family, even as their daily experience of the city continues to be one of violence and fear. While recognising the importance of police, state and other institutions in creating safer cities for women and girls, we cannot underestimate the role of positive actions and responses by individuals, families, communities and the society at large in creating safer environments.

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INDIA

DELHI WOMEN CAN DEPEND ON BUS CONDUCTORS FOR A SAFER RIDE

By Tripti Nath



New Delhi (Women's Feature Service) - Almost a decade ago, a newspaper advertisement issued in public interest by the Delhi Police showed women being harassed at a bus stand in the presence of silent male bystanders. The copy read: 'There are no men in this picture or this would not happen'. The text may have sexist overtones but it flags the fact that Delhi has long had a reputation for being the most unsafe city in India for women.

Research by civil society organisations like Jagori, a women's training, documentation and communication centre based in Delhi, revealed that public transport is one of the critical spaces where sexual harassment takes place. Yet, women are forced to suffer this crime in silence, as people around them - mostly men - choose to look the other way. Even when a woman raises her voice against someone trying to invade her personal space, she gets no support, not even from the bus conductor who is the sole interface between the transport authority and the public.

Anuradha Singh, 42, a Delhi professional, confirms this trend, “I have been commuting by DTC buses from college days. As a student one doesn’t know how to deal with harassment and feels extremely violated. If one decides to challenge them, there is no help forthcoming. Things have not really changed over the years.”

Adds Sakshi Khurana (name changed), 25, “Before I started commuting by buses I was given a list of do’s and don’ts by my mother. But nothing worked.”

In an effort to make the daily commute of women like Anuradha and Sakshi a little more secure, the Delhi Government’s Department of Women and Child Development teamed up with Jagori, to organise a three-day gender sensitisation training workshop for the instructors of the Delhi Transport Corporation’s (DTC). The workshop, held at DTC’s training centre in Nand Nagri in North-east Delhi, was part of a project on making cities more gender inclusive.

A recent survey by Jagori conducted among women who have been living in Delhi for more than five years has confirmed that 70 per cent of women suffer sexual harassment of one kind or another in public places. Although its findings are yet to be formally released, the survey has shown that 38 to 40 per cent women face sexual harassment in buses, autorickshaws and even on the metro.

Keeping in mind this disturbing scenario, Jagori designed a training module to sensitise DTC instructors. They, in turn, train drivers and conductors - the men who can eventually help make a difference. Fifty DTC instructors participated in the programme, which was supported by UNIFEM and the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.

During the training, the message was clear: Safety of women commuters should extend beyond merely running “ladies special” services. According to the 30-page training module, DTC drivers should ensure that helpline numbers are displayed on every bus. It reminds drivers and conductors of their right to refuse entry to persons who are drunk or are carrying arms. It enumerates nine actions that constitute sexual harassment and calls upon drivers to apprise supervisors in bus depots about cases of harassment and the action taken on such cases.

Besides, the module seeks to create legal awareness by listing the provisions in the Indian Penal Code that punish sexual harassment - Section 294 for obscene gestures or songs; Section 354 for outraging the modesty of a woman by using criminal force; and Section 509 for outraging a woman’s modesty through obscene words or gestures.

Jagori has also taken a tough stand on the issue of reserved seats for women in DTC buses, which are much resented by men. The module clarifies that the seats reserved for women are their right and should continue to be so till commuting conditions are improved men can reclaim these reserved seats with ample evidence of conduct.

On the opening day of the training programme, Rahul Roy, a well-known documentary filmmaker credited with pioneering work on issues related to masculinity, initiated the

interaction with DTC instructors by asking a simple question: “How many of you have heard of complaints of sexual harassment from women in the family?” To his surprise, only three instructors raised their hands. He then asked the instructors if they had ever asked women members in their families to share problems related to sexual harassment. The question evoked responses bordering on chauvinism. Stated an instructor from Gurgaon, “In our families, women don’t even step out to buy a matchstick.” Another added that if their female relatives were ever stalked or harassed, they as the men of the family would not spare the person indulging in such behaviour.

Roy listened and then set an assignment for the instructors. Their homework on day one was to ask any woman member of their family whether she had faced harassment in a public place. The following day, three instructors came back with the admission that women in their families had indeed faced harassment and often suffered these experiences in silence as they feared retaliation. The instructors were more vocal when it came to talking about cases of sexual harassment on DTC buses. Observed C.P. Singh, an instructor, “Men who are in the habit of passing lewd remarks don’t make any difference between women in their twenties and women in their fifties.”

Most instructors felt that drivers and conductors need to be empowered to take action in cases of sexual harassment. Said Singh, “We recently got a circular directing us to flash headlights and blow the horn to draw attention to a case of sexual harassment. The circular authorises the driver to approach a police control room or a police van for help.”

However, Singh’s colleague, Davinder Singh Tanwar, felt that dependence on the law may not always be the best solution. He recounted a case of sexual harassment in Naraina in West Delhi: “A boy of 21 years was stalking a schoolgirl. I got together with some locals and we took him to a barber and asked him to tonsure the boy’s head and shave off his eyebrows.”

Geetika Sharma, Joint Director in-charge of Women Empowerment Cell, Delhi Government, explained the relevance of such gender training exercises, “We want women to be able to step out of their homes and use public transport without fear. Every bus should have a complaints box and the driver and conductor should have the social authority to teach a lesson to those who harass women commuters.”

According to A.K Srivastava, Senior Manager, Personnel and Training, DTC, over 3,600 DTC drivers and conductors had benefited from participating in an awareness building and gender sensitisation programme in 2007. “This time around, these 50 instructors will pass on the knowledge and wisdom they get from such training to 9,563 regular conductors, including 30 women conductors, and 9,536 drivers. They will do this through depot visits and refresher courses,” he said. He believed that such efforts will motivate drivers and conductors to make quick and effective decisions in case they are confronted with a situation where a woman passenger is being sexually harassed.

DTC has a fleet strength of 4,500 buses. According to Srivastava, the Corporation is thinking of providing mobile phones to the 1,000 drivers on duty during Commonwealth Games. This would also aid them in seeking police help promptly, should it be needed.

If such interventions help make women like Anuradha and Sakshi feel more secure in the city, and encourage bus conductors and drivers to swiftly assess situations of harassment and respond effectively, they would have served their purpose. Delhi, besides being the capital of the country, has emerged as its crime capital as well. This dismal reality needs to be changed urgently.

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Photographs Available

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INDIA

I've Got My Eyes On You': How Women Students Face Stalking In Delhi

By Pooja Bakshi



New Delhi (Women's Feature Service) - Stalking is an extremely common form of sexual harassment in urban settings. It can range from being followed on the street to being bombarded by unwanted phone messages and emails.

More often than not, this form of sexual harassment goes unnoticed, dismissed as being passive and harmless. Yet, such behaviour can manifest itself in ugly, even murderous, ways. On March 8 – ironically, it was International Women's Day – Delhi was shocked when a young student, Radhika Tanwar, was shot dead just outside her college on the South Campus of the Delhi University. The murder was perpetrated by a man who was obsessed with her and had been stalking her for many months.

Most young women students in Delhi have their own experiences of being stalked, and a recent study, anchored by the Delhi-based resource centre, Jagori, as part of the Gender Inclusive Cities Project, estimated that stalking constituted about 15 per cent of all forms of harassment faced by women in the Capital.

Says Raksha (name changed), a student pursuing her Master's degree in Political Science from Delhi University, "I don't even remember the first time I was stalked by someone. It just feels like men have been stalking me forever. Perhaps it's only over the last few years that I have started noticing my own discomfort about this." Raksha's statement reveals the unique nature of stalking.

Also there is a real fear that the stalker could react violently if confronted. Says Raksha, "It's not as if I don't retaliate when a guy in a bus stares pointedly at my private parts, but it is exhausting to keep doing it all the time. Sometimes you are also scared to retaliate because you don't know whether the other person will back off or attempt to cause further harm. Sometimes it's just more practical to ignore the stalker because, at the end of the day, you want to save yourself from getting physically hurt."

What makes a bad situation worse is the lack of public response to such behaviour. This "desensitisation" of society results in the burden of addressing the crime falling on the victim. The situation then becomes a vicious circle, where the woman continues to ignore her discomfort at being stalked due to the fear of others not acknowledging her agony, or responding inadequately to it, which in turn encourages the stalker to continue his heinous behaviour.

The lack of public response is also an indication of uninformed attitudes and widespread public ignorance. For many young men, women exist solely for their sexual gratification and "chasing women" is presumed to be part of the male DNA. The idea of a woman's consent is never factored into this assumption. A common argument is that women "ask for it" when they dress "provocatively".

Sachin (name changed), a student at Delhi University's South Campus, believes this is the case, "I am not saying that sexual harassment in any form is justified but sometimes people just ask for attention... and, yaar (friend), with guys it's also an ego issue. Ladkiyan tardna to kool hota hai na (it is considered cool among guys to stare at women)."

Mahesh, a Masters degree student of Delhi University, presents another view. "I think that the mentality of men in Delhi is just flawed. They are made to believe that they can get away with almost anything. You can't impose yourself on someone and hope to get away with it. Come on, I am a man and have sisters and a mother. I stand up for them in times when they need me, why can't others see things this way?" he says.

Women students say they don't want to be "protected"; they want to be respected as individuals. Reveals Akanksha (name changed), who is completing her third year as a Bachelors' degree student at Delhi University, "Going by my experiences of being involved in the anti-sexual harassment cell at college, I noticed that when a few of us got together and confronted the stalker, he would back down. At times, even the police respond to your complaint when you manage to take a college teacher along or go to them in a huge group."

Akanksha also believes that the existence of statutory bodies, such as anti-sexual harassment cells at the college level, help in providing students with a support base, especially in the case of students from outside Delhi, although it is also a fact that not many colleges have active anti-sexual harassment cells. She adds, “I have to say that it’s quite misleading to presume only women are stalked by men. In the process of running the cell, we came across cases of men being stalked by other men.”

In the attempt to make college campuses in Delhi safer for its inhabitants, a group of about 500 students across seven colleges marched on the streets of Delhi University’s North campus, two weeks after the Radhika Tanwar murder, shouting, “Bol ki bas ab aur nahi” (say that I will tolerate no more). This mobilisation was a part of an initiative taken by Jagori and the Delhi Police, aimed at sensitising different groups within the university to issues of sexual harassment.

The march was followed by the staging of a street play, ‘Dastak’, performed by the Asmita theatre group, which deals with violence against women on the streets. Through the play, an attempt was made to outline certain strategies of resistance which women could follow while being stalked. They included asserting oneself in front of the stalker by either confronting him directly or indirectly; informing friends and family; contacting helplines run by the police or civil society organisations, and approaching the police directly.

Says Prableen, who works with Jagori, “It’s very important to instill enough confidence in the victim so that she can acknowledge the harassment she experiences. It must also be made very clear that it’s not the women’s fault that she is being stalked or harassed. At the same time, we must collectively stand up against harassment of all kinds.”

Prableen believes that it is useful for civil society groups to work in collaboration with state organisations, such as the police, to ensure the accountability of the criminal justice system in ensuring women’s safety. “We have to work towards making redress mechanisms more accessible to women whilst simultaneously ensuring the accountability of these mechanisms,” she says. Jagori, in fact, has partnered the Delhi government to focus on issues like safety in public spaces and effective policing.

Among students, though, there is a high level of scepticism about the police. Many who had joined the recent protest spoke in one voice when they observed that the police are far too apathetic to the issue. “Is it too much to ask that the Delhi Police respond promptly to calls? Support women complainants and act swiftly and sternly against perpetrators of violence? Ensure that the complainant feels reassured when she comes to lodge her FIR, free from those who seek to pressurise her to withdraw her complaint?” they asked.

A lady police officer stationed at the gates of Delhi University’s Faculty of Arts believes she can make a difference. “I was transferred here recently and I hope that my presence

as a woman ensures that other women feel more comfortable about reporting instances of stalking or any other form of harassment to me,” she says.

But the presence of a police officer here or there is unlikely to make much of a difference. What is most important in a city that witnesses the highest number of attacks on women in India is to build an environment of public safety in which everybody has a stake.

Is that too much to ask of Delhi’s eighteen million residents?

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Ends Sexual Harassment\Higher WFS REF NO. INDK330j

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