

This report is the final report on the activities of the Women's Commission before it was reconstituted on 20.10.2001. In the period, April – October, 2001.

The Women's Commission continued with its regular activities and also took some new initiatives. On 14 – 15 July the Chairperson Smt. Bela Dutttagupta Vice-chairperson Smt. Gita Sengupta, members Smt. Maya Niyogi, Smt. Martha Kujur, Smt. Chhaya Roy, Smt. Malini Bhattacharya and Member-Secretary Smt. Bindu Zutshi visited the district of Bankura and held two meetings with the Zilla Sabhadhipati, Panchayat members at the Zilla Parishad and block panchayat level administration, police officials, members of various Women's organization and legal personnel. They also visited a government sponsored women's home and the women's section in Bankura district jail. The objective of the meeting was to establish contacts with different people engaged in women's issues, to activate the administration and its different committees to take proper care in handling such cases and to sensitize panchayat members and the administration to such issues.

On 19 July the chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and other members held a meeting at Lalbazer with C.Cs of different police stations in the metropolitan area to expedite certain cases which are lying with the Commission. The Commission has again and again apprised the government of the difficulties faced by the commission in ensuring the presence of witnesses and persons against whom complaints have been lodged at the Women's Commission. In most cases the police officers are reluctant to co-operate with the Women's Commission when their help is sought in this matter. Having a discussion with police officers in the metropolitan area in the presence of higher police officers in the metropolitan area in the presence of higher police officials like Commissioner of Police, Shri Sanjoy Chakraborty, and D.C.D.D. (I) & (II) no doubt, clarified some of our points but the problem is very much there and we have to inform the government that unless a government order apprising all O.Cs of the Commission's statutory powers to call witnesses and to call for evidence and instructing them to co-operate with the Women's Commission is issued by the government, the exercise of the Commission's statutory power remains limited. We are bringing this to the notice of the government through this report.

The Commission has been visiting Liluah Home regularly for the last few years. During the last six months also two such visits have been partially implemented. However, the Commission is displeased to notice that even after we communicated the complaints made by a number of the girls at the Home against one of their co-inmates, this last mentioned person was allowed to go scot free. It was only after things reached such a state that the police had to be called in to arrest the above mentioned person that the authorities were activated. It seems clear to us from this and from another incident in which a girl at the Home became pregnant that even among the staff there are certain elements who are powerful enough not to abide by any discipline. We have recommended before and are recommending now that to prevent such unhealthy power bases within the Homes a regular and transparent transfer policy has to be implemented by the Government. Another incident at Shilayan, a government girls' Home at Baharampur in which Smt. Malini Bhattacharya, member Women's Commission intervened, also reinforces our position that such unholy power bases set up by a section of the staff in government Homes has to be broken up immediately. We have already discussed the matter with the superintendent, Liluah Home, the medical officer and the DSWO, Howrah. And have impressed upon them the need for keeping the Women's Commission informed of the real problems at these Homes. We would also like to point out that the government has not so far taken any steps towards expediting the police cases in which the inmates are involved as witnesses, towards providing opportunity for high school education and physical activities like regular games etc. They have also not done anything about

segregating and taking trained care of deaf-mute inmates.

On 21 August the Women's Commission organized a meeting with women MLAs at the Bidhan Sabha Bhawan in order to interact with them and discuss ways and means of tackling women's issues like education, health, atrocities against women etc. This was the first interactive session of this kind attended by the majority of women MLAs cutting across parties and we hope that in future the fruits of such interaction may be garnered at the grass-roots where many of the MLAs are working.

The commission has with the help of the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, published in book form the proceedings of workshop on legal literacy that was held in 1997. The volume is titled 'Mayeder Chokhe Ain O Ainer Chokhe Mayera'. For another bilingual publication Better Laws against Rape, the manuscript are now ready for press. The last number of 'Nari Kantha' has also come out in September.

We wish to inform the government that the report on destitute Bengali Women in Vrindavan is ready and we have also sent the government the outlines of an action-plan which can only be implemented, if the government gives the green signal.

During our visit to the Chief Minister in July, he requested us to make a study on any remaining non-criminal lunatics in the various jails of West Bengal and to outline a rehabilitation plan for them. Some members of the Commission made a visit to the Presidency Jail where some NCLs were said to be were said to be and found that there were cases pending against all of them. However, we identified the problems of mentally disturbed women in jail custody of whatever category and sent our recommendations based on our experience. Response from the government is still awaited.