

## Half-yearly Report For The Second Half-year Ending On 30.12.97

### Govt. of West Bengal

Office of the W.B. Commission for Women

10, Rainey Park, Calcutta – 700 019.

Memo No. \_\_\_\_\_ Dated Calcutta, the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1998.

From : Dr. (Smt.) Bela Dattagupta.  
Chairperson,  
West Bengal Commission for Women.

To :

### REPORT

During 1997 – 1998 the West Bengal Commission for Women had been able to pursue a large number of activities and to explore newer and newer areas of investigation and inquiry.

In late 1996 and the early part of 1997, besides attending to individual complaints to the extent of at least sixty per month, the commission could also pursue other activities viz., visit to Liluah Home (First visit) and inquiry into the situation of inmates there. Meeting the Women Parliamentary Group of Common Wealth Parliamentary Association at the Assembly House, Calcutta, holding a Seminar on Divorce, Maintenance and Guardianship at Sisir Mancha, Calcutta, visit to Midnapore and Haldia for investigation into the condition of women there, visit to Nanur. Birbhum on complaints of misconduct on women by local roughs, a Second visit to Haldia for spot inquiry into the complaint of a rape victim at Haldia.

The new areas to be explored by the Commission included preparation of a Status Report on Women & Children in West Bengal, more legal awareness campaigns among women in the districts, setting up a Family Counselling Centre at the present premise of the Commission and development of a database concerning women and children at the Commission.

As mentioned in the previous Reports, the Commission has to deal with individual complaints to the tune of at least 50 to 60 per month. These complaints are of varied nature. These complaints are of various nature and in cases of conjugal disharmony the Commission faces, oftener than not, the difficulty of bringing both husband and wife before the commission for a dialogue and mutual settlement, if any. In most of the instances, the husbands play truant and repeated notices sent to them become infructuous. The Commission feels that it should have more power of the Civil Courts to prevail upon such husbands.

Also, as the number of individual complainants is quite large and the process of dealing with them dilatory, the Commission feels the necessity of having a Family Counselling Centre attached to it. Being relieved of this daily chore, the Commission will then be able to pursue more fruitful activities. A proposal on Family Counselling Centre has already been sent to the

Government of West Bengal and State Social Welfare Board.

In cases of complaints by parents regarding their non-maintenance by gainfully employed sons and daughters, the Commission wished to examine if the Maintenance of Parents by Children Act, passed in Himachal Pradesh could be given a try in West Bengal. The Hon'ble members of the Commission spoke with the Minister-in-Charge, Law and Judiciary on this point.

The Commission investigated into the complaints where the complainants had been discriminated against in their services, retirement benefits etc.

In course of the day to day function of the Commission, it is felt that the existing Act of the West Bengal Commission has some lacuna and needs amendments and revision. Ms. Manjari Gupta, Hon'ble member of the Commission and a legal practitioner at the Calcutta High Court has been requested to look into it and suggest revision. The Karnataka Women Commission Act is being consulted in this connection. It is a matter of great regret that inspite of repeated reminders, the finalization of rules for the Commission is still pending with the Government. Needless to say, this is causing endless inconvenience to members; in fact one member even resigned from the commission on this ground.

The West Bengal Commission for Women took upon itself the onerous task of meeting the children deported from Saudi Arabia and considering their rehabilitation in the most suitable manner. In this connection, a team of the members of the Commission, headed by the Vice Chairperson of the commission visited Berhampore (West Bengal) and made, with the help of the local administration, suitable arrangements for the placement of those deportee children. A Report has been submitted to the department of Social Welfare, Govt. of West Bengal. The team also took pains to tour the villages, allegedly, supplying children for migration abroad and talked with the parents. A report on this issue has also been sent to the Chairperson, the National Commission for women, New Delhi requesting her to take up the matter of issuing passports indiscriminately and the proliferation of false passports with the government of India. Also, the NGOs working with women and children in West Bengal have been apprised of the matter and requested to see if they could be of any help in this. As follow-up action, Dr. Malini Bhattacharya, Commission member, visited Berhampore again and set up a committee under the convenorship of the district Magistrate, Murshidabad to take up rehabilitation measures.

Feeling the importance of Mahila Adalat, the Commission met the Minister-in-charge, Law and Judiciary in early January, 1997 and a team comprising the Chairperson, Ms. Manjari Gupta and Ms. Bindu Zutshi, Member-Secretary of the Commission attended Mahila Lok Adalat held in Burdwan late in January, 1997. The Commission also requested the Minister-in-charge, Law & Judiciary to hold more such Mahila Lok Adalats in different districts, including Berhampore of west Bengal.

In view of non-compliance of the circular regarding Joint Guardianship of both the parents by the Board of Secondary education, West Bengal, the Commission has sent for enquires to the above authority on this point.

Acting intersectorally, the Commission is maintaining a close liaison with the Women's Grievance Cells at Lal Bazar and Bhowani Bhaban and a large number of cases of atrocities on women have been discussed with the D.C.-II(D.D.), Lal Bazar. She has promised to help the Commission by supplying a list of Police Stations in West Bengal along with the names of the

O.C.'s and their telephone members. The Commission is also liaising with the DIG/CID(Sp1.) at Bhowani Bhaban for quick disposal of cases of torture on women outside the jurisdiction of Lal Bazar. Also two quarterly meetings of the Commission with NGOs, Women's organizations and police authorities, mentioned above, have been held at the Commission's office premises and it is proposed to hold them regularly. These meetings aim at a two-way dialogue between the Commission on one hand and the police and local NGOs on the other. A few very constructive programmes have been broached by the Commission and it is at it for the last six months :

- (a) A Status Report on the Women and Children in West Bengal;
- (b) A well equipped library of book, journal and reports on women for building up a database at the Commission;
- (c) Frequent legal awareness Seminars throughout West Bengal including Calcutta at an interval of six months;
- (d) Apprising the department of I & C.A., Govt. of West Bengal of the necessity of putting up hoardings for the West Bengal Women's Commission. Also requesting advertising agencies, like Selvel to put up appropriate slogans on Women and Children on the hoardings. And, Commissioning artists to prepare posters for the suitable display at different conferences and Seminars on Women. In preparing the posters, the help of the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University may be solicited. These posters may also be lent to the women NGOs, against a refundable deposit, for their use in rural areas.

In pursuing the above schemes, different members of the Commission have been entrusted with charges of different projects: (a) Family Counselling Ms. Gita Senugpta and Ms. Maya Neogi; (b) Seminar & Workshops Dr. Ratnabali Chatterjee. And Ms. Vidya Munshi; (c) Advertisement & Posters – Ms. Vidya Munshi & dr. Malini Bhattacharya; (d) Bimonthly meetings with the police Ms. Aparajita Goopi & Dr. Malini Bhattacharyya; (e) Quarterly meeting with Women NGO's –Dr. Ratnabali Chatterjee and Dr. Malini Bhattacharyya.

In pursuance of the proposed scheme, three day seminar entitled "Legal Awareness in west Bengal" was held at the Jadavpur University premises from 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1997. The School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University and the West Bengal commission for Women jointly held the seminar. Proceedings of the Seminars are being prepared by the School of Women's Studies on behalf of the Commission.

The Second Seminar on Legal Awareness was held in Birpara, Jalpaiguri on 14-15<sup>th</sup> November, 1997. In both the seminars legal experts, local educationists and intellectuals were involved in a large way. The proceedings are being processed.

To give shape to the library and database project, two top library experts have been involved. The first list of books, journal, reports to be bought has been sent to the social Welfare Department, government of West Bengal. On the basis of an advertisement in the local dailies, applications have been received and short listed for the final appointments on a temporary and ad-hoc basis of a Librarian-cum-Research Officer and a Junior Librarian.

Regarding the project 'Status of women & Children in West Bengal', a meeting of the

members of the commission, experts from different disciplines at the Universities, research institutes of repute like ISI, ASI, was held at the commission and a core group of experts formed.

In view of some damaging news regarding the Liluah Home, published in local dailies, the Commission sent two of its members there to make in-depth inquiries into the situation reported. The director of Social welfare Board was requested to come to the Commission to have a thorough discussion on what has been seen by the two members. Mr. R.M. Zamir, director of social welfare Board explained why such untoward things are cropping up, again and again, at the above Home. He assured the Commission that steps would be taken to stall such situations in future. The Commission took the view that the Home Minister and the Judicial Minister might be apprised of the situation and requested to see that the cases of minors and those who had attained adulthood during their stay in the Home were disposed off as quickly as possible. The Commission has resolved to send its members to visit Liluah Home on a quarterly basis and has been acting upon it.

Also, regarding education of the deaf and dumb inmates of the Home, an NGO called REACH might be given charge and the Commission offered to seek government help in this matter.

The Commission has not kept its activities within a narrow confine either. Nothing concerning women has been alien to it. As such, the Commission promptly responded to the case of murder of Shyamali Sarkar, a sex-worker at Sonagachi area and made enquiries with the O.C. Burtolla P.S. Calcutta. As the case is now being handled by the D.C. (D.D.)- I & II, the Commission stopped proceeding further into the case.

The Commission has also taken up the case of a local medical practitioner, Dr. Biral Mullick who has been using "Quinacrine" illegally for sterilization purposes. This medicine is universally condemned as a sterilizing drug in the medical world and also by the World Health Organisation. Its use in India for this purpose has since been banned by an order of the Supreme Court.

The medical practitioner, in question, was called to the Commission and reprimanded for his activities. He was also warned that, unless he gives up this practice of using "Quinacrine" his case would be brought before the Indian Medical Association for appropriate action. The Commission has resolved to set up an investigating team to meet women claimed to have been treated by him.

As awareness generation about women is one of its basic tasks, the Commission is approaching the director, Door Darshan Calcutta, with a proposal for showing non-commercial advertising spots on women's issues. The production of these will be funded and supervised by the Commission.

In the financial year 1998-99, apart from its regular activities, the Commission proposes to hold at least three awareness raising seminars in the Districts and in Calcutta and also to start the first phase of compiling the status report on women in West Bengal. For this, enhancement in the existing infrastructure would be required. The Commission also proposes to start its library and archival collection if adequate funds are available. It is also proposed to start a quarterly newsletter of the Commission, and to publish proceedings and recommendations of

various seminars organized by the Commission. If additional funds are available, the Commission also proposes to organize a Lok Adalat in this financial year.

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**Budget allotment and expenditure on  
Activities covered in the report at a glance.**

1.Seminar on 'Legal awareness' at Jadavpur University Auditorium from 19.07.1997 to 21.07.1997 :

Expenditure	–	Rs.	15,000.00
Allotment – Nil.			

2. Seminar on 'Legal awareness' at Birpara, Jalpaiguri district from 14.11.1997 to 15.11.1997

Expenditure	–	Rs.	45,000.00	(Approx.)
Allotment – Rs. 45,000.00				

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