



## **THE ROLE OF MEN IN THE INCREASING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

11<sup>th</sup> January 2013

A Call to Men- by Forum to Engage Men (FEM) for gender equality  
Organised by Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) and SANGAT- South Asia

While condemning the recent gang rape in a Delhi bus, the members of Forum to Engage Men for gender equality (FEM) wanted to raise concern about how we address the issues of violence in general and the deep seated issues of gender inequalities and masculinities that allow these atrocities to happen. FEM, a network of individuals and organisations, launched in India in 2007, with the primary objective of working with boys and men to usher in a gender just society, recognises the need for working with men. From our diverse efforts and work with communities we have learnt that it is difficult but not impossible to challenge and change prevalent constructs of masculinity by enlisting men from different social strata as allies in the work on gender equality. We are convinced that men have a lot to gain from interrogating power systems that provide them with short-term privileges, but deprive them of the lasting benefits that would accrue from an equitable world. Over the years there has been a growing acknowledgement of the need to work with men for addressing violence against women and for promoting gender equality. This is important because otherwise the issue gets framed as a women's issue and men's culpability as a 'gender' (group) gets ignored and many men who personally may not use 'violence', get disassociated from this larger gendered social problem. There is also a growing understanding that men's relationship to power is not limited to gender (female-male) issues and needs to be situated within a more nuanced understanding of masculinities or men's relationship and experience of power, privilege and subordination along different social axes and cultural domains.

FEM along with CHSJ and Sangat South Asia organized a meeting to discuss the role of men in the increasing violence against women on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2013 at CHSJ office in Saket, New Delhi. The one-day meeting was an interactive session and included over 70 participants, mostly men from Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, schools of Delhi, Civil Society Organisations, women's groups, international donor organisations, Dalit rights organization, child rights groups, trade unions, hotel workers unions, activists from the community and youth leaders from urban slums of Delhi.

Dr. Abhijit Das, Director, Centre for Health and Social Justice, setting the agenda stated that it was good that the participants included several youth from Delhi who have little prior experience of working on gender as it is critical to view this issue not as a women's rights one alone but to make it a part of our everyday social and personal life and reflect on the role of men through this perspective. The role of men is not to stand as protectors of women, but to support women in their process of empowerment.

Suneeta Dhar, Director, Jagori expressed the need to work with young men and boys to help them explore their role in violence, in the social set-up, in the family





and in their communities. The young men must reflect why women from all age groups in a city like Delhi always face sexual assault on the streets, in parks or other public places? Why must women feel that they must be accompanied by men to feel protected? Why must women get blamed for the violence they suffer? Why do we as a society normalize violence? When we reflect on these questions, we reflect on patriarchy and the roles defined for men and women. There is a need to look at women's rights- at women's education, sexuality and reproduction separate from the role they will play in life. Suneeta argued around reanalyzing the home as space where violence takes place. Violence is not always done by outsiders, whom we do not know; violence is most often done by family members- people the women know well. There are no spaces for women- the home is not safe and the police station is not safe. After the December 16<sup>th</sup> incident, there has been a lot of reflection around violence, but we must remember that violence has been taking place before this and continues even now, even in Delhi. We must not forget the violence being suffered by people all around the country, especially in the villages. Suneeta recognized that there are men and boys who do not support this violence and are raising their voices against this. They must be welcomed in this struggle to work together and they must realise that this will not be an easy journey.

Satish Kumar Singh, representing the FEM, talked about men's role in stopping violence. Explaining the need for working with men, Satish stated that lot of feminists and people working with men's groups raise the question- why are some men violent and others not? Is violence an individual behavioral or personality trait? If it was a matter of one house, or if violence was rare and in between, then it could perhaps be so. The figures around violence, however state that 33% women face violence, some say almost half the women in the world face violence and if we expand the definition of violence then we realise that all of us men have



at some time been violent. If violence is so widespread then it cannot be a matter of individual personality trait. Violence is a part of and symbolic of systematic social structures which control and manipulate this aggression. These social structures are the deep rooted mindsets of patriarchy which promote and legitimise this violence. Men are made violent and the violence is accepted by society. However, men cannot forego all responsibility and claim that they are just what society made them. Men also carefully choose what habits to pick up and what benefits them. Men must. An increased role of the police and judiciary in stopping violence; sentencing the rapists to death; providing separate buses and schools for women and girls will not prevent violence, if men do not realise their privileges and be open to challenging them Satish further reiterated that patriarchy controls the life of men and women but it can be challenged. Patriarchy is all pervasive, yet weak as it constantly has to put checks and controls to remain dominant. Patriarchy is constantly threatened and is therefore most intolerant. Satish commended the participants who by choosing to be part of this questioning and reflection process had themselves, now, put up a challenge to patriarchy and to the mindset that permits violence against women.



This was followed by a group discussion where men were asked why they do not raise their voices when they see any violence being committed. Most men stated that they don't speak up as they themselves feel scared for their own security. Men said that they would consider helping if the women themselves asked for help, they do not want to intervene unless asked. There is still the belief that we should not interfere in other people's personal matter, even in the case of violence. Men also accepted that some amount of violence seems to be acceptable in our culture. Some men admitted a fear of a matriarchal society. Some men just want to avoid being in a police case. Some men also stated that they have received no guidance on how to deal with violence. Their family members also do not encourage them to intervene or raise a voice.

Dhiviya, Sangat South Asia, spoke about the One Billion Rising Campaign, which was launched in India on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2012. This worldwide campaign has been signed by 182 countries by now and has its aim the call to stop violence against women. Thousands of activists and women's groups' world over have struggled with to put an end to all forms of violence against women and girls. However, the United Nations states that 1 in 3 women on the planet will be beaten or raped during her lifetime. That is more than one billion women living on the planet today. OBR is a promise that we will rise up with millions of women and men around the world to say, "ENOUGH! The violence ends NOW." OBR is a global call to action. On February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013, we are inviting one billion women and those who love them to walk out, dance, rise up and demand an end to this violence and say that we refuse to stand by as more than a billion women experience violence. Dhiviya explained the need to unite and talk about the violence and to demand that it stops. Dhiviya described the various efforts around South Asia countries and the activities taking part in different parts of the country and the world. There are several activities being planned during this time and we hope to build support for the event on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

The meeting included screening of a couple of documentary films and group discussions regarding how to involve men in the struggle for gender equality in various institutional and family structures. The meeting ended with participants making commitments for future efforts in their communities, which would be followed upto the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2013 (culmination of OBR) and then systematically after February in the form of trainings and sessions in all the communities.



Commitments were made by participants regarding where they would like to initiate interventions around increasing male involvement in gender equality. There were commitments to carry forward discussion in schools and colleges and other educational institutions; in communities (mohalla); through street plays; through campaigns and meeting; screening films and disseminating publications; and other social media. Plans were also made for follow-up of these commitments, which FEM will take responsibility for.

For more information, please see [www.femindia.net](http://www.femindia.net)

For more on the work of CHSJ, please see [www.chsj.org](http://www.chsj.org)



For more on the work of SANGAT, please see <http://www.sangatsouthasia.org/index.html>

To become a part of the Forum to Engage Men network, please go to <http://www.femindia.net/become-a-member.html>