



MUMBAI FIRST & SNDT WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY

hosted a virtual discussion

on

Safe Mumbai: New Age Policing for Women's Safety

Esteemed Panel



Smt. Aswati Dorje
Special I.G.P, Director ,
Maharashtra Police Academy



Dr. Nandita Shah
Co-Director, Akshara



Dr. Poornima Advani
Former Chair, National
Commission for Women



Mr. Anil Dharker
Founder & Festival Director,
TATA Literature Live



Moderator
Mr. Naresh Fernandes
Editor, Scroll.in

29 December, 2020



Safe Mumbai: New Age Policing for Women's Safety

The discussion began with context-setting and a quick round of introduction of the eminent panel by the moderator, Mr Naresh Fernandes. In his opening remarks, he mentioned-

“If one were to ask Male Residents about women safety in Mumbai, they would probably speak of how the city is extremely liberating and safer in comparison to other cities like Delhi. They would speak of how women can take taxis at 2 am without any worry. If one were to speak to women, they share experiences of being verbally abused or inappropriately touched in heavily crowded areas.” NCRB Statistics back these experiences of women. **Last year, Mumbai ranked third in terms of reported rapes and second in terms of molestation and topped the list of sexual harassment in the public transport system.** A city that never sleeps and the high density of population are some of the intangible factors that play an important role in women feeling safe. This idea of invisibility masks a serious problem which has been on the rise- violence against women within the confines of their homes. **In a statement issued by the National Commission for Women, domestic violence has increased almost 2.5 times since the beginning of the pandemic.** The challenge of women safety, one would believe could be tackled through a transformation of attitudes- attitudes of men more particularly. In this context what role does law and policing play in tackling violence against women?

Discussing challenges faced by women in Mumbai, Dr Poornima Advani, Former Chair National Commission for Women mentioned that beneficiaries need to know about existing schemes, the concerned officers and helpline numbers. She also mentioned, **“Often helplines are initiated as kneejerk reactions”**. With regards to the Crimes Against Women cell in Mumbai, she raised pertinent questions- Are women aware of the existing helpline numbers, is the information available at railway platforms? Can women calling these helpline numbers expect to be helped? Statistics are questionable. Crimes often go unreported.

Quoting an incident involving rape which occurred in the Mumbai Local Train years ago, Dr Advani, “Are witnesses wanting to report and cooperate with the victim?” She mentioned that witnesses fear being harassed or the time taken during police procedures. Witness friendly policies are hardly known to people; they should be more visible to ordinary citizens. **Police investigation, forensic procedures and due process should be seen to be adhered to in order to give confidence to people.**

Large population of Mumbaikars reside in the slums and do not have access to technology or the numerous apps being launched. There is a need for publicity to reach them, so that they have the information and the confidence to reach out to those concerned. Investigation reports need to be filed appropriately till the time the case is brought up for trial. **Condition of women in shelter homes is an issue of concern and calls for serious attention.**

While Mumbai is better than its counterparts when it comes to women safety, Mumbai Slums seem to suffer because of various factors such as poor lighting. **There is a 33% reservation for Women police officers in India and 35% globally, however, in Mumbai Maharashtra, there is about 7.3%.**

Dr Advani, helped us revisit key questions- Are women police officers safe while on duty? What are the public toilet facilities available? In the past, there have been instances of police apathy towards women. Gender sensitization programs are crucial. It is important for those in duty need to be sensitive to women's needs.

Responding to challenges with regards to women safety, Mr Dharker highlighted that **India figures in the last 20% when it comes to gender inequality figures**, a natural consequence of which is male domination. Studies on men's opinions on violence reveal that they feel women should tolerate violence for the sake of the family and a lot who also believe women deserve to be beaten. Such attitudes of men are a cause for concern. Women's attitudes towards fighting for other women is sometimes a cause for concern. Violence on social media is an area which requires urgent attention.

In response to a question posed by Mr Fernandes on what makes Mumbai unique and lessons that India ought to learn from other parts of the world- Dr Shah, "**India lacks a comprehensive approach to Safety**". Helpline, CCTV cameras are short term responses to safety. Prevention is equally important when it comes to the safety of women as is Law and Policing. A multi-dimensional approach is key and this should factor in city design, more accurate data on unsafe areas, street lighting and submitting a comprehensive report thereby to relevant authorities. Mixed-use plan now incorporates a gender chapter and the high population density in the city make it safe for women. Currently, signage is purely meant for motorists or cars. The comprehensive approach should also consider signage and directions, maps. **A mindset change is a very important part of the prevention strategy.** Improving emergency response is needed.

All women's organizations in the city are currently opposing the Shakti Bill on grounds on the death penalty, provisions related to false cases. In the gravest of crimes, existing laws already mandate death penalty. Creation of a separate law seems counterproductive. Building platforms for lawmakers, civil society and police to engage in dialogue are necessary. **Safe public spaces, public toilets with lighting and other amenities, toilet facilities in schools and colleges and access to leisure are important considerations when it comes to women safety in Mumbai.** 95% of women in a survey had experiences of street sexual harassment or molestation. Making Mumbai the best when it comes to safety of women is important- not just its relative position with respect to other cities. This is the kind of vision that is required with the involvement of young people. **Curriculum in schools and colleges needs to incorporate gender equality and gender sensitization.**

Smt. Aswati Dorje was asked to share her experience of what it takes to ensure the safety of women in Mumbai City- areas of strength of Mumbai Police and areas for improvement. Commenting on the issue of safety, she mentioned that Mumbai seems to have the largest conglomeration of working women which makes it safer for women in the city. (both skilled and unskilled). Regarding police response systems, she mentioned that the skewed ratio of police to population and women in police population is gradually changing. The **Police Didi system** is one where Mumbai Police work closely with municipal schools and discuss good touch / bad touch, whom they can reach out help, etc. 3000 cases have been reported since the program commenced in 2015. Counselling centres have been initiated by TISS (8 in number) and Crimes Against Women, Police (3 in number). For reduced period of investigation, the one-stop centre would drastically reduce the time taken for investigation in cases of rape.

In the context of **crime prevention through environmental design**, Ms Dorje mentioned that the police should be involved in the design of schools, factories, colleges and hostels right from the design stage. Surveillance systems should be a mix of formal (typical police patrolling) and informal styles of surveillance (eyes and ears approach). It is crucial to identifying hotspots of violence and extend patrolling activities where there is missing lighting is. Systems should be identified to merge private CCTV camera input with existing police surveillance systems (5000 cameras under the Police currently). **Tackling of gender-based violence could be tackled by training of paralegal volunteers - population residing in the slums. This would be a force multiplier,**

“Domestic violence cuts across classes; and in cases of rape, an astonishing number of victims know their attacker”, Mr Naresh Fernandes. Responding to the class dynamic which plays out, Dr Nandita Shah mentioned that safety of women is an issue irrespective of class. It is important to discuss a city with people having access to all public spaces. A recent campaign by Akshara Centre in collaboration with Special Cell for Women and Children (a program of DWCD, GOM and TISS) focused on the need to for men and women to report domestic violence in wake of the rising cases during the pandemic. People were urged to stand up against domestic violence and break their silence through this initiative launched by the Chief Minister.

WebApp - Stand Up Against Violence is a joint collaboration between Akshara Centre, a women's right organisation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (RCI-VAW) and Department of Women and Child (Government of Maharashtra). The app includes mobile numbers of State and non- State agencies, service providers, women's movement groups responding to violence against women across Maharashtra at sub-district level. This information will make it easier for women survivors and supporters to access assistance.

The audience raised a question on how citizens and police can work together for women safety. Responding to this, Mr Dharker mentioned that there are often instances where ordinary citizen does not trust the police enough or fear the police, preventing them from reporting crimes. Smt.Aswati Dorje spoke of crime prevention initiatives such as **Bharosa Cell** where police, civil society, lawyers and doctors come together for the welfare of senior citizens, women and children. Accessibility in terms of police outreach has improved significantly given the massive following Mumbai Police has on its social media platforms such as Twitter.

Mr Dharker highlighted instances of how citizen groups have worked closely with the police (mohalla committees during the riots). He shared that citizen groups can discuss violence in their localities regularly and share the same with the police. Dr Shah mentioned having citizen groups at every police station involving citizens would be useful. Safety audits of college campuses, railway stations, routes to colleges with young people are necessary. Dr Advani discussed that the police should adequately publicize their **“victim-friendly” and “witness friendly” policies.** This would encourage people to report.

The session concluded with a vote of thanks to the co-organizers of the panel discussion, SNTD Women's University, Eminent panellists and the Mumbai First Team. Mumbai First will take up the recommendations from the discussion with the relevant authorities.

Panellists Profile



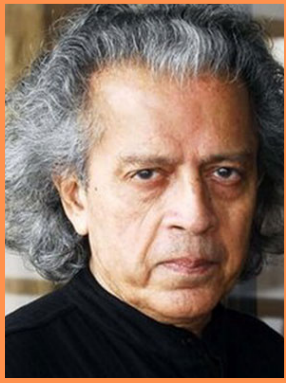
Smt. Aswati Dorje
Special I.G.P.,
Director, Maharashtra Police
Academy

Ms Aswati entered Indian Police Service in the year 2000. As Director of MPA, she headed the team that revised the Maharashtra Police Manual, after a gap of sixty years. She has recently headed the committee to introduce legislation on the lines of Disha Act of Andhra Pradesh to ensure more stringent punishment and speedier investigation to provide justice to survivors of violent crimes against women. During the span of her career, she was the head of the Mumbai Immigration and the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer. She was the first lady officer in the country to handle this responsibility. Ms Aswati has won the Internal Security Medal and Hard Area Medal for her services in the Naxal affected districts.



Dr Nandita Shah,
Co-founder of Akshara
centre

Dr Shah is the Co-director and Co-founder of Akshara centre, a non-profit organisation working for women's empowerment, building a gender-just society and equal society for men, women, and others. She has represented Akshara on many International platforms like the UnWomen-Commission of Status of Women, AWID, Feminist Dialogues, world social forum, Post Beijing platforms, Habitat III etc. Dr Shah is part of the Civil Society Advisory Group of the UN Women's multi-country office. She has been on the Planning Commission for Women's Rights, for drafting women's policy in Maharashtra. As an author, her books have been an important contribution to women's studies and the women's movement



**Mr Anil Dharker,
Founder & Festival
Director, TATA
Literature Live**

Mr Dharker is an Indian journalist and writer. He is the Founder and Director of the Mumbai International Literary Festival which is held in November every year. Dharker's most significant contribution to NFDC was to enable it to co-produce Richard Attenborough's film Gandhi, the multiple Oscar-winner. Dharker was also on the selection committees for India's International Film Festivals and has also represented NFDC in overseas film festivals in Cannes, Berlin, Chicago and London. Anil Dharker has been Editor of a variety of publications- Debonair (a monthly), Mid-day and Sunday Mid-day (evening papers); The Independent, a morning broad-sheet from the Times of India group and The Illustrated Weekly of India



**Dr Poornima Advani,
Former Chair,
National Commission for
Women**

Dr Advani is an Indian lawyer, author and social worker. She is currently, a Partner at The Law Point, a national law firm, which she co-founded in the year 2005, along with Mr B.N. Makhija, Former Principal Advisor, Planning Commission of India. Dr Advani formerly served as the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women and was also a de facto member of the National Human Rights Commission of India. She was also a member of various important committees such as Planning Commission of India; Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India; and Committee on Judicial Reforms, Government of India.



**Mr Naresh Fernandes,
Editor, Scroll.In**

Mr Fernandes is a Mumbai based journalist and author. He is the editor of Scroll.In, a digital daily. He was previously the editor-in-chief of Time Out India and worked at The Times of India in Mumbai and The Wall Street Journal in New York. His journalism has appeared in the leading magazines, publications and newspapers all over the world. He is the author of 'Taj Mahal Foxtrot: The Story of Bombay's Jazz Age' in 2012 and 'City Adrift': A Short Biography in Bombay' in 2013 amongst other books. He is currently a Poiesis Fellow at the Institute of Public Knowledge at New York University and is on the editorial policy board of the World Policy Journal.