

Structural overhaul to end violence rooted in multiple forms of discrimination and inequalities.

New Delhi, May 2, 2013

The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Ms. Rashida Manjoo has highlighted the fact that without addressing root causes of structural inequality and oppression, India cannot hope to address violence against women.

In her media statement issued yesterday, Ms. Manjoo, has raised critical questions to the Government of India on the swift – law and order approach that has been adopted to deal with issues of violence against women. With reference to the new rape legislation following the Justice Verma Committee report, she has not minced words in saying, “It is unfortunate that the opportunity to establish a substantive and specific equality and non-discrimination rights legislative framework for women, to address *de facto* inequality and discrimination, and to protect and prevent against all forms of violence against women, was lost.”

Her statement recognizes the deeply entrenched structural causes of discrimination and violence and the varied manifestations on girls and women. This includes multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence based on socio-economic situations. Her mention of caste based discrimination in this regard, clearly highlights the multiple barriers faced by Dalit women in accessing justice and fundamental freedom. Ms. Manjoo has further reiterated that the notions of male superiority combined with realities of social exclusion and marginalization, power and powerlessness, economic dependence and religion and cultural practices are at the core of violence faced by women from excluded communities.

In a very powerful manner, Ms. Manjoo brings the special focus on women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes stating, “Despite protective legislative and affirmative action laws and policies, their reality is one where they exist at the bottom of the political, economic and social systems, and they experience some of the worst forms of discrimination and oppression - thereby perpetuating their socio-economic vulnerability across generations.”

India’s obsession with growth and aggressive neo-economic policies at the cost of security and safety of women and girls in the country is clearly mentioned in her statement. Migration, trafficking, forced marriages, sex work and scavenging activities arising out of extreme poverty situations does not speak of a safe and conducive environment for women and girls in India.

While we eagerly look forward to her full report, which will be submitted in June 2014, we welcome whole-heartedly the first set of recommendations through this media statement. The UN Special

Rapporteur in her recommendation section states – “Grave concerns are noted as regards the continuing atrocities perpetrated against Dalit women. There is a culture of impunity for violations of the rights of Dalit women (CEDAW). Concerns are further expressed for the failure to properly register and investigate complaints of violations against scheduled castes and tribes, the high rate of acquittals, the low conviction rates, and the alarming backlog of cases related to such atrocities (CRC, CEDAW and CERD).

This recommendation is an indication of the failure of the Indian Government to protect Dalit women from systematic violence and discrimination. In spite of special legislations like the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, the perpetrators and the duty bearers enjoy impunity and victims of brutal violence continue to be victimized.

Further she also calls upon effective legislative reforms and proper implementation of policy to put an end to dedication of young girls as Devdasi's.

Dalit women platforms and individuals across the country have met the UN Special Rapporteur and her team members and have shared about the specific concerns of women from untouchable communities who continue to bear multiple forms of discrimination and violence.

We are delighted that Ms. Manjoo in her statement reiterates the need to analyze violence against women from a broader and deeper structural analysis in which lie the roots of inequality and oppression.

We welcome her statement and move ahead in our struggles for justice with yet another tool for realizing our dream of a gender just world in a caste stratified society like India.

Please find the link below for the full version of press statement released by SR on Violence Against Women, Ms. Rashida Manjoo on 1 May 2013.

<http://www.unic.org.in/displaymore.php?chname=Press%20Releases&subchkey=&chkey1=6&itemid=12739&subid=>

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