

# Struggle For Equality

(Sangharsh Samantano)



AWAG

Ahmedabad Women's Action Group - AWAG



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Dr. Kalpana Shah

Publisher  
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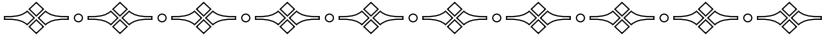
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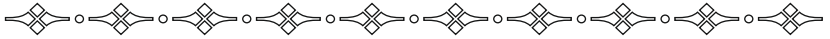
## Preface

In the year 2009, Dr. Ila Pathak considered the idea of penning down the history of twenty five years of AWAG, right since its inception to the year 2007-08. The organisation has grown with a lot of enthusiasm, goodwill and a confidence. She decided to put her idea into action. And, she asked me to undertake the work.

Ilaben introduced me to Ms. Nalini Trivedi. Her association with the organisation has been that of a close acquaintance and well-wisher. Very interestingly, Naliniben filled me with all the details of AWAG and shed light on minute specifics that helped me with the writing of the book. Being a sociologist and researcher, I thought it was inappropriate to publish descriptive accounts of the work undertaken by the organisation. Hence, during my discreet conversation with Ilaben, I comprehended that AWAG has done remarkable work which has not been documented so far. Thus began a [tête-à-tête](#) with Ilaben to document the détails of the work carried out by the organisation. While doing so, several unrecorded activities came to my notice. Ilaben commented that AWAG is an organisation that has upscaled itself, learning from its previous failures. The initial failures provided a guide to future, a need was felt for long termed planning, policy making and program designing. Ilaben recalled small and delicate incidences while conversing with me. She provided past information, records, publications and hand-written notes. All these data provided a base for me to write this book.

Both, Ilaben and I were deeply engrossed in this project. A final draft was prepared after two-three rough drafts. Unfortunately, while taking up this project, firstly because of her commitment towards other work and later because of her health, Ilaben could not have a look at the final draft of the book. Thus, it remained untouched and unpublished for a very long time. This whole project got buried under several other priority based works of the organisation.

During the time when AWAG was founded till the year 2016, several women organisations have been formed in the state of Gujarat and



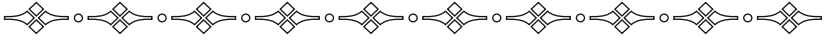
also in other parts of the country. They have followed women centric approach, so that women belonging to all socio-economic sections should avail basic amenities. For AWAG, health and education became an entry point for women 's é emancipation. Violence against women, especially awareness raising for the protest against domestic violence became the core work of the organisation. 'Save the woman, not the family', became AWAG's motto. A voice was given to all those women who were victims of domestic violence. AWAG taught these women to challenge and raise voice against the norms and rules made by the patriarchal society and the social structure which demeans the image of a woman in the society and treats her secondary. A woman was taught to think and take her own decisions and was provided legal support as and when required.

To eradicate violence against women, AWAG focused its energy to attack its roots. To target and implement this AWAG started protesting several malpractices within the society such as female foeticide, consumption of alcohol, exchange marriages, child marriages and three times talak verbal rule as per Muslim law. All these became the main agendas for the organisation.

AWAG decided to put down all its work in the form of a book. This is one of the best ways to provide a true homage to llaben.

Let me remember all those hardworking hands without which AWAG would not have proliferated so much. I want to recall and thank all those people who provided me all the details during my research to write this book. Bapunagar is second important AWAG's office after Bhudarpura. Over there, Saraben established a centre for victimised women and those seeking economic empowerment. Hamida dedicated herself as a caretaker of the Bapunagar centre and grew the organisation. Sara's association with AWAG has been from a long time and right now, she has successfully taken AWAG's responsibility and is leading the organisation forward.

How to forget Malini Shah! Right from day one, she has taken the reins of the Bapunagar centre in her hands and despite the discomfort of the



wheelchair, she has constantly looked after it. Nazma Pathan, who has been associated with AWAG for more than 12 years now, provides legal literacy to women approaching for advice. Many other employees of AWAG have been helpful to me in some or the other ways to write this book.

At last, for this work, I am thankful to late Dr. Ila Pathak and all other members of the AWAG family. I sincerely show my gratitude to AWAG's Secretary, Ms. Sara Baldiwala and Ms. Nalini Trivedi who trusted me with this book and helped me to complete it. I thank to AWAG Communications, for carefully translating the book from Gujarati to English.

**Kalpana Shah**

### ***My Acknowledgements to....***

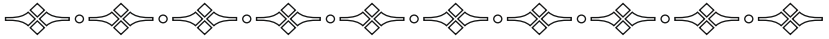
- The founder secretary Dr. Ilaben Pathak who initiated the documentation of a number of write-ups/articles/reports, but gave me (the current Secretary of AWAG), the honour of fulfilling its completion.
- The author of this book - Dr Kalpanaben Shah for initiating the documentation of AWAG's history without any procrastination and for readily penning down a foreword for having undertaken the publication of this book over the last month, after a very long interval.
- Colleagues and associates at AWAG who rendered their unconditional and relentless support at every stage.
- Ajaybhai who printed the document well on time.
- All those friends and well-wishers who are fondly remembered.

અસ્તુ /Amen!

**Sara Baldiwala**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

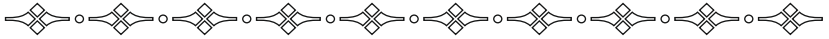
Women constitute around half of the world's population. Nevertheless their social, economic and political status across the globe remains subordinate regardless of the country or its extent of development and prosperity. Though it is observed that there is some difference in the magnitude and form of subjugation, the prevalence of their inferior status is universal. As a result of their subordinate status they have to face inequality, injustice, exploitation and oppression. It can also be said that their subordinate status is an outcome of their oppression and inequality.

Women have not always faced injustice inflicted on them silently by attributing to their destinies. They opposed it in different ways. Of course, forms of resistance vary. Defiance starts at the personal level. With the passage of time and in different contexts with education, understanding, spread of information and communication isolated issue-based oppositions take the form of a movement and agitation. As the agitation grows, new issues and problems emerge. With this the need for a clearly-defined strategy and goal began to be felt.

Issues such as wages, working hours or voting rights that started as a struggle were organised into an ideology structure. Since such issues are linked with political and economic structures that largely affect all women, their struggle has been identified as 'feminism' across the world.

It has been increasingly realised that right to vote as a political right and right to get opportunities for livelihood in the economic field are inadequate for women's freedom. A need to explore the untouched social and cultural aspects



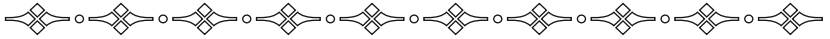


was felt. Social and cultural aspects are emotional and sensitive and hence difficult to challenge. A number of these aspects are believed to be natural, holy and a gift from God. For the first time, on the bases of scientific research and empirical data, economic and political aspects as well as all social and cultural aspects were examined meticulously by women. It was found that women were excluded from all spheres.

Women soon realised the complexity about issues pertaining to them. The root cause of injustice, exploitation, oppression and the inferior economic and political gender status lay in socio-economic structure – rules and regulations, social, cultural values, beliefs and traditions. The social structure of society that is patriarchal, responsible for the prevailing condition of women. The disparity between the biological role and gender role of women was clarified. Biological disparity is natural, whereas gender disparity is socially created. Gender disparity has emerged through sociological processes related to confirming gender based roles and responsibilities. Social discrimination varies according to time, place, country, culture, religion etc. It is a constantly changing process.

Patriarchy implies a social system where men hold authority over women. Such a system is characterised by the family, society, and State that controls the labour power and femininity of women. The roots of subjugation of women lie in the male-dominated system. All social, political and economic organisations run on the lines of this system.

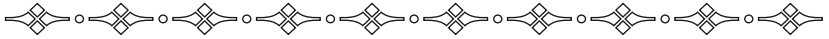
The reason for the extreme complexity of the entire system is that along with the males playing a dominant role, women



too are involved in sustaining the said system. It is not that there is male dominance only but the male has the hegemony for it. As result of this, the values of the system are deeply rooted in the social and cultural aspects of life. Women are oriented to this from the moment they are born. However, the male dominance, values and control of power are not universally alike with all women. Its extent, type, form, characteristics etc, vary from woman to woman. In a country like India, stereotypes such as class, caste, religion, region and culture are actively responsible in the thriving of such a system. In such a situation it can be said that groups linked to contemporary feminism, regardless of their struggles on different issues, have always challenged the male-dominated society in some way or the other.

In the modern context, with special relation to women's education and unequal status in the family, the pro-woman concern in our country especially among the elite of the upper strata started emerging by the end of the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century a number of women groups and women clubs were established with the aim of uplifting women and their welfare. Gradually, there was a movement from welfare work to women's reformation. Women's reformation and its related programmes received national support. Women's education was at the centre of the reformation movement. Various attempts were made and fulfilled as regards women's education and the subject received much focus in public discussions.

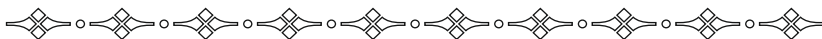
In the proceedings and resolutions of government and non-government committees, the dilemma of the type and extent of women education was visible. These committees revolved around discussion on education related to building skilled housewives and competent mothers. The



talk about equal education for girls and boys came up much later. The matter about women's independence and individual qua individual development did not arise. This marked the first half of the twentieth century.

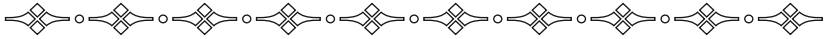
India became independent in 1947. As a result of women's struggles across the world and at the local level, women started gaining hold of their voting rights in free India. But through the national movement, the upper-class women who were the political face believed that their work was complete and were either involved in social work or once again got busy with their own families. Subsequently, in the decade between 1950 and 1960 barring a few, women were largely excluded from public or political participation. They neither joined the government nor were they asked to do so except in exceptional cases. The exclusion of women from politics became a natural-accepted phenomenon.

A number of laws in favour of women were put forth but unfortunately women were not seen as independent individuals. The laws equated them to being mothers, wives and daughters only. From the very beginning, in vital areas such as law and education, only the family perspective in relation to women was taken into consideration. Thus, these laws and education helped in continuing the stereotyped traditional role and status of women in society. The functioning of women's organisations that came into existence at the start of the twentieth century did not pose any challenge to the prevailing family structures. Perhaps it would be more suitable to say that the idea was not to cause any disturbance in the prevailing structure. The women organisations that were established became popular among educated, middle-class and upper-class women. The count of such organisations was, is remain high.



The decade of the 1970's was important for women. The United Nation declared 1975 as the International Women's Year. Various countries across the globe started gathering statistical information regarding the position of women in their areas. The same was carried out in India as well, wherein the government formed a national committee. With the understanding, efforts and vision of the women committees, data was gathered from all over India and served as an eye-opener. The comprehensive report titled 'Towards Equality' brought out the actual status of women in India and was published in 1975 by the committee. It refuted the belief that 'women don't do any work'. The involvement of women in tasks such as maintaining the household, cooking, raising children, understanding savings, increasing family income, engaging in work such as agriculture labour, cottage industry was accepted as work in the context of the census and economic survey. In the field of economics it was the first time that the outlook towards women had changed.

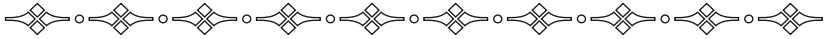
Alongside, new programmes, policies, concepts and considerations emerged in relation to the women's movement at the international level as well. Talks about women reformation and welfare led to the emergence of concepts such as equality, women's freedom, women's individuality, women's ability and strength. The male-dominated society started facing challenges. The ideals that were laid down for women along with the help of the statistical data also faced dissent. In short, the rules and regulations of the male-dominated society faced opposition and the women's movement gained momentum. New organisations were formed on the basis of new ideologies. The decade of 1975 to 1985 saw a number of studies conducted on this matter. Various notes/material were also



published and Centres for women's research studies were set up.

New thoughts, new readings and new challenges were the need of the hour. Educated and knowledgeable women did not get convinced by prevailing understanding with stereotyped beliefs, thoughts, values and practices. The family that is the most important social unit was not excluded from the interrogation. . In the social and economic context, as well as in that of the widespread belief of people, the family meant harmony, unity, equality, mutual sacrifice and other lovely virtues. The society had accepted the family as an organisation on the basis of this belief without raising any question or pointing fingers at it. Women began to questions such established belief system and norms. Those who were involved in women's movements and studies brought out family from personal private sphere to public arena for interrogation. They raised questions related to rights of various family members, their duty, their role and share in decision making and pointed out discrimination and injustice suffered by female family members. They highlighted that prevailing picture of the family as a pure, helpful and united social unit was a delusion.

The male members of the family enjoy more rights and powers. The status of the husband and wife is not equal. The husband or the elderly male members in the family being a part of the male-dominated society, have more power. As a result, unequal and unjust relations prevail between men and women. The unequal status and subordinate position of women is also an outcome of this. Moreover, with the male holding more power and influence, their attitudes towards women are exploitative and dominating.



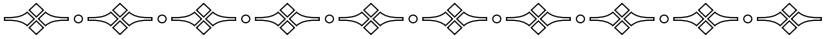
The newly-formed autonomous women groups do not accept domestic violence as an absolutely personal matter. These organisations are not in agreement with the idea of keeping family issues out of social interventions. With this, issues such as dowry-system and other forms of exploitation towards women like foeticide, domestic violence etc. started gaining recognition as social issues rather than personal or family issues. Autonomous women's organizations initiated the examination of the family system from the women's point of view and brought such perspective in public arena. In the eighties, a number of organisations started raising their voice against domestic violence inflicted on women.

### **Violence against Women**

Various forms of violence inflicted on women are:

- Domestic

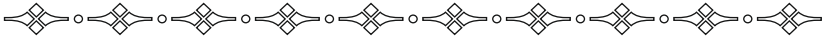




- Social
- Caste-based
- Community-based
- During war
- State-based

In the patriarchal system the mindset that there are unequal power relations between women and men and furthermore that women are a personal property of men is responsible for all the above-stated forms of violence. Division of labour between men and women is prevalent in the patriarchal system. This division of labour has arisen from the differences in the separate roles, duties and status of both women and men. Women and work done by women fulfil this on the basis of beliefs related to their roles and responsibilities. Following this, men's power and control over women becomes stronger.

As per this belief, the responsibility of the home and its related matters lies in the hands of women. On the other hand, external matters are believed to be that of the male's responsibilities. This division that is thought to be natural leads to division of power between the two. Differences in power prevailing in society receive justification through traditions and beliefs. The recognition of a man's power lies in his manliness i.e. normally flaunted in the presence of women. To beat women, keep them under control, insult them in public etc. reflects the male ego. From the women's side, even minute visible oppositions are enough to hurt the man's ego. The man definitely does not tolerate it, but even society does not let such a move take place. The roots of all forms of violence against women lie in this only.

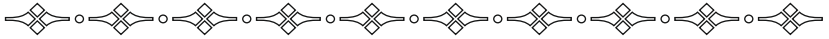


The patriarchal society along with power gives man a high position in their roles and status. Naturally, their dominance and control regarding family and other social matters only gets strengthened. Division of labour, roles and positions are firmly set in the minds of women and men through the process of socialization and are believed to be a natural phenomenon. All these factors are responsible for domestic violence.

The family is a social unit. Due to social and economic interactions that are undertaken through the family, women have to bear with the control and power exerted by the men of the family. With this, the intensity of domestic violence increases. Various forms of violence in society have been widely discussed. Adequate comments, criticisms and opinions regarding this have been presented. Information about punishments has also been put forth. On the other hand, violence against women is largely served with silence, though heinous acts such as sati, rape and sexual harassment have been openly discussed to some extent. But the battering of women at the home front is not considered as an act of violence in the social context. Consequently, the scope of bringing such discussions in the open does not arise. Unfortunately, since domestic violence is socially and religiously accepted it is believed to be a natural occurrence.

The extent and complexity of this issue led to despair among women groups. Though several studies regarding violence against women have been undertaken, this is only an approximate estimate of the violence that takes place in reality. A number of forces along with the mainstream definition of the violence have been instrumental for this. In its mainstream definition, only that violence which is visible

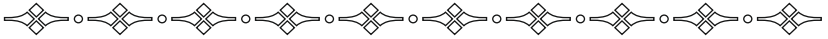




and experienced in reality is included. With this, violence that women experience behind closed doors is not taken into consideration. Despite the 1975 conference at Nairobi and 1995 conference at Beijing, in addition to attempts through women's movement the extent of domestic violence could not be reduced. On examining the 2008 data pertaining to Gujarat, it was observed that only three hundred and seventy-four rape cases were registered with the police that year; although in reality each day one woman is faced with rape. (Table 1.) The rapists are generally members from within and outside the families.

As per government figures for the year 2008, each day nineteen women were abandoned and sixteen women faced violence from their husbands and in-laws. Over the year, a total of six thousand and ninety-four women, fell prey to domestic violence. In the same year twenty-two cases of dowry deaths and one hundred and twenty-two cases of sexual harassment were registered.



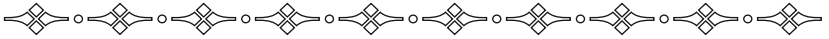


As per the draft of the UN Declaration, violence against women is defined as any act that causes physical, sexual or mental injury. The definition also includes acts of threats about inflicting violence, forcefulness or autocracy and to seize upon a person's private or public freedom. In the larger context, any person or group that faces threat about exploitation or faces it in reality becomes a victim of violence. Moreover, the act of any person or group that exerts force, control and dominance on others as per their desires and needs is considered as an act of violence. On examining violence against women in light of the above-mentioned large definition of violence, it is clear that when the male race exerts force, threats, control and trauma for his vested interests; it is an act of violence.

Behind all forms of violence lie concepts such as domination, supremacy, power and control. Attributes of domination and power give rise to violence. Male domination is a legacy of the patriarchal society.

By perceiving violence against women as mere exertion of physical strength does not bring about an understanding of its magnitude and outcome. In Gandhiji's opinion – cowardice, bad conduct and causing pain to others are all acts of violence. To cause pain and suffering to others in a slow but sure manner, is an act of greater violence. There is also greater violence in weakness, insult, injustice, pressure and also when a person destroys another's self-respect. In light of Gandhiji's perspective of violence, women in India are subjected to suffering and pain in a gradual and progressive manner.

The act of discrimination in raising sons and daughters is universally known. The girl has to face deprivation and



taunt at her parent's home. After marriage she has to hear taunts and face physical and mental trauma from her in-laws for not satisfying their materialistic needs. In event of the girls not being able to bear this torture, they succumb to suicide which society has accepted without any pangs of conscience. To abort a female foetus is an insult to the entire women race. Over a period of fifteen years spanning from 1986 to 2001, a total of fifty lakh female foetuses were aborted. The extent of this increased after the year 2001. In cases where abortion was not possible, the newborn girl-child would be wrapped in a wet towel and on the pretext of seeking treatment, medicines would be procured from a doctor; but in reality the neonate would be left to die without administering any medication. In people's opinion such a practice involves less expenditure and protects the offence that is committed from being revealed. The very first case of gender determination and foeticide that came out in the open in the year 1979 was in Amritsar. Today it has become an industry worth a thousand crores.

All the above incidents are direct or indirect forms of violence. The women dying or getting killed as a result of this does not seem to stir the social cycle. Society has conveniently consented such violence. The credit to stir the stagnant and stale social environment goes to a number of women organisations. Through programmes related to women equality and empowerment, violence against women is being brought under some control. Very few organisations have undertaken domestic violence as their main issue. AWAG is one such organisation. The given publication is a bird's-eye view of the organisation's work over twenty-five years.

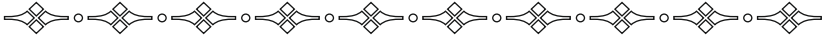


## AIM AND STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

Ahmedabad Women's Action Group, AWAG, is an effective organisation that fights against domestic violence inflicted on women in Gujarat. The organisation was founded in the year 1981 and was recognised as a registered organisation in 1983. AWAG was established at a time when developing awareness about women's issues and ideology was at its peak. Accordingly, the organisation's activity and work were naturally centred on the women's perspective. Dr. Ilaben Pathak is one of its nine founders and has remained the organisation's driving force to date. Born in 1933 her age then was forty-eight years. Ilaben has been functional as AWAG's secretary from its inception to date.

Though she was born in Mumbai she spent her childhood in Lunawada where her father served as a *Diwan* to the local ruler. Her aptitude towards public life and social issues was

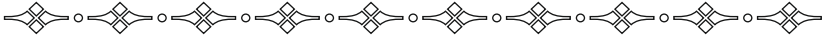




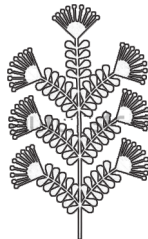
inculcated in Surat during her high school days by her paternal aunt who was also active in public life. From a student in Surat she served as an English professor in Vidyanagar and later in Ahmedabad till her retirement. Her sensitivity towards women's issues was nurtured in childhood, developed in her adolescence and matured with her higher studies in her youth. Being a woman, sensitivity and concern was further moulded with the support of her family environment and exposure to public life. She was sensitive towards women's issues and was always interested in journalism. She was of the belief that newspapers were a media to bring women's issues to the fore and spread awareness among a larger mass of people. Thus, Ilaben used to publish articles on women's issues regularly in the newspapers like Gujarat Samachar and Jansatta under dedicated columns named '*Nava Yugni Nari*', '*Parodhna Andhara*' and '*Trajava nu Triju Pallu*'.

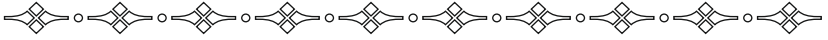
Even during her tenure as professor, Ilaben had linkages with women organisations in Ahmedabad. These organisations were at one time linked with the national freedom movement. Their activities were to bring about social reformation. In the year 1980 she started going to Jyoti Sangh, Ahmedabad for three days a week. Activities to liberate women from exploitative conditions were undertaken through Jyoti Sangh.

The first shelter home in Gujarat was set up in 1937. These organisations were instrumental in running training classes and skill-building for women in the field of tailoring, type-writing and printing. Systems were set up for sale of pickles, spices and other food items that were prepared by the women so as to generate income for them. This work methodology was thereafter adopted by women



organisations across Gujarat. At that time the inclination of these organisations was towards preserving the family. As a result of this, emphasis was laid on counselling and settlement. The woman was advised to adjust as long as she could bear it. On taking a promise for good behaviour from the accused man, the woman victim was sent back to her marital home. Despite there being more than fifty Counselling Centres in Gujarat the count of women facing unnatural death that was constantly on the rise is depicted in Table 1.



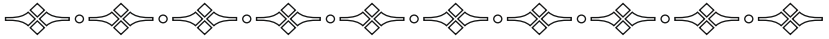


**TABLE 1:**  
**No. of Unnatural Deaths of Women**

Year	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Total No. of Deaths	1418	1024	2132	2220	4116	4245	3986	3862	4016	4521	4838	5112	5164
Average No. of Unnatural deaths/day	3.88	2.8	5.84	6.0	11.27	11.65	10.92	10.58	11.0	12.38	13.25	14.0	14.15
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
Total No. of Deaths	5525	6349	6135	5583	4924	4672	4749	4631	4587	4929	5380	5811	
Average No. of Unnatural deaths/day	15.14	17.39	16.08	15.03	13.49	12.80	13.01	12.68	12.56	13.5	14.7	15.92	

**No. of Offences Registered u/s 498-A (IPC) in Gujarat, (1989 to 2000)**

Year	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Total No. of Complaints	-	-	250	348	479	899	822	1097	1576	1540	1596	1950	2545
Average No. of Complaints /day	-	-	0.7	0.9	1.31	2.46	2.25	3.00	4.32	4.22	4.37	5.34	6.97
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
Total No. of Complaints	2415	2989	3276	3563	3191	2866	3185	3781	3998	4898	5692	6093	
Average No. of Complaints /day	6.62	8.19	8.97	9.76	8.74	7.85	8.72	10.35	10.95	13.4	15.6	16.7	



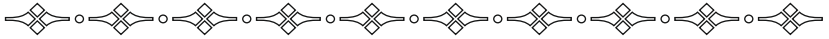
During her working with Charumatiben Yoddha and Pushpaben Mehta, Ilaben's concern towards women not only increased but also raised a number of questions in her mind. Some matters that bothered her time and again were –

- Why do we social workers constantly advise the victimized woman only?
- Why is the subordinate status of women and male domination not being challenged?
- Why are women's issues dealt with only the families at the centre?

At that time and to a large extent even today, as per the mainstream ideology, the family is considered to be holy. Everybody's approach is towards saving the family from breaking. In other words the main contentions of the organisations and social workers working on issues related to women, is to save the family any which way. The family is believed to be the foundation of society and a place of



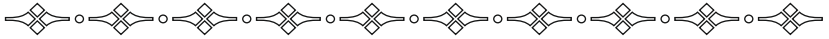




shelter for the woman that is indispensable for her existence. It is advantageous for the families to consider the status of women as subordinate. Here, the definition of family refers to husband and wife as well as husband's family members such as his parents and siblings. Favouring the family implies favouring the husband, his elder brother and his father – power and dominance. Ilaben was not in agreement with this approach and outlook. She expressed that women organisations and their workers had given too much importance to the family and not in saving women from distress. In her view, the woman is a human being and she has her own independent individuality. If her individuality is preserved and her likes and dislikes are taken into consideration, then the family will be preserved. With the approach of preserving the family the status quo of patriarchy is maintained. In such a power structure the existence of women becomes subordinate. The woman is taught to and given the duty of preserving the family by maintaining patriarchy. Ilaben believes that women organisations must change their approach towards women. A woman is not for the family, but a family is for the woman. AWAG has developed this approach in its interventions with women.

**AWAG's Aim:**

- To raise the image of women in society.
- To oppose elements that tarnish the image of women.
- To establish women's equality in society.
- To contribute towards growth of women's involvement in national development.
- To support the pride and Right to Life for women and also support them in their welfare, security and education.



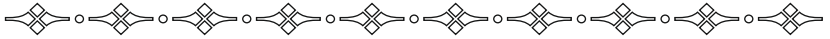
- To work towards improving the economic conditions of poor women. This implies the setting up of groups, organisations and co-operatives so as to increase their strength through income generation.

With this perspective AWAG believes that women are equal to men in all fields of life and along with this understanding works towards uplifting women. To develop as an equal member of society, it is essential to support women in their struggle. AWAG considers awareness building as a first step towards achieving this and income generation as the second requisite that encompasses saving, credit and market network for economic production. Economic independence is closely linked with awareness about rights and personal growth. With this, AWAG deems the importance of activities that lay emphasis on awareness of women's rights over their bodies and the care and wellbeing of their health. Thus, the approach of AWAG towards women is holistic.

The mission of AWAG is to make women competent enough so that they can develop and sustain themselves as per their abilities. When women are made aware about their self-respect then guidance regarding their environment, their health, their children's education and wellbeing and organising women in accessing their rights from the state government, is provided to them. AWAG supports the efforts of women and serves as a missing link where and when necessary.

### **Work Area**

AWAG's work area spreads across Gujarat. The organisation is actively involved in voicing women's



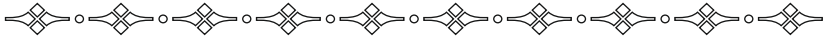
problems, spreading the approach of feminism, sharing of thoughts and information with women groups within and outside Gujarat. While the organisation has taken a number of initiatives in public forums it has also participated and supported other organisations in oppositions and protests through conferences and processions. Alongside, since its inception the organisation has worked towards organising women into community groups at the local level. For this, AWAG's efforts are towards inculcating awareness about rights among women, supporting them in resolving their day-to-day issues related to their social and economic aspects, providing linkages/support to women in their struggle to face the patriarchal system. In addition, AWAG also works intensively at the grassroots.

Initially in 1984, AWAG organised the coal labourers of the Railway Department at Asarwa and so also the sweepers at Naranpura. In 1986, it initiated the work in the Dalit and Muslim settlements at Bapunagar. In the mid-nineties it initiated work in the rural areas of Radhanpur and thereafter in 2004 in Rapar area of Kutch district following the earthquake that occurred in 2001. Thereafter, work in Sami Taluka was also commenced upon.

### **Work Methodology**

Whether the area is a slum or riot-prone, whether the issue is related to health in rural Radhanpur or that of rehabilitation in the earthquake-affected region of Rapar, whether the target group comprises of police, community leaders or panchayat leaders, the organisation has laid down the following as its rudimentary steps in relation to the work undertaken:

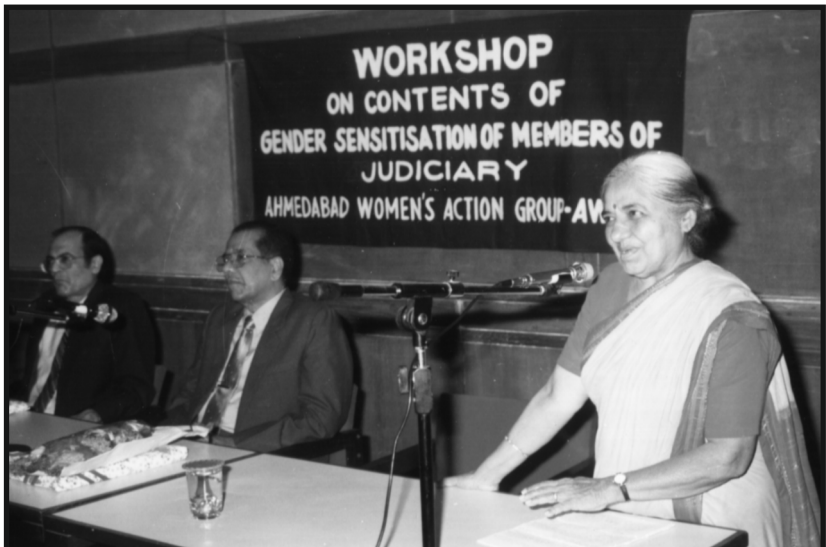
- Build Awareness

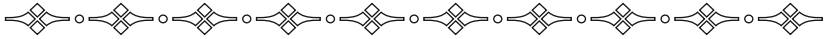


- Organize
- Confrontation
- Advocacy
- Networking

These are the basic steps of AWAG's work. Regardless of the area or target group, the very first move is to broach the subject matter of women's awareness amongst the participants. Efforts are directed towards sensitizing women towards their subordinate status, role and position in society. As time passes by women are organized into a group so as to identify and articulate their common problems and concerns.

AWAG believes that, 'You don't get anything without asking.' Hence, the organisation supports the local women in their struggle by organising them and making them aware about their rights and demanding the same from the concerned authorities. AWAG works firmly and strongly on





women's issues. Work related to advocacy has been taken up for implementation of law and policy-related matters.

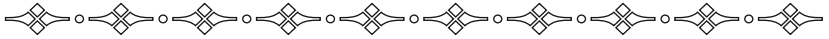
### **Advocacy**

AWAG believes that it is necessary to first and foremost put the women victim at ease and then hear her out in a calm manner. For that, she requires support initially, her individuality must be respected and her equality must be accepted. AWAG has accepted and adopted this women-centric and pro-woman work approach.

This viewpoint occupies a central position in AWAG's advocacy related to feminist struggle. With regard to women's individuality and their oppression along with raising awareness among women the organisation is actively involved in setting up a structure based on a feminist perspective. In this vein, the organization is active in...

- Articulating the feminist approach and women's problem in civil society and so also to create space for taking necessary action.
- Building understanding about women's issues with policy makers.
- Creating pressure to promote women-centred work and provisions.
- Raising awareness in government systems.

Initially in Gujarat there were more than fifty Counselling Centres to provide support to victims. There was a need to change this approach. Based on the need of pro-woman counselling, AWAG conducted discussions and workshops with the counsellors of the Counselling Centres so as to



sensitize them towards a pro-woman approach. The response was positive.

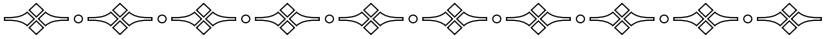
This was AWAG's first task as regards advocacy and networking. As the organisation went deeper into women's issues its work related to advocacy started gaining a strong hold and spread.

The need for conducting trainings related to women-centred interventions linked to violence against women was apparent. AWAG explained the advocacy technique to the counsellors and the latter developed their own definition about advocacy. It was soon understood that there were many aspects of advocacy and the organisation puts these into effect as per need. According to the Oxford dictionary the meaning of advocacy is-'to render support in order to advocate an objective, cause or policy'.

In order to recommend and pursue the above definition AWAG suggested an alternative to it. AWAG believes that the concept of advocacy works in cases where there is legitimate, formal power/authority, whereas in cases of informal power/authority persuasion proves more effective. In India there are centres of power in addition to that of the government. In our patriarchal system much power and control lies in the hands of caste panchayat and youth groups.

### **1]. Counselling Centres**

The need for women-centred interventions with regard to violence against women was strongly felt. Thus, AWAG prepared a manual for the counsellors of the Family Counselling Centres. This manual has fulfilled



the necessary understanding about concepts of counselling, skills and its principles along with the various steps involved in the process of counselling.

## **COUNSELLING PROCESS**

### **Step 1: Being Aware that there is a Need for Help**

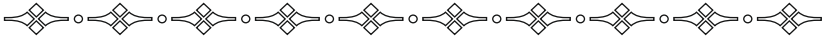
The victim has to understand that she needs help since she is going through agony. Generally, most of the women have woven their pain and agony into their roles and hence it is necessary to clarify this aspect with the victim.

### **Step 2: Registration**

At the stage of initial contact, the victim has to be provided support and confidence to register her case. The victim may come of her own, or may be brought in by another person. It is essential that the counsellor pays utmost attention to what she is saying so as to build environment of trust. In doing so a rapport is developed with the victim. In course of the above the counsellor decides whether to deal with the case at the counselling centres or to refer it elsewhere. Registration, study, diagnosis and treatment of the case can be merged together. There is no need to be rigid about it. The focus all along should be on the victim.

### **Step 3: Recording the Case History**

- Request for information, seek clarification if necessary, and note details regarding all aspects.
- Recognise the defence mechanisms exhibited by the victim such as denial, refuse to listen to what is being said, make use of the counsellor (victim pretends to be helpless and puts up an attitude wherein the entire



responsibility is thrown on the counsellor), seeks sympathy and attention time and again, is inattentive to topics that she dislikes, unwilling to fulfil her share of responsibility.

- Understand the deeply-embedded feelings and efforts of the victim when the situation gets difficult.
- Support the victim in venting out her feelings and experience relief in her stress level.
- Motivate the victim to overcome the past and adopt a rational approach in handling the present situation so as to prevent building pressure and tension once again.
- Home visits

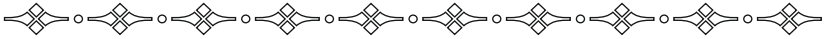
#### **Step 4: Integration and Compilation of Procured Information**

The counsellor along with the victim helps the latter to understand her internal struggles, obstacles and pressures. The future course of action is mutually decided by the counsellor and the victim.

#### **Step 5: Treatment**

The counsellor explores the possible solutions and alternatives to handle the victim's problem. In due course the counsellor trains the victim to undertake some intense work and on embracing sensitivity suggest her to control herself when emotional. The victim is advised to take care of herself during agonising moments and suggest that she fulfil her role. In this manner the capacities of the victim are gradually built. The victim is also advised to put her strengths and resources to effect so as to bring about a change in the surrounding environment.





### **Step 6: Response during Treatment**

The victim stays in touch with the counsellor so as to share the success or failure about the techniques suggested by the counsellor. Alternatives are also suggested if required.

### **Step 7: Closure of the Case**

The case is closed as per mutual agreement of the victim and the counsellor. The victim is assured of help if required in future.

### **Step 8: Follow-up**

The victim contacts the counsellor at the decided intervals or at times the counsellor keeps in touch with the victim so as to check the progress and give further guidance if required.

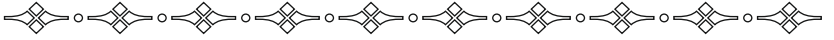
## **Legal Counselling Centres**

Through suitable legal trainings of counsellors and social workers of the Centres, help is provided to the victim.

## **II]. Police Force**

For members of the police force:

- Advocacy for sensitivity towards women's issues and situation.
- Publication of a handy police Manual outlining the understanding of Section 498-A of the IPC as well as other related laws.
- Advocate the prevention of unnatural deaths of women and implementation of remedial steps and ensuring that the related circulars are handily available.



- Publication of a booklet containing the 1948 Global Human Rights Declaration, Fundamental Rights framed by the Constitution, list of various Sections along with laws pertaining to offences and criminal laws related to women.

### **III]. Officers**

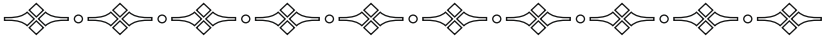
This category includes the Primary Health Centre's officers, doctors and other authorities and workers who are linked to AWAG's work.

### **IV]. Community Leaders and Field Workers**

Building Awareness among women in relation to:

- Ways and means of handling domestic violence
- The availability of government services such as health.





- People's rights related to municipal services such as sanitation and water supply.
- Primary counselling trainings.
- Training of Dais for adopting scientific methods while conducting deliveries along with the use of sterilized instruments and equipments.

#### **VI]. Panchayat Members**

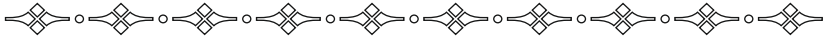
- Awareness and implementation about rights and duties.
- Sensitivity towards women.

#### **VI]. Caste Panchayat Leaders**

- Sensitivity towards women.
- Protection of women's constitutional rights and laws.
- Gentle but firm voice in public against women-related traditions and practices.

#### **VII]. Village and Community Men and Youth**

- Sensitivity towards women issues.
- Awareness about elimination of oppressive social customs such as Saata marriages.
- Protest against superstitions and blind-faith.
- Advocate access of doctors and hospitals.
- Advocate education of girls.
- Protest against foeticide.
- Advocacy to refrain from participating in riots.



## **Networking**

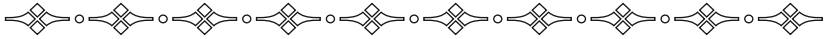
In view of the multifarious nature of women's issues, AWAG retained contact with a number of resource agencies and government departments.

In its efforts to achieve the expected outcomes, on one hand AWAG liaisons with the government for implementation of women-centred policies and on the other hand with voluntary organisations in order to support its pro-women issue and viewpoint. It thus serves as a bridge between the two.

In order to fulfil its goals and objectives, AWAG is active in a number of areas. Ahmedabad is an industrial city. A number of industries big and small flourish here. A beginning was made by working with the unorganised coal labourers. These labourers were organised into a union as a result of which they could earn higher wages and improve their working conditions. A Board was set up to implement the Public Interest Litigation that was filed for these members to access their rights from the State Government.

## **Structure of AWAG**

The administration structure of the organisation is simple. The Trust Board comprising of seven members is at the upper most level and meets once a year. The end responsibility and power lies with the Secretary whose responsibilities include policy-related and administrative decisions, contact with government and other voluntary organisations etc. In its twenty-eight years of existence, AWAG's work area and activities have increased. At present the organisation is operational through five branches; two in the urban and three in the rural areas.



## Five Branches

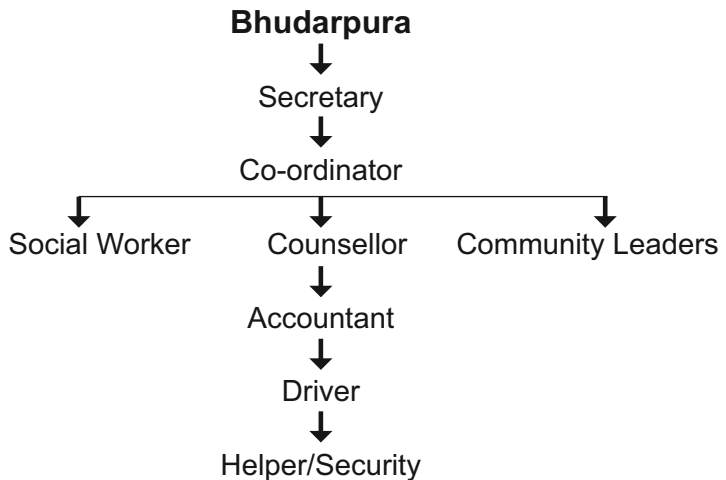
### Urban

- i). Bhudarpura
- ii). Bapunagar

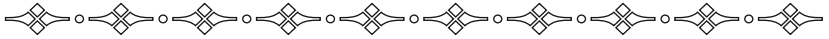
### Rural

- i). Radhanpur
- ii). Rapar
- iii). Sami

The main branch is at Bhudarpura, which houses the main office as well. The organisation that was initiated in a rented premise now owns one since the year 2000. The total strength of the organisation comprises of forty-five women.



The Bapunagar office works on two aspects-social and economic, wherein income generation activities are undertaken.



## Bapunagar

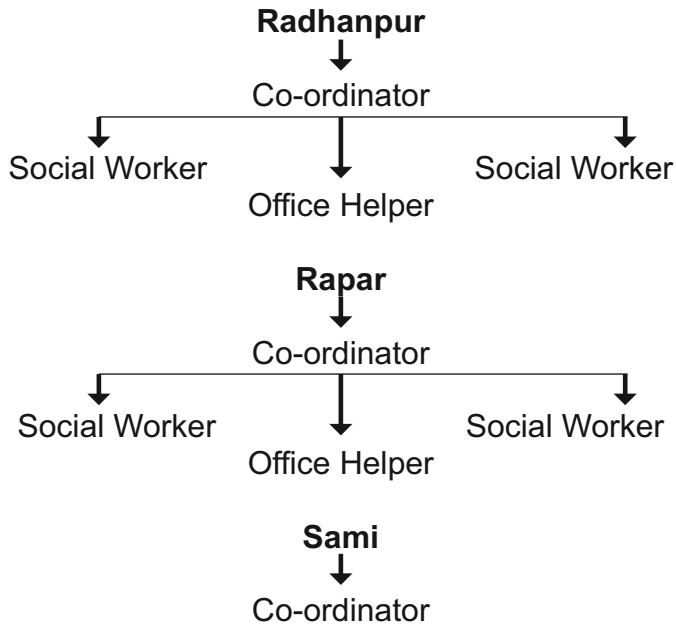
### AWAG (Social)

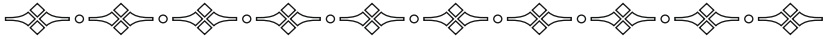
- Counselling Centre
- Legal Aid
- Training Centre
- Short-stay Home
- Rehabilitation Centre
- Govt. Multipurpose/Women Welfare Centre
- Mental Health Centre

### AWAG EKTA (Economic)

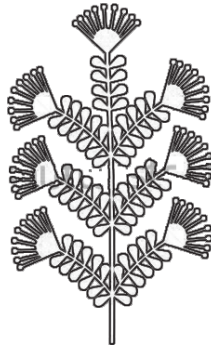
- Co-operative
- Production Centre
- Record-keeping of Orders
- Marketing

A shop named 'EK AWAG' fulfils the sale of the garments produced at the Production Unit at Bapunagar. Orders are procured from within and outside Gujarat. The venture has stood the test of time and prevailing competition of the market.





Members of all the branches gather on the last Saturday of every month to share their experiences through a meeting. The meeting is an open forum to discuss, share, criticize, suggest etc. Regular meetings have created a social bonding amongst members.

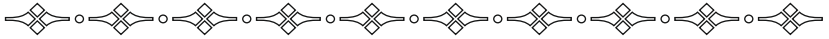


## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & AWARENESS RAISING

Women were and continue to be obscenely depicted in media such as film posters, advertisements of cosmetic products and other items. Resultantly the woman is made into a commodity and a symbol of attracting and pleasing people in the marketplace. AWAG felt that such illustrations were lowering the image of women and llaben expressed this vide her column in the newspaper. A collective demonstration was organised in the early 1980s to protest against these posters. In order to raise awareness on this issue, discussions were organised in small groups, street plays were conducted and posters representing women's respect and dignity were pasted on the walls. Discussions on these topics had started taking place among the middle-class members and this led to AWAG's stepping into the Ahmedabad public life. At this time, new thoughts and organisations related to women's issues were taking shape





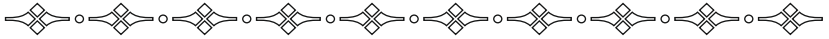


in Gujarat and the rest of the country. The Mathura rape case was a topic of much discussion. News about dowry deaths flashed extensively in all newspapers. On realizing the extent of violence and atrocities on women, AWAG took on the mandate of opposing violence inflicted upon women and in its entire chronology, the organisation has upheld it as its core issue.

Violence against women is visible in various forms in public places and includes acts of individual/gang-rape, eve-teasing, beating, insulting, derogation, vulgarity, sarcasm, sexual harassment and killing of women due to communal disharmony. On principles there are legal provisions against all such acts. Social customs such as sati, child-marriage, social discrimination and untouchability on social and religious grounds as well as imposing roles and tasks of women against their wishes are also considered as forms of violence.

In addition to this, the issue of domestic violence amongst husband and wife behind closed doors raises a number of questions. Such violence is of two types - Physical and Mental. Physical atrocities cannot be isolated from mental atrocities. Physical atrocities include beating, striking with a hot iron rod, giving inadequate or no food, sexual harassment, toiling etc. While mental humiliation is discreet and includes acts such as taunting, criticizing, insulting in public, degrading, detestable behaviour that constantly torments women.

AWAG soon realized that this sort of violence against women was not an isolated issue but was very widespread and of a high magnitude. Moreover, such incidents were seen as a common occurrence in the social order. The pain



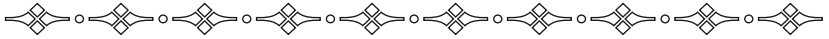
and suffering borne by women was not taken note of in the public domain. AWAG challenged the premise of violence against women and so also the concept of considering death of women as personal/family matters. The organisation believed that dowry was not the sole reason for the unnatural death of women. A number of other reasons were also responsible for the situation. AWAG conducted a study to gain an understanding about the reasons and spread of the unnatural deaths of women. For this, an analysis of the incidents that had occurred was undertaken. The study that spanned over a year was completed in 1985. The two main findings derived from the study were:

- i). In her maiden home a daughter is somebody else's possession.
- ii). In her marital home she is an outsider.

It is said that she has two homes; but in reality a needy and abandoned woman only receives a farewell from both homes. The strict adherence to patriarchal laws, customs and traditions prevents the paternal families from keeping the daughter due to fear of social disgrace. Moreover, the reluctance to shoulder her responsibility forever and the burden of handling her femininity prompts her maiden family to send her back to her husband's home. The social approach towards women along with the assimilation of values and beliefs by both sides has resulted in the issue of women atrocities as inherent and acceptable in society.

In reality the woman generally bears the exploitation inflicted on her. The survey conducted by AWAG reveals that women are exposed to the following types of atrocities in their families.

- Beating and mental harassment.

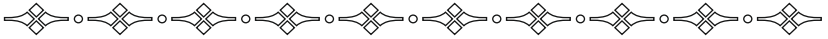


- Family disputes/quarrels
- Domestic violence due to alcoholism
- Divorce
- Bigamy
- Extra marital relationship
- Financial pressure/poverty
- Unemployment
- Sexual harassment
- Mental torture/misery

Based on the findings derived from the study AWAG chalked out the following strategy.

- To raise the level of understanding about one's own self among women.
- To hear out distressed women through counselling centres.
- To expose and openly publish acts of the inhuman approach of society and family atrocity inflicted on women.
- To raise a voice against the physical abuse of women in their families.
- To build rapport with the police to go through trainings related to women's law and so also to change their attitude towards women.
- To protest against topics that advocates the subjugation and submission of women through school textbooks, media and elders of the family.

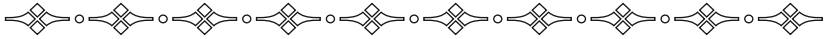
In order to mitigate domestic violence, AWAG clarified its viewpoint that by protecting and respecting women, their family life will be happy and not get affected; but by protecting the family at the cost of the woman will not lead to the wellbeing of the family.



This was the period when the country witnessed large-scale agitations against the practice of dowry. The pressure of the civil society on the state increased. Activists demanded that an amendment be brought about in Indian Penal Code such that investigations pertaining to the role of the victims' husband and close relatives in the former's unnatural death are made obligatory. Following this Section 498-A was added to the Indian Penal Code and cases of domestic violence became cognizable. Thus in event of an unnatural death it became obligatory for the police to approach and register a complaint regardless of whether the victim registers it or not. As part of their duty the police were assigned the responsibility of investigating the case. Furthermore in accordance with the law, the police can arrest the person/s stated by the complainant without any warrant. Besides this, by virtue of an amendment in the Act 47 of 1983 was included in Section 113-A. On the basis of this Section, the role of the husband and his relatives inciting the suicide committed by the women was accepted.

Despite all the efforts there was no difference in the occurrence of unnatural deaths of women. In course of work it was experienced that when the police were ready to register the complaint under Section 498-A, the women were not in a position to do so in spite of AWAG's interventions. Thus, AWAG wondered whether Section 498-A had proved useful for women or not. Later it was realised that a large number of police officers were not aware of this new Section.

To add to it if the offence is registered then their work related to investigation increases. AWAG's workers constantly struggled for this Section to be put to effect for which support from the court was also sought for. But with the passage of time it was observed that the count of unnatural

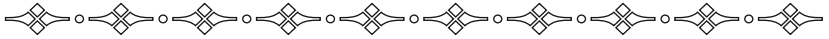


deaths of women was rising instead of declining. The count of such cases that was 1,418 in 1984 had increased to 5,112 in 1995.

AWAG was dejected by the situation. A number of questions arose in the mind of the organisations' workers.

- Did the distressed women gain from the said Section?
- What was the position of the voluntary organisations supporting such women?
- What was the approach and attitude of the lawyer?
- How did the police apply this Section? What has been the role of the police in registering cases of violence against women occurring at the family level?
- Did the police take the trouble to gather information to support the women's complaint?
- Were they ready to register a private family matter of wife-beating as an offence in public?
- What was the outcome of the cases that were registered under the Section 498-A at the court level?
- Has any discussion regarding this matter taken place by the concerned judiciary?
- Did the women victims receive justice?
- Have all the complainant women become homeless?
- Were they socially boycotted or reinstated? Were their husband's punished?

To seek answers to the above questions a study on 'Resultant Effect of Family Atrocities Against Women' was



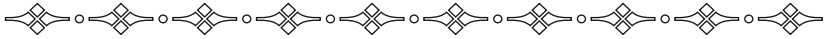
conducted. It was aimed at understanding the effects of implementation of Section 498-A on the lives of women vis-à-vis the responses of the state administration and legal wing. In addition to this, the aim also encompassed the investigation of policy-related changes for effective implementation of pro-woman laws.

For this the foremost task was to gather information regarding cases of unnatural deaths of women registered with the police. Alongside an analysis of the various Sections pertaining to the nature of offence was also conducted. With this details of twenty-two cases were collected from the police. Of them twenty cases were taken up for the study. The findings of the study revealed the following:

- There were several shortcomings in the method of registration of cases by the police. Different Sections were applied for complaints that were identical; while the same Section was applied to different types of offences.
- Adequate evidences were not gathered.
- A settlement was made before the commencement of the court's hearing, especially in cases of family disputes.

Displeased with this, AWAG felt that such findings portray the women complainant as irresponsible, foolish and a source of amusement. Furthermore, the settlement undertaken to keep the family intact does not take place on the basis of equality. As a result of this women have to bear the brunt of the lop-sided situation.

On the basis of the study on the whole AWAG observed that atrocities on women are not based on religious

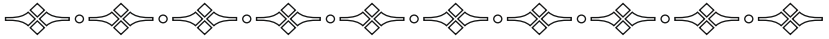


discrimination. The count of unnatural deaths among Hindus is highest among the OBC's (Other backward Classes). Women from all classes and castes put up with the atrocities inflicted on them. But comparatively the magnitude of this suffering is far more among the poor and lower classes. However, it is observed that among the upper castes, Rajput women rank highest amongst those embracing death.

To sum up, the findings of the study, AWAG is of the opinion that players such as police, lawyers, magistrate, the state, victim's relatives etc. by and large examine the women from a patriarchal outlook only. Thus the woman victim rarely receives complete justice. Based on the findings of the studies conducted in 1985 and 1995 AWAG formulated a new policy that is outlined below.

- To foster the elements of self-identity and self-respect of women.
- To patiently hear out the distressed and needy women at the counselling centres instead of abandoning them.
- To bring out family atrocities in the open.
- To oppose battering of women at the family level.
- To conduct trainings regarding laws pertaining to women for the police force.
- To establish rapport with the police and change their approach towards women.
- To oppose all matters and material that cause harm to the image of women at the public or family level.

In order to implement the decided policy AWAG adopted various strategies such as:



- Expose the occurrence of atrocities through street-plays.
- Organise awareness camps for women's groups.
- Increase information and sensitivity of the police force.
- Scrutinise textbooks published by the Gujarat State Education Board and convey its report to the government.

The outcomes of the policy were:

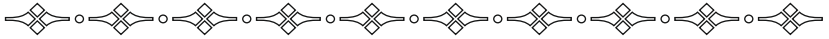
- Awareness among women groups increased.
- Laws pertaining to women were included in the police's core curriculum.
- Amendments were made in the school textbooks.

As per the Indian constitution, women and men are considered equal. Both have equal rights. This matter is repeatedly elucidated through constitutional provisions, various Sections of laws, court judgements, debates and discussions vide speeches, illustrated books, posters, debates etc. in short, a lot has been harped on self-respect and rights.

### **Awareness Raising**

Awareness raising is the foremost strategy in AWAG's work approach wherein a woman is looked upon as an independent individual and citizen. For this, emphasis is laid on camps, workshops and training programmes. The duration of the camps or workshops that spans over two to five days, stresses on the key-issue of women's independence, individuality and existence and need for social justice. Following this, a dialogue and discussion on



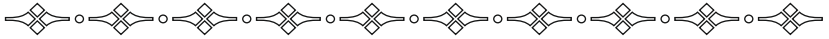


concerns of the particular groups takes place on topics such as healthcare and services available for them. With health as a human right, special rights related to women's reproductive and child health are also woven in. Furthermore, awareness of the ill-effects of atrocities on the physical and mental health of women is shared amongst all male and female participants attending the workshops.

By virtue of these workshops women became conscious about themselves. They acquired information about the importance of their existence, their contribution in national production, their rights, gender equality etc. Their determination of not succumbing to atrocities was strengthened. They started overcoming the beliefs and stereotypes thoughts that prevailed in the existing system. Women started registering cases of domestic violence with the police or contacting the local voluntary organisations. They also grew in awareness regarding their local concerns and rights.

### **Women Committees**

Along with awareness raising AWAG also organises women from a given area into women committees. This brings about a feeling of co-operation and unity among them and they soon realize the strength of their collective efforts. Women cultivate awareness about raising their own voice against social evils such as dowry and alcoholism. Their confidence in presenting local issues to officials also increases. The strategy of forming women committees has proved to be powerful and successful in AWAG's work. These committees have emerged to be active at the end of their training programme.



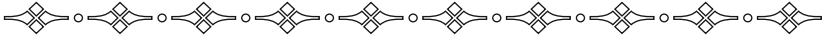
- A total of ten meetings were organised for women committees from across sixteen villages between 2004 and 2006.
- Two workshops were conducted for the leaders of women committees.
- As per need a third level advanced training was undertaken to explain the details of Section 498-A.
- An educational tour was organised so that the women members gain exposure about the outside world.
- A workshop was organised with the women committee and local youth so as to strengthen their struggle against social ills.
- A meeting was also organised between women committee and panchayat members.

On the other hand there are slums in the Bapunagar region of Ahmedabad comprising of Hindu and Muslim settlements. Here also women have been organised into various committees. The function of these committees is to procure primary services such as pension for widows, health schemes etc. Women from both these communities are members of these committees and are helpful to one another when faced with domestic violence.

### **Functions of Women Committees**

In addition to common local tasks these committees also undertake women-centred work such as:

- Protesting against domestic violence
- Supporting women issues
- Preventing women from committing suicide
- Bringing distressed women to the organisation

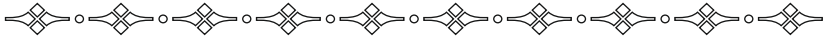


In backward areas such as Rapar, effects of the prevailing ills of superstitions and blind faith on health are explained to the people. Likewise, need to protest against practices such as child marriage and *saataa* (exchange) marriage is conveyed to all. Owing to the geographical, social and economical factors of Rapar the need to build people's participation was strongly felt and thus a women's committee was set up. The committee members were given leadership training so as to provide necessary support to women victims faced with domestic violence, rape and atrocities.

### **Counselling Centres**

Women who are faced with atrocities need guidance to handle the tough and sensitive situation that they are in. In their emotional state of mind it is essential that they receive the much needed support of an organisation or an individual so as to gain warmth and strength to vent their feelings. For this counselling centres function through government as well as social organisations. Well trained social workers, psychologists and lawyers are linked to a number of social organisations. AWAG too felt the need for such counselling centres based on the concerns of women approaching them. The organisation set up its counselling centre in the riot-affected area in Bapunagar in 1985-86, but was apprehensive as to the type of counselling that was to be rendered.

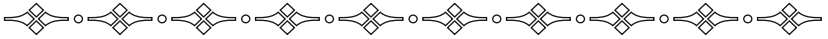
The word 'counsel' has been interpreted in four forms as per the Gujarati dictionary – (i) advice, preach, sermonize; (ii) guidance; (iii) intent, opinion, view; (iv) conciliation, treaty, union.



All the four interpretations have a very fine distinguishing line. The first meaning is one-sided, where the counsellor gives advice or sermonises. The one receiving it hears it and understands it. The entire process of counselling is mandatory, but not binding for either side. In case of the term 'guidance', there is scope for interaction and discussion between the two parties and hence an element of compromise gets included. Experience and observation made the organisation realize that the much popular approach of settlement that was adopted in counselling centres was ineffective. This system that had been accepted for decades was not able to reduce the rising family disputes and unnatural deaths of women.

AWAG was of the opinion that the efforts that were put in so far were based on the acceptance of the male-dominated social structure. By simply following the customary beliefs all concerned were going round and round with the same complaints. AWAG diverged itself from this prevailing method and adopted its own ideology and method of working that was centred round protecting the woman and not the family.

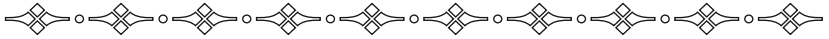
To protect a woman who is driven towards unnatural death implies that first and foremost she be provided with emotional support and wellbeing. Due to her mentally disturbed state she is not in a position to grasp any guidance that is rendered to her. AWAG's efforts are to help her recover and regain her health. Her physical injuries are attended to and the counsellors' endeavours are towards lowering her fears. The entire process demands immense time, understanding, patience and sympathy from the counsellors. The goal is to achieve wellbeing of the woman and not family reconciliation/union.



Only when the situation gets unbearable do women come forth with their complaints. Even at this point of time they experience feelings of guilt. Women feel that they have not conformed to the rules, regulations and beliefs laid down by society. The victim starts finding faults with herself and expects only a few random changes. By and large women are seeking out for a settlement. After all, their mindsets have been moulded in a social system that is steeped in male dominance.

The prevailing approach laid emphasis on three aspects – to sustain the marriage, to preserve the family and that the women should continue bearing the brunt for the sake of her child. In other words the woman had to tolerate violence imposed on her. Society has chalked out a code of conduct for women – to keep silent, to avoid back-answering, to overlook the faults of the husband and the family elders, to be subordinate, to be selfless, sacrificing and endure pain. All these characteristics are considered to be ideals. The male-dominated system has deeply instilled this belief into the minds of all men and women. The counsellors as well as the victims also move along these lines. Resultantly, on one hand the counsellors advise the woman victim to change her attitudes and on the other hand they are ready to compromise on the level of distressed caused and send her back to her marital home.

'A woman is best at her husband's place'; 'That is her real home'; 'She has to learn to adjust and live with her family'; 'She has to learn to tolerate and let go'. These are some of the thoughts and impressions that are prevalent in the system. A woman's maiden family is also influenced by such beliefs. All social realities drive the woman towards a compromising attitude. At the end, the woman victim



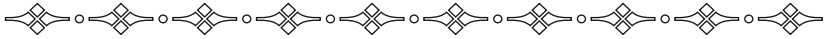
experiences loneliness, insecurity and constant danger. She is contained in an unstable mental situation. At this point AWAG's woman-centred approach comes to the woman's rescue.

### **Counselling Process**

A module outlining the three-pronged approach of the counselling process has been developed by AWAG.

- i). Psychological Help
- ii). Social Support
- iii). Legal Recourse

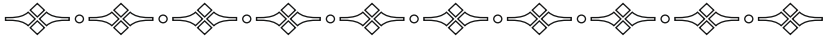
Due to the organisation's limitation of time, resources and capacities, AWAG had laid down a policy whereby cases/appeals presented by women only are accepted. The entire process is woman-centred. Efforts are directed towards raising the confidence level and self-respect of women by providing her with peace and comfort. Building an understanding about women's right and feminism forms the base of the process. Generally, the formally qualified social workers and traditional counsellors choose to be neutral towards gender disputes but the counsellors of AWAG adopt a pro-woman approach. The organisation is clear about its woman-centred ideology. Women victims who have to bear with the patriarchal system are not only oppressed and exploited but are also made powerless. Nonetheless, AWAG's women workers are confident and believe that they are competent enough to challenge oppressive structures. The first stage is that of a visit by the woman victim to the organisation wherein she narrates her problem to the counsellor. The latter completes the necessary formalities from the organisation's end. At this stage an interdependent and structured process is



established. The victim presents her problems, vents her feelings and expresses her expectations from the organisation. She has to overcome her self-consciousness. The role of the organisation at this stage is to hear out the victim calmly and patiently without getting drawn into the victim's emotions. The counsellor considers her role as that of a facilitator to the woman victim in the entire process.

During the counselling process the victim is seen as an independent individual and therefore she has to take her own decision. She also has to decide on her final choice and the extent and form of help required. As per policy, the organisation neither has to suggest anything to the victim nor does she have to take a decision on her behalf. It is the woman who has to take her own decision ultimately. The counsellor's responsibility is to explain the pros and cons of the possible alternatives to the victim. The extent of the woman-centred counselling spread wide over the coercive family structures as well as challenging social systems.

The counsellor works towards bringing out the victim from her pitiable situation. The distressed woman is calmed down and urged to think rationally. She is guided to see her perceived weaknesses and faults as an outcome of the patriarchal society that she has fallen prey to. In this manner, slowly and steadily the victim regains her strength and confidence so that she can now sit upright and take her own decision in a rational manner. This is the process of women empowerment. AWAG trains these women to acquire skills to cope with the social and emotional aspects of life. She is counselled to divert her attitudes of defeat and thoughts of self-immolation towards constructive and positive utilization for her well-being.



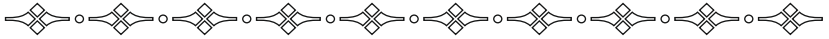
In the counselling process emphasis is laid on understanding, listening and observing the health of the victim. The counsellors adopt two methods of counselling with relation to the victim's grievances about her family members.

- i). Emergency Counselling
- ii). Assisted Counselling

In the first type, the immediate need for help required by the distressed woman is fulfilled. For example, in cases of rape or abandonment of the woman, psychological techniques are applied as a result of which the victim is able to control her rapidly flowing emotions and start thinking about the future course in a calm and cool manner. In the second method, the woman victim receives psychological help to take her own decisions by understanding the situation.

The primary stage of social support is fulfilled in a number of ways – from accompanying the victim to the police station, court, government departments, ration office, hospital, to helping her seek custody of her children. All through the entire process the organisation ensures that the victim does not become dependent on them. Her inherent confidence increases through the psychological counselling that she receives and is now able to converse confidently with the concerned officials. On receiving training she soon picks up the work at the organisation's production unit. Women seeking support at the shelter home are gradually guided to settling down independently. Those women who are seeking the court's justice are rendered legal counselling and are made familiar with the Rights and complexity of laws. Efforts are put in to ensure that such women receive regular information regarding their case proceedings.





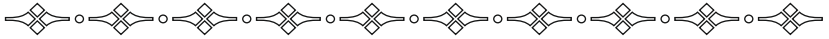
## **Procedure**

AWAG has chalked out a method of interaction between the counsellor and the victim based on its experiences. This method is known as the intervention process and is divided into three parts.

While the entire process is not simple, it is also not possible for it to run in uniform manner in the defined structure, because of the differences in the issues, situations and circumstance of the various victims. This stage is not only important but is also difficult. The conditioning of her thoughts, opinions and values through the process of socialization affect the victim's decision and presentation. The need of the hour is to present the information as openly and clearly as possible along with a firm determination.

A woman who is faced with assault from her husband tries to conceal this information. Society has accepted this matter and considered it to be a personal issue. Despite there being enough evidence of physical abuse on the woman's body, more often than not, she hesitates to say so initially. She experiences feelings of guilt and continues finding faults with herself only. She has never learnt to see the faults of her husband and even if she can see them she has never been allowed to speak about it. She feels ashamed of her vulnerable situation and all these factors eventually have a negative effect on her individuality.

At the third stage appropriate steps have to be taken according to the decision taken. To handle the violence caused by the husband, the following three steps has been strategically formulated.



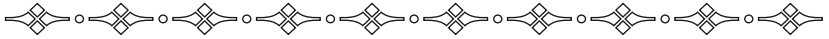
- i). Protest and verbally oppose the act of violence.
- ii). Hit back or hold back his hand when he raises it to hit.
- iii). Build pressure on the husband through neighbouring women for him to abstain from such abusive behaviour.

The third stage is that of 'Action Plan'. The victim is in constant touch with the counsellor and fulfils each stage as per her advice. The victim soon learns the ropes of bringing the situation under control and handling her changed behaviour.

### **Family Intervention**

Generally the family is considered to be a symbol of unity and harmony. Nonetheless this belief has been challenged by feminists and women scholars. The family head has the powers of a male-dominated society. It is obligatory for the family to follow the rules laid down by the male members. The family head is normally a male member that holds absolute power. The position of women in family is considered subordinate. Power, rights, benefits and duties are not uniform across women. Benefits enjoyed by a mother and daughter are not shared with the daughter-in-law. But the latter has to shoulder much responsibilities and duties. Sequentially, in the social power context 'family unity' is an illusionary. While the family provides protection, it can also become destructive.

It is hard to imagine a person without a family. Domestic violence implies violence borne by women from their own family members. To complain about one's own family members is a tough proposition for a woman. It is the

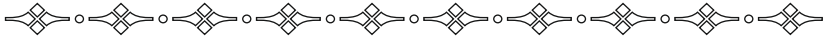


woman who has to lodge the complaint in her individual capacity but she hesitates to think and take any decision on her own. As a result of this, she becomes indecisive at the decision-making stage and desires the presence of some family members with her. Such a situation gets delicate and intricate.

The presence and intervention of family members is advantageous as well as disadvantageous. When the judgement is declared the woman is not seen as an independent person. She is seen as a wife, a mother and a daughter-in-law of the family. Thus, there is doubt regarding the justice rendered to the woman. At this stage AWAG urges the victim to be confident and determined. Some have stayed firm, some have returned to their homes, some have returned home and soon reverted back to the organisation for help. But whenever the woman seeks help she is provided so by the organisation. Family members or other persecutors are involved in the process only on the behest of the woman victim.

Information about the family, family relationships, information from neighbours' etc. help in explaining the situation to the victim, based on which she rests her decision. In most cases, the concerned family members are also involved in the joint meetings conducted. For instance in a case of marital discord, two responsible persons participated in a joint meeting and assured that the woman victim would not face any further difficulty after the settlement undertaken in these meetings.

In line with this the counsellors applies her skills related to – encouraging the concerned person to join in the discussion, asking appropriate questions, procuring information,



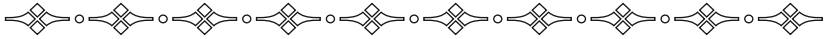
checking the acquired information, interpreting it, expanding on ideas, sharing of understanding, reflecting on possible emotions, increasing the level of confidence and providing a comfortable environment for expression of feelings.

### **Role of Society**

To give voice to women subjected to domestic violence boils down to challenging the rules laid down by the male-dominated society as well as questioning the social structure that has confined women to a subordinate role in the society. To encourage such women to think and take their own decisions and confront the situation are not socially accepted acts. To take the victim's husband and his family members to court needs much effort and skill in our conventionally steeped society. AWAG has taken on this task and with a motto to 'Save Women' and stands by women who face their struggles.

The organisation evidently has had to bear with the contempt and disapproval from the victim's family, caste and community and has to face the threats and abuses directed towards it. In addition, AWAG has had to put up with accusation of breaking homes and also has to withstand the pressure to withdraw support to women victims. In the context of conferring women with a human identity and existence, AWAG is going against the flow and knocks onto the sensitivity of civil society in order to eliminate violence against the women.

The relationship of the victim with the organisation's counsellors does not end with the process of counselling. All the beneficiary women are absorbed into various activities of the organisation. Thus, women are exposed to

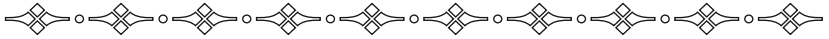


the outside world and gain insights about the social activities.

### **Manual**

In 1995, AWAG released a Manual for the counsellors of the Family Counselling Centres. In order to bring about a woman-centric ideology in the counselling process Shri Ilabelen Pathak opines that “when we talk about counselling in the Indian context it is not possible to pay attention to the lack of mutual adjustment among family members. But it is necessary to pay heed to the lack of equality in such situations. Counselling that is based on adjustment issues only, is like merely extinguishing a fire temporarily following which the problem of the woman arises again”. The Manual is aimed at fulfilling the understanding of women-centric counselling. It is divided into four chapters. (i) Counselling (ii) Concepts, Skills and Methods of Counselling (iii) Counselling Process, and (iv) Annexure of the data outlining violence against women in the current perspective. Table no. 1 represents the year-wise figures of unnatural deaths as well as data of complaints against harassment. In 1989 the count of unnatural deaths of women that was 4254 rose to 6349 in 1998. Likewise the count of complaints against harassment that was 899 in 1989 increased to 2989 in 1998.

The manual mentions that the purpose of meetings and interactions with women was to make the counselling process effective and help the victim recover so as to build her own identity and confidence. The Case History Annexure of the manual includes the how and why details related to the case. The Manual has been helpful in gathering the necessary personal information of the



victimized women. The details obtained help in analyzing and exploring various solutions related to the case.

### **Study**

A study conducted by AWAG covers the experiences of women facing domestic violence, their needs for seeking help, their responses from counselling centres, psychological support received by women and social/legal counselling received by women. In order to closely examine and understand the counselling process rendered by AWAG a number of details related to the cases have been taken note of.



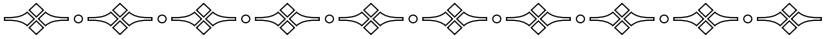
#### **Aim:**

- i). To sharpen the organization's approach and women-centred interventions for distressed women who reach out to the organization for help.
- ii). To examine the psychological and social aspects that are helpful or hindering in the process of rehabilitating women victims in an environment free of violence.
- iii). To examine the role of the organisations supporting distressed women.
- iv). To spread AWAG's insights obtained through regional experiences related to the intervention process.
- v). To publish material based on studies such that counsellors, social workers etc. receive guidance.



#### **Method:**

The case study method has been utilized in the said

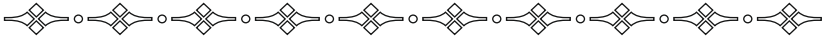


study. A timeframe of six months had been decided for the study. The respondents were selected from the women who had approached AWAG-Ekta Counselling Centre. A total of eighty-eight cases were registered of which ten cases were taken up for the study. Women covered under these ten cases are a representation of various castes and religion. Since AWAG's Counselling Centre is located in a Muslim locality at Bapunagar, the representation of Muslim women approaching the Counselling Centres is significant.

### **Findings:**

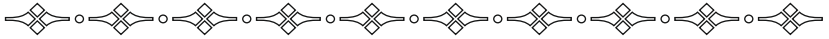
A definite pattern in relation to women has emerged from the study undertaken.

- Both the maiden as well as the marital families expect the women to fulfil her roles and duties as per the patriarchal system.
- A woman's likes, dislikes, decisions etc. are never solicited.
- The decision of her marriage is also not in her own hands.
- The parents need to educate their daughters is negligible. They consider this as an additional expenditure.
- A woman is 'trained' to be a 'good' woman as part of the process of socialization. The scope of the definition of 'good woman' is wide and is considered to be a benchmark of the society. Women who fall short of these criteria have to face atrocities.
- 60% of the surveyed cases accounted for husbands who are alcoholics and indulge in other vices also. Alcohol addiction leads to violent behaviour.



- Women face violence due to lack/delay in bearing children and so also for not bearing a male child.
- Most of the respondents were economically independent and despite fulfilling the family's financial needs they had to face various forms of domestic violence.
- The respondent's husband and other family members make use of violence to gain control over women.
- A common finding in all the cases was that men consider their wives to be their property.
- In relation to woman's sexuality, the men mistreat women – physically, sexually, mentally and emotionally.
- Most of the respondent women faced malnutrition, health issues, physical and mental injuries, frustration, disappointment and were exhausted with life.
- In all cases, the women have in their own way hindered/thwarted the atrocities inflicted on them by men.
- With women getting more competent and opposing violence, led them to face greater pain and suffering.
- Women who attended awareness raising camps gained understanding, gradually realised the injustice caused on them and started opposing their exploitation.
- The process of taking one's own decision poses as a major difficulty. Due to the unyielding social system, the bend is towards settlement and women are not able to rebel against the system.
- In rare cases women have opposed to social





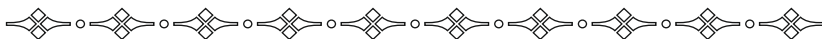
pressures and have decided to live independently.

- Rapport building with the organisation's worker and participating in AWAG's programmes proved beneficial for women. They developed the strength to tackle violence. Women started disapproving of their existing situation and realised that they could raise their voice against it. With this, they have built new relationships.
- On recuperating mentally, women experienced their own space following which they started conveying their feelings in a clear manner.

AWAG opposes all sources of women atrocities be it an activity, habit, custom, social or religious tenet. AWAG believes that to eliminate atrocities from the society it is necessary to attack its sources. With this, opposing practices such as foeticide, saataa marriages, ending the marriage by uttering Talaq three times as well as advocacy of prohibition of alcohol and maintenance laws for women, form the salient features of the organisation's agenda.

### **Foeticide**

In a technocratic, modern society the act of female foeticide is the worst form of violence against women. In Gujarat, the population of females as compared to that of males is on the decline since the last few decades. In 1951 there were 952 females per 1000 males and in 2001 the count of females dropped to 920. The main reason for this is female foeticide that bears a direct link with domestic violence. The woman's right to bear her child is seized and the female foetus is aborted from the woman's womb.

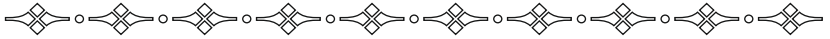


This form of violence against women is very complex because it is not necessary that the woman always opposes to such practices. Female foeticide is undertaken with or without the consent of the concerned woman though in most cases the practice is carried out with the 'consent' of the woman. As a result of this, the attitude of society, doctors, government etc. is to hold the woman responsible for such acts. But the reasons for the woman to indulge in such practices are:

- Social and religious importance of sons.
- Family and social pressure for bearing sons.
- Patriarchal mindset of both men and women.
- Exposure and experiences of atrocities borne by women in the patriarchal set-up.
- Prevailing social values of considering daughters as somebody else's asset and a liability to the maiden family.
- A feeling of helplessness experienced by parents.

Foeticide is a form of violence in which the atrocities on women are twofold; i.e the aborted foetus is that of a female and furthermore, it is a woman who is carrying the foetus. This clearly depicts that the birth and existence of women is unwanted by society. Female foeticide is a well planned social racket against women. This issue is complex by nature and tough to tackle because it has the direct and indirect support of social, political and religious organisations. The doctors are part of this entire racket wherein medical technology is used adversely on women.

Since 1988 AWAG has been demonstrating its protests against foeticide through meetings, conferences, processions, pressurising the government, appealing to



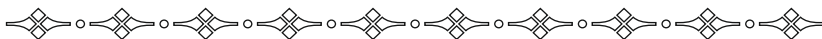
doctors as well as religious leaders to negate such practices. The organisation has been advocating that a law against foetal examination be established. This need has been fulfilled in Gujarat with the active role and pursuance of Shri Ilaben. After twenty years of campaigning, a number of organisations, caste groups and the Indian Medical Association wing in Gujarat have expressed their support in the matter.

### **Protest against the Practice of Saataa Marriages**

The roots of atrocities on women are deeply embedded in the society. The entire social structure and system considers a woman as a property that belongs to man. Consequently the role of women in social interactions is negligible. An appropriate example of this can be observed in the role of Draupadi in the epic-Mahabharat. The Pandavas put her at stake when they were defeated in gambling.

In India also, cases of sale of women and daughters are significant in numbers. Here, women do not have any say. Women are used as a tool to derive pleasure and are also mortgaged and bartered for want of money or commodities. This is also a form of atrocity on women. AWAG addresses such cases in its work areas.

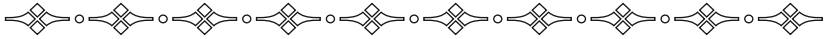
Since 2004, AWAG has been functional in the Rapar Block of Kutch district in Gujarat. Work related to rehabilitation and awareness building among women was taken up after the earthquake that occurred in 2001. This project was supported by OXFAM.



Rapar is a socially and economically backward area. Low gender ratio, lack of education among girls, rigid traditions and social practices, subordinate status of women were some of the salient features observed in the area. On delving on the issues related to the women, AWAG learnt about the practice of saataa marriages. In Rapar and Kutch area, marriages are based on the saataa practice that involves the marriage between a brother-sister pair of one family with that of the other. This leads to the emergence of various social ills. The choice of the prospective bride and groom becomes very limited because they have to seek partners who are of marriageable age. Thus, due to limited opportunities a number of compromises have to be borne with.

- Such marriages are arranged at a young age.
- By and large these marriages are mismatched in terms of age, height, education and intellect.
- Being unmarried is considered a social disgrace.
- Inter-caste marriages being prohibited gives rise to a situation of social inhibition.
- It becomes obligatory to bring wives from other areas and communities.
- The woman faced with atrocities is neither able to sever her marriage nor go to her parents home, because by doing so her brother's marriage gets adversely affected. Thus she has little or no choice before her.

AWAG's key mission is to combat domestic violence. This issue is overemphasized during awareness camps, workshops and advocacy. Furthermore, a network also has been set up by AWAG to handle this issue. The organisation



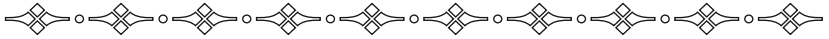
works towards educating and supporting women to raise their voices and oppose violence by inculcating practices such as: refusal to accept beating, not tolerating any misdoings and taking legal recourse rather than submitting to suicide.

AWAG has always opposed to such indirect abuses inflicted on women, has trained women to protest against it and has achieved its results. On 8<sup>th</sup> March 2006, a total of one thousand seven hundred women had gathered wherein slogans centred round women grappling with saataa marriages were created. '*Hu Jivava Mangu Chhu.*' (I want to live)

As an outcome of awareness camps, vigorous campaigns against social ills as well as related workshops, the age-old practice of saataa marriages was now ready to be put an end to. The organisation assured the community of its complete support in the matter. The positive effect was that leaders from the Rajput, Koli, Dalit and Patel communities supported those who were ready to break through these conventions. Local people gradually gathered courage to raise a voice against social evils.

In order to solve social problems the need of youth to support women committees was strongly felt especially in matters such as saataa marriages, gender discrimination, health-related superstitions and beliefs. In December 2004 a gathering comprising of partner organisations and around two hundred and fifty youth was organised at village Ratneshwar on the issue of saataa.

The youth group that was earlier sceptical about AWAG's interventions now changed their outlook after having participated in the said conference. Subsequently their



support and trust in AWAG's activity soon increased. The main topics discussed in the conference were – reasons for the sustenance of saataa marriages, gender discrimination, reasons of prevalence of blind faith and ways to eliminate the same.

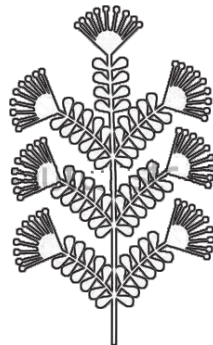
In 2006, a day's camp was organised by AWAG for the women committees and youth. A total of 277 participants (135 men and 142 women) from thirty-nine villages attended the camp. At the day's end a number of youth resolved to share their learning with their parents. The enthusiasm and confidence of the women committees to pursue their work also increased.

### **Muslim Personal Code**

AWAG has been fairly active on issues concerning Muslim women. The organisation has put in efforts to organise these women in relation to amendments in the Muslim Personal Code. For instance, in the Shahbano case her maintenance rights under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code were ceased at the time of dispute. Thus in order to retrieve her rights and so also to oppose against the 1996 Muslim Women Divorce Bill and Halala practice, Muslim women were once again organised.

The decade of the nineties faced a demand from the Muslim community across the country for amendments in the Muslim Personal Code. A sizeable number of poor Muslim women had participated in the gathering organised by AWAG in 1993. AWAG's approach on Muslim divorce is pro-woman. The organisation expresses its dissent of the practice of ending a marriage by uttering Talaq three times at a single sitting. The alternative for a three month

reconciliation period was recommended so that the woman is not thrown out of the house instantly. In addition it was suggested that the amount of *Mehar* (dowry) should also be increased so that the woman does not become dependent on others. While the organisation confesses that they have been unable to make this demand acceptable, related mechanisms have been put to effect. For instance, women are taught to be in denial of having heard the words of Talaq and hence abstain from leaving their homes. This technique has been quite fulfilling.



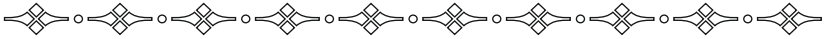
## INTERVENTIONS WITH THE POLICE FORCE

As observed in earlier, AWAG's efforts since the very beginning are towards awakening a pro-woman feeling in civil society. To protest against obscene pictures in the media was the organisation's very first public activity. While awakening of civil society is necessary it is also imperative that women develop awareness. Thus, awareness-building forms the strategy as well as an important component of the organisation's multi-pronged battle.

Support is sought from organizations and individuals as well as lent by AWAG to those working towards women's justice, protection and equality. AWAG has faith in the strength of collective efforts. Alongside the organisation's constant endeavours have been towards bringing about amendments in laws in favour of women as well as chalking out new ones. AWAG also lays emphasis on building



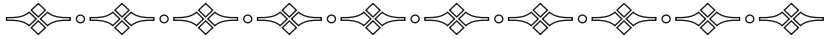




awareness among women regarding women's issues, in addition to awakening the civil society. Building pressure on the government with relation to these issues also forms a part of AWAG's work for which it seeks the support of other voluntary organisations.

Like all committed workers, AWAG also experienced that the issue does not end by mere framing of laws. In order to manifest the real implication of the law one has to persistently hammer in the fact that a woman is an independent individual. Most of the laws render justice to woman in her capacity as a mother, a daughter, a wife and a daughter-in-law. At times the finer details pertaining to laws have to be conveyed to its implementers such as officers, police and even to the judges. Sensitizing these servicemen forms part of AWAG's role.

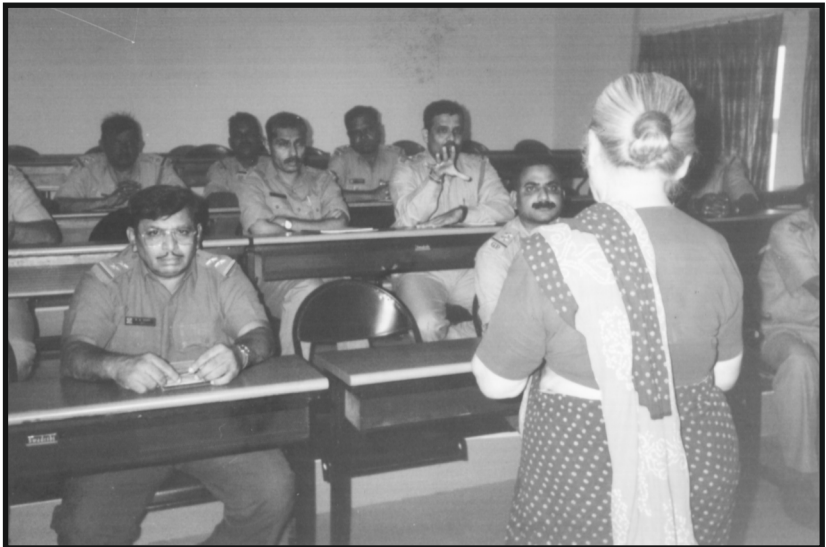
A number of organizations in Ahmedabad run Family Counselling Centres as well as Legal Counselling Centres. Since these Counselling Centres were not exercising Section 498-A, AWAG prepared a questionnaire to understand their responses in the matter. A survey covering total of twenty-five organisations from across the districts of Junagadh, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, Amreli, Surendranagar, Valsad, Surat, Bharuch, Mehsana, Banaskantha, Ahmedabad and Vaodara was conducted. A number of respondents stated that the police refuse to register their complaints of domestic violence when they approach the police station on the pretext of there being no visible injury on the woman's body. Some police officers also advise the woman that they may not be able to return back to their husband's home if they file the complaint. Some of the respondents stated that when a woman go alone to the police station her complaint is not registered. In event of a

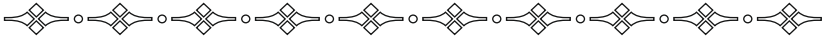


woman going along with an organization member, the police officer expressed amusement on hearing the victim's complaint.

The women workers of the Family Counselling Centres and Legal Counselling Centres of the surveyed organizations expressed that when the organization representative accompanies the complainant woman to the police station, the police officer starts explaining the implications of Section 498-A to the former by stating that, 'by lodging a complaint the victim will become homeless. It is her anger that prompts her to lodge a complaint otherwise she is well aware that she is disclosing a very private matter in the open.'

In instances where the police officer registers the victim's complaint at the behest of the organisation's representatives, he treats the matter very lightly thereby diminishing the entire case. The officer sympathizes with





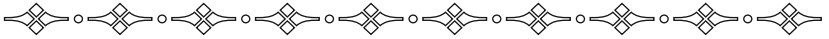
the accused and readily fulfils his request for receiving bail from the court. Several women have expressed their view that when an offence is lodged under Section 498-A of the IPC it serves as an opportunity for the police officers to receive bribe from the accused because under this Section the latter has to be arrested. But when the accused is not arrested but is instead smothered with generosity, the complainant soon realizes the police officers' ploy to weaken the case and set the accused free.

When women approach the police station the behaviour of the police is not only disgusting but is also discourteous – they keep the woman waiting for long hours and poke fun at her, pass obscene remarks and insult her.

The lesser known reason for women's complaint not getting registered at the police station is that the police does not want that the count of offences registered at their police station should increase. Police officers are aware that if the number of offences in their police station increases, they will be reprimanded and if the count decreases they will be praised. Thus, to minimize the count of complaints registered in their police station, the staff normally finds it convenient to drive out the woman complainant.

In domestic violence cases though the role of the police does not arise at every stage, in cases of physical violence the affected woman has to take help from the police much to her reluctance. AWAG has experienced that even at such times the police's approach is not pro-woman.

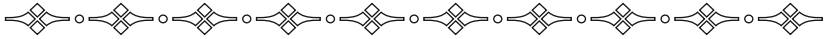
Police are the product of a male-dominated social system and have imbibed its values. In the laws favouring women two new sub-sections (498-A and 113-A) were included.



Accordingly, once a complaint is registered, then under Section 320 of the Criminal Procedure Code, no authority can undertake its settlement. Such a case's hearing takes place at the court only and only after court's order does the case get closed. But crux of the new Sections and laws did not make its way to the police. During their interactions with the police, the activists observed an attitude of apathy, irresponsibility and carelessness of the police towards the woman victim's grievances. With the attitude of 'women are meant to die, so what!!' the police are the last to arrive and their investigation remains inadequate.

They are all conversant with the fact that the count of unnatural deaths of women rises each year. However the count of such cases registered with the police is very low. Women cells are set up at police stations at the city and district levels, but the cases of unnatural deaths of women that are registered herein are also negligible. The actual count of unnatural deaths of women does not match with





the police records. When confronted with this, the police furnish an absurd unfulfilling reply.

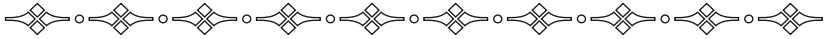
### **Law and Police**

The woman inflicted with atrocities has to go to the police station to register her complaint. The role of the police officers herein is to investigate the case by gathering information from the persecutors, the victim's relatives and neighbours and presenting the same in the court. This implies that the police has to be sensitive in understanding the woman's issue and has a key role to play in sustaining the victim's confidence and self-respect.

As mentioned earlier when a victim of domestic violence registers a complaint under Section 498-A, the police officer is instructed and authorized to arrest the accused. But the reality is very bitter. Women activists and human rights activists have observed that the inclination of the police is not in favour of women. The main reason is that the police force even if they are women is a part of the patriarchal society. Hence, they too have assimilated the anti-woman values and attitudes of the system.

### **Police Proceedings**

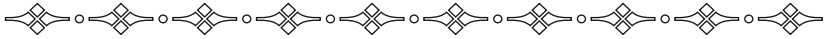
As per the rules laid down, when a woman succumbs to burns she is examined by the Deputy Superintendent of Police, but when a woman suffering with 60% burns survives, she is examined by a junior Constable. Many a times, despite ample efforts of the senior police officials it is very difficult to procure the necessary evidence. AWAG felt that if the victim is shifted to the hospital and examined by a senior-level officer the chances of procuring the same



would be better. As per the police's contentions in view of the responsibility, work load and constant activity this was a tough proposition for a senior officer. AWAG's suggestion was that in event of the unnatural death of women whether the officer visits the place for investigation or goes to the hospital when the case is admitted, the time taken is one and the same. When an officer at the level of Deputy Superintendent of Police provides guidance in the investigation process then the investigation proves useful. Such suggestions were conveyed to the then Additional Chief Secretary of Gujarat.

It was also brought to the notice that the woman's complaint was registered under Section 323 and only in event of her death was Section 498-A exercised. But the police urged that owing to the rigidity and severity of this Section the resettlement of the victim in her family becomes difficult. AWAG's counter argument to this was that the role of the police is to enforce the law and is not that of a social worker



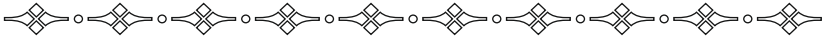


or mediator to safeguard the family. By and large the police advise the woman victim to save her marriage and family at any cost. AWAG insists that the victim's complaint should be registered at the police station as per rules and regulations. AWAG strongly opposes the practice of granting advance bail in cases of physical and mental harassment and opines that the persecutor released on bail becomes a hindrance in the investigation process thereby increasing the chances of destroying all evidence.

AWAG's insistence for fair and legitimate police proceedings reflects a deep understanding of the women's behaviour and attitudes. No woman files a police complaint if she is subjected to beating once in a while only. It is only when her endurance limits have crossed the threshold does she take recourse of the police. Generally when she is driven out by the police, the woman considers embracing death and this is the main cause of the unnatural deaths of women.

AWAG is convinced that registration and due investigation of the woman's complaint by the police can put an end to a large number of unnatural deaths of women. A survey undertaken by the organization substantiates the said conviction. As per AWAG's experience and observation, there are a number of gaps in the police's registration and investigation of complaints and unnatural deaths of women. Given below are the findings derived on the basis of the overall police proceedings undertaken.

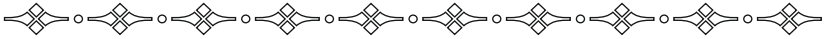
- The procedure for police registration is not systematic and consistent. Different Sections are applied to similar complaints and offences whereas the same Section is exercised for dissimilar offences.



- The police registration also lacks a number of details. Generally the unnatural death of women is registered under Section 174 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Moreover, all unnatural deaths are reported as accidents or suicide this method does not clarify whether the unnatural death of the woman was due to murder or suicide.
- The inclination of court is towards settlement especially in cases of family disputes. As per AWAG's observation the settlement however does not take place on the grounds of equality of both parties. A woman is faced with pressure arising from social scrutiny and so also from her maiden home.

Let us take a look at the case of Bhadravati that was taken up in the study conducted by AWAG. Bhadravati had committed suicide after much endurance of atrocities inflicted by her husband's family. Her father filed a police complaint. Two years later her father had arrived at a settlement with the accused. The reasons for settlement had not been mentioned in the case. The court also accepted the said settlement without any scrutiny. Though the offence was filed under Section 498-A, the suicide was not seen as an act of incitement. The court further applied Section 306 but did not re-impose the charges on the accused. The case was not sent to the Session's Court. Similarly, charges for lying were not imposed on Bhadravati's father. Thus, the registration of Bhadravati's death was neither taken up by the police nor the court for which the accused received total support of the father and his relatives. As such police proceedings and judicial processes are not in favour of women. In AWAG's opinion a little more care and vigilance in proceedings undertaken by the police can lower the incidence of unnatural deaths of women.



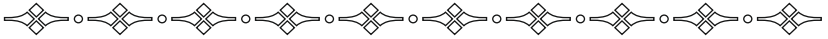


## A CASE RECITAL

*Reshma approached AWAG's Counselling Centre in relation to seeking maintenance to support her daughter. Soon after her marriage Reshma's husband started putting a lot of restrictions on her as a result of which she was not allowed to meet her parents and had to observe the system of burqa. Due to her husband Masood's prolonged illness Reshma took up giving tuitions to make a living. One day a student's father approached Reshma in relation to his child's progress. This incident became a point of major dispute. Reshma's father was made to get involved in the matter. He expressed that Reshma's talking to a parent about his child's studies was not an offence. Masood's ego as a man and a son-in-law was hurt. Following this, he got rid of Reshma from the house.*

*Reshma stayed at her parent's home for a year during which time they realized that Masood was spreading talks about Reshma's poor education status and her not fit to be his wife etc, within the community. Reshma's reaction was filled with vigour. She decided to study further and clear her high school studies and enrol herself into a college. On the other hand, her parents were putting in efforts for a settlement between her and Masood. Soon with the intervention of the community Reshma was accepted back home by the Masood.*

*On the very next day of her return to Masood's home, the latter gave her a tight slap and told her 'Look here! I am slapping you and will continue to do so. In case you want to go back your parent's place go right away. But if you want to live with me then you have to bear with all this'. Reshma*

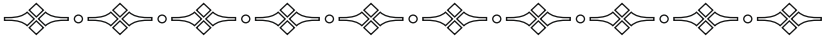


*kept silent so that the efforts put in towards the settlement do not go in vain. She also felt that her parents may face humiliation if she returns back.*

*Though Reshma had to face the ups and downs Masood did not prevent her from pursuing her studies albeit with the number of restrictions and harassment. But despite all the harassment Reshma's determination to complete her studies annoyed Masood. He started abusing her physically and verbally and made sure that she did not get any time to study at home. Regardless of adversities faced Reshma continued her studies. incidence of unnatural deaths of women. Masood's growing suspicion would lead him to her college. Once he had even dragged her out of her classroom and beat her. In fact, he would never miss a chance to beat her and insult her in public. At home too she would have to be at his back and call and bear the brunt of his crude and violent behaviour. In yet another instance he once created a ruckus over the food just when Reshma was about to leave for her exams and made sure that she cooked another meal for him. Thus Reshma was obviously delayed for her exams.*

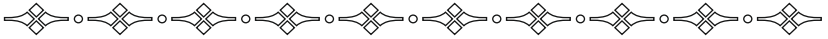
*Initially Reshma would eat the leftovers after Masood had finished his meals. But on getting involved with AWAG she soon made sure to keep aside her food and consume it. Masood taunted Reshma on this pretext.*

*After three years of marriage Reshma became pregnant and despite bearing physical atrocities she gave birth to a healthy baby girl at her maiden home as per the customary practice. Masood did not welcome his own child and soon Reshma returned to his home with the newborn. Unfortunately, her traumatic experiences were only*



*increasing. After going back and forth from her marital home to her maiden home on several occasions she finally decided to return to her parent's her for good.*

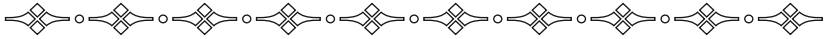
*As of now she has completed her college studies. She has not received any alimony from Masood. She worries over the fact that despite staying in the same city her daughter does not even identify with Masood. The latter too does not seem to have any paternal instincts towards his daughter. Reshma finally approached AWAG to seek maintenance from Masood so as to meet the rising expenses incurred by her in raising her daughter. She was keen on a settlement out of court. For this, when Masood was called over to the Counselling Centre of AWAG he expressed his desire to take Reshma and their daughter back home but posed several conditions on Reshma, such as discontinuation of her studies, forbid her from doing a job, being at his beck and call etc. Reshma did not approve of this and hence the thought of returning back with him was set aside. Instead Reshma accepted the work offered by AWAG whereby she not only derived a source of income but also related well with her responsibility. Reshma finally graduated in Law with much emotional and psychological support from AWAG. She got along well with the organisation's counsellor and hence could vent her feelings easily especially those of immense insecurity that she was anticipating in the event of her parents being no more. She was extremely worried as to how she would cope with her daughter's schooling and other responsibilities singlehandedly. Such feelings were creating an adverse effect on Reshma's mind. She also started developing inhibitions regarding her work performance when faced with unfavourable situations. This made her indulge in self-pity, diffidence and anger.*



*In course of the counselling process Reshma was encouraged to view her situation in a different perspective altogether. The counsellor advised her to identify her strengths and abilities of having grappled with the struggle in her life. The education acquired helped Reshma to increase her self-esteem and shape her future. Several cases of women in India and across the world were narrated to Reshma in order to convince her that she was not alone in the battle of violence against women.*

### **AWAG's Confrontation Strategy**

While determining the organisation's confrontation strategy the foremost need that was felt was to sensitize the police towards women victims. The role of the police in the process of the victim getting justice is of much significance. Without this vital link neither will the Legal Counselling Centre's counsellors or social workers be able to achieve the desired outcomes of seeking justice for the distressed woman. Hence, in order to combat violence against women it was essential to rope in the effective police proceedings, without which there often apparent gaps in the process leading to its abrupt end. Training rendered to the counsellors and social workers of the Counselling Centres were found to be one-sided. There was a pressing need for the police to get active. Thus, with approval of the then Director General of Police and the Inspector General Shri K V Joseph, the programme for sensitizing the police was commenced upon in 1998. Around 80% districts of Gujarat were covered by AWAG's advocacy related to gender sensitivity. The resultant effect was that there was a rise in the figures in the cases registered by the police personnel. AWAG also acknowledges that with the given support and timely intervention of the police the count of unnatural death of women also started declining.



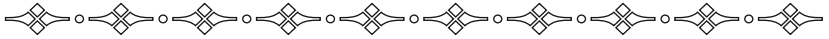
## **Socio-Legal Training**

AWAG's main concern was to bring about the effective implementation of laws. For this, the effort to publish the Manual and hand it over to the police was fulfilled. The organisation's main aim was to alleviate the unnatural deaths of women. In order to achieve its aim, AWAG's approach from the very beginning has been sound and rational. Based on its approach it conducted trainings at six-monthly intervals for counsellors of Family Counselling Centres from across Gujarat. The objectives of the training were as under:

- Sensitize the participants to support and understand the plight of victimised women.
- Fulfil the victim's need to file a police complaint in event of being inflicted with physical and mental atrocities.
- Familiarize the counsellors with Section 498-A and the procedure for applying it.
- Uphold the objective of preserving women rather than preserving families.

## **Women Police**

When a woman victim visits the police station to lodge a complaint, the presence of a woman police is essential. In a male-dominated society when a homely woman has to interact with a strange man and that to a police officer for the very first time, is bound to feel uneasy. Regardless of the approach gentle or otherwise presented by the police officer, the woman freezes and fumbles as a result of which she is unable to articulate the matter clearly. Thus, it is mandatory for a woman police to be available at such times.

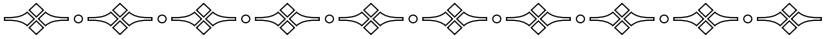


However, it is observed that women police despite being women lack the female perspective and generally possess the male outlook and perspective. After all they too are a product of the male-dominated society. Often their attitudes that emerge from their position are also similar to those of their male counterparts. Perhaps, they consider themselves to be at par with males. Thus, AWAG felt the need for conducting gender sensitivity trainings. In 1991 an advertisement of the All Women Police Station that featured in the newspapers served as an opportunity for AWAG to fulfil its objective. In collaboration with other voluntary organisations a discussion on women's issues was organised with the women police. Owing to apathetic response from other organisations, AWAG decided to pursue the same in its own capacity. AWAG developed a rapport with the police force in order to inculcate a pro-woman approach among their officials.

During the workshops care was taken to ensure that:

- The participants do not distance themselves from the group,
- Their power and ego are not hurt in anyway,
- Their position is respected,
- The training undertaken by them is not a threat to them.

The approach and petty-mindedness towards women is inherent in the police. Such behaviour of utter disregard was not acceptable to the organisation. The training team of AWAG was magnanimous enough to ensure that modesty and decorum was maintained during these trainings. At times the team would turn a deaf ear towards criticism

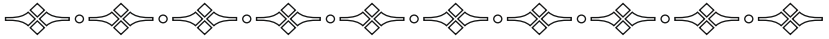


about women and even bend a little if required. But when it came to conveying the issue of violence against women in Gujarat there was firm assertion from AWAG.

In order to keep up the effective dialogue and relationship that was established with the police, AWAG adopted the following measures:

- It was decided to set dialogue with police officers at the level of Dy.SP, PI and PSI instead of getting involved with Constables and Head Constables. This is so because the education qualification of the senior officers is of a higher order.
- No complaint would be registered without the consent of Dy.SP, PI and PSI.
- Furthermore, since the volume of the lower rung is large dealing with middle-rung officers such as Dy.SP, PI, PSI is much simpler.

Collaborating with officers who control the reins of law and order is a tough affair. In addition to their rightful power they also wield their male power bestowed to them by the male-dominated society. Amidst all this, the new-found issue of gender equality crops up! One also had to handle their presumption of them being highly knowledgeable and all-encompassing as a virtue of their position. Here, AWAG had to work with power wielders for which it had to gear up with confidence. In order to overcome the troublesome situation, AWAG decided to adopt a rational means of equipping itself with legal knowledge. For this it acquired complete information regarding various laws, Indian Penal Code as well as Criminal Procedure Code. The organisation also built knowledge, understanding and nitty-gritty's regarding circulars related to the police force, their work methodology in putting it into practice etc. It was also



decided to keep the figures of the declining numbers of women across Gujarat handy and on the tip of the tongue. After having gained competency in the said matters the training team of AWAG conducted workshops for the police with modesty.

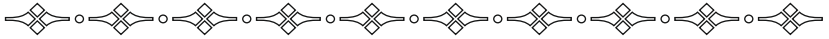
### **Police Workshops**

A training that was organized for the police in 1997 had the participation of a number of women police whose presence was extremely beneficial. This resulted in positive effects as regards awareness and sensitivity towards women's issues among the police force of Gujarat.

In the same year a total of four workshops were organized wherein dialogue and discussion were centred round concept, thoughts and principles of the male-dominated society. The participants realized that the language and expressions used in our day-to-day lives knowingly/unknowingly creates disparity between the two genders. This point was emphasised with relevant examples. For instance, boys are considered to be brave, physically strong, fearless, aggressive etc., while girls are considered to be modest, fearful, soft and ignorant. Girls are prone to crying. So if a boy cries he is labelled as a sissy. This type of language and expression further feed the prejudices that have been prevalent since ages. Thus, the participants were informed that as part of their responsibility to protect women it was essential for them who overcome these biases. This was the premise on which AWAG rested its work to encourage and urge the participants to start thinking and acting in the said direction.

Thereafter, the trainee group was exposed to data pertaining to women's ownership of income in social





production published by International Labour Organisation. By linking these figures with the experiences of our day-to-day living, the aspect about unequal distribution of resources was also brought to the fore. A number of women police present in the workshop could relate their learning with their experiences. Efforts were put in to understand the discrepancy between reality and assumptions.

The male and female police participants were asked to evaluate the trainings. Their responses were very encouraging. The workshops with the police force of Porbandar became a regular and permanent feature of AWAG's activities. The organisation had prepared learning material to lead discussions during the workshops undertaken.

### **Schedule**

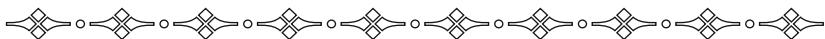
Generally, the material developed was based on the following topics:

- Origin and function of the patriarchal system
- Origin of the feminist ideology in India
- Social structure and patriarchal system

The above issues were dealt with and discussed in detail. Room for debates and questions was also provided for enhanced effectiveness in police proceedings.

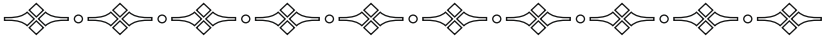
### **Manual**

A booklet containing the roles and duties of the police as well as laws favouring women was published by AWAG to serve as a handbook. The booklet named 'Police Guide' encloses all details related to the offences inflicted on



women, application of relevant laws and various procedures. Topics related to the police's understanding/misunderstanding and perception about women; sensitivity towards women victim while registering complaints etc. This simple, self-explanatory twenty-five paged booklet was published in 2004. The foreword elucidates the need for the police's support towards women victims in context of the prevailing social situation. In her straight-forward and lucid presentation, Ilaben with her profound feminist outlook has exposed the male psyche of the police. Parents, in-laws, society as well as systems pertaining to police, law and order have always associated with the woman as a mother, a wife, a daughter or a sister rather than as an individual. Under these circumstances a woman rarely steps out to lodge a complaint because she is aware that the society is not in agreement with her. Thus, when a woman reaches out to the police station to lodge a complaint one can fathom the severity of the torment and state of mind of the woman.





The booklet is divided into seven sections. The first section covers a detailed understanding of Section 498-A. In addition to clarification of the said Section, the aspect related to the non-bailable offence has also been included vide a special note. Thereafter, through dialogue between the woman victim, AWAG and the police a vivid picture of the stage of the organisation's interventions and expectations from police are laid down. With an understanding about women's ignorance about laws, their mindset and attitudes, it is expected that the police handle these aspects maturely while dealing with women victims. Many a time when the women approach the police to lodge a complaint, the latter are concerned about her becoming homeless. At this juncture the male-dominated psyche is at play. Sections 1 and 3 of the manual highlight the absurdity of the police's concern and instead emphasise on the need for them to register the victim's complaint in confidence. Women feel highly offended when they are turned out of the police station without registering their complaint.

In Sections 4 and 5 that follow, data related to the unnatural deaths of women between 1996 and 2000 has been presented. The count of the complaints registered is far more in 2000 than that in 1996. The positive intervention of the police can save the lives of women thereby protecting their human rights.

Section 6 enumerates an understanding on sexual offences especially those related to rape. An attempt has been made to define and categorize the various forms of rape. Information regarding the pertinent Section under the IPC is also fulfilled completely. Here also, the role of the informed police has been outlined with relation to the

uninformed women victims. With the intervention of the police the woman's case gains strength. The responsibility of strengthening the victim's case and protecting her lies in the hands of the police.

Finally, the circulars released by the State for the police have also been included. In course of the discussion between the organisation's social workers and the police it was understood that the police circulars were available in their files but were not handy enough. These circulars have been included in this booklet for easy access at the police station. This handy booklet serves as a guide to the police in developing sensitivity towards women.

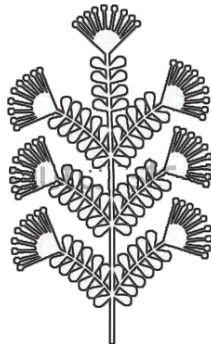
In course of work the sense of understanding increases, difficulties come to the fore and gaps in the process are apparent. AWAG too experienced a similar process. Matter related to the Police Guide was limited and hence another booklet was published to meet their requirements. This



booklet covered:

- The 1948 United Nations Human Rights Declaration
- Fundamental Rights according to the Indian Constitution
- List of Sections of Criminal Laws pertaining to women
- Recitals of the Sections of Criminal Laws pertaining to women.
- List of Sections of criminal offences under IPC that pertain to women.

A special note of the laws pertaining to the Dying Declaration, its related judgments, inconsistencies therein, as well as other vital points have also been penned down in this booklet. Thus, in addition to serving as a guide for the police, the booklet has been very useful for the workers of voluntary organisations. This booklet is like a ready reckoner in relation to Law. Being handy and concise, it leaves little scope for the police to make lame excuses. But the crux of the matter remains that the laws pertaining to women must be implemented and not just laid down on paper.

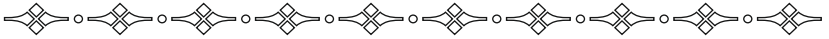


## **OTHER ACTIVITIES: COMMUNAL HARMONY, HEALTH AND LABOUR**

### **Communal Harmony**

Gujarat, especially Ahmedabad has been a victim of communal riots since the last four decades the brunt of which is largely borne by the poor. AWAG's main work area falls in the Bapunagar region of Ahmedabad that is home to poor labourers belonging to Muslim and Dalit communities. AWAG's member Sara Baldiwala has been involved with organising and awakening of Muslim women from the slums since 1986. The endeavour was initiated with the formation of women committees. The work however spilled over to additional areas such as Rakhial, Gomtipur and Saraspur.

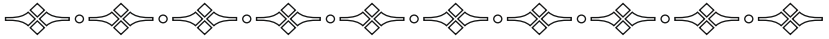




AWAG's idea herein was to build rapport with the Muslim women that would prompt them to step out of their homes, interact among themselves, share and discuss their concerns so as to expose them to social, political and economic aspects. Thereafter in 1992, Dalit women were also included in this activity.

For AWAG, the communal riots posed much challenge. The organisation's approach was to take on the responsibilities as and when they came by. There was a pressing need for relief work for the riot victims. In 1985 AWAG could not do much beyond some relief work, but based on this experience in the very next year AWAG decided to work with women that had fallen prey to the riots that had broken out in Ahmedabad.

The work related to communal harmony that was commenced upon by AWAG in 1986 has been ongoing since then at various levels and stages in response to the varying needs of the situation. AWAG has always responded to the issue of the growing communalism in addition to its mandate related to violence against women. AWAG is one of the few voluntary organisations of Gujarat that has shown sensitivity towards communalism. The organisation's work related to communalism and concerns of Muslim women has been noteworthy. The first attempt towards communal harmony was launched in 1986 wherein to start with, a visit to the relief camps was undertaken. The areas of Bapunagar and Dariapur were affected then. Since AWAG had formed women committees in these areas, work with them was commenced upon. Thereafter, the work area in Bapunagar gained much hold. Between 1993 and February 2002 the sensitive areas of Bapunagar, Rakhial, Gomtipur and Saraspur remained riot-



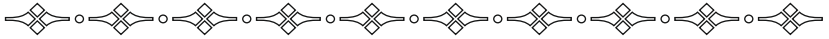
free. Even in the old city area of Dariapur the sporadic disturbances that occurred did not spread into other areas.

### **Economic Activity**

The priority of the women from the above work area was to establish peace but due to three consecutive years of communal riots people experienced acute financial pressure since their business was badly affected. As the situation normalised, the women of the area expressed their need to generate income. Based on this, AWAG procured a year's work pertaining to tailoring of uniforms from the Khadi Gramodyog Board. However, AWAG was not successful in acquiring the contract for the following year. In the initial stages, the organisation found it tough to withstand the competition, politics and market dealings. But despite facing adversities and backing out the situation, AWAG instead set up its own Production Centre in Bapunagar. The venture took off with the production of



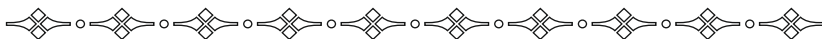




readymade garments designed for the middle class and these were placed in the market for sale. The next two years were a period of teething troubles and one of learning about economic activities.

Through these attempts the organisation soon realised that in order to sustain the market competition it was necessary to be well-versed with market tactics, designing, marketing etc. In 1989 the organisation received an order for edging of handkerchiefs from Calico Mills. With the mill having closed down this activity lasted upto 1993. Meanwhile a number of activities were taken up by AWAG but could not arrive at their logical end from producer to consumer. There were a number of factors on which the organisation had no control and this retarded the work process. Furthermore, with a number of mills closing down it was obligatory for the organisation to think anew. Work pertaining to Modern Tery towels lasted till 2004.

After eighteen to twenty years of experience in running income generation activities, in 2005 AWAG took on the task of upgrading the skills of its resources at the Production Centre at Bapunagar. To date, items such as women readymade garments, bags, purses, spectacle and cell phone cases are produced at the Centre. In 2009 it tried its hand at producing and marketing sanitary napkins. There is a shop in Navrangpura for sale of the Centre's produce. AWAG entered the market by launching its brand Ek AWAG in 2006 and faces competition with regard to concepts such as skill, finishing, marketing, profit etc. In addition to sale at the state level, the products are also exported.



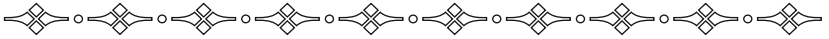
At first, economic support for this was sought from outside, but today the co-operative is functioning independently and in a stable manner. The membership count in the co-operative at the end of 2008 was four hundred and eighty-three. At present the count of the earlier riot-affected women is very less. After having gained economic stability or due to migration to other locations after marriage the count of the enrolled women is on the decline. Women faced with domestic violence, learn the skills and procure work in their own capacities. New women members constantly join in and ultimately the count rises.

### **Communal Riots, 1992**

The demolition of the Babri Masjid led to the outbreak of widespread communal riots in Gujarat as well as other areas of the country. AWAG in the very same year expanded its work areas and undertook its promotion work by setting dialogue with the Dalit and the Muslim women of the area. Consequently, the women from both these communities realised that they were not against each other. External elements and factors were responsible for creating and sustaining the riots. AWAG organised a camp named '*Manavta Bachao*' (Save Humanity) in this area. The two-day camp centred round aspects such as communal biases, misunderstandings, misconceptions etc. through dialogue and discussions.

### **Sangathan (Organisation)**

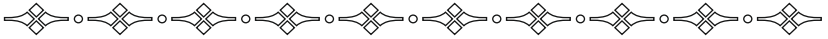
Following the riots of 2002 there was a positive change in the work methodology of the organisation. A total of one hundred and twenty women were given leadership training and were groomed as field leaders. AWAG's contention



was that instead of venturing alone the workers could be accompanied by their respective field leaders. In this manner a larger area with more inputs could be covered. Furthermore, with the objective of emphasising on secular activities, the workers were imparted training to focus on day-to-day primary needs such as water, sewage, electricity etc. Thus, women from the Dalit as well as Muslim communities went through trainings.

During the Godhara carnage and thereafter there was a massive outbreak of communal riots. Several areas in Ahmedabad were strongly affected. These riots were intense and lasted over a long period of time. Apathy of the police and political interventions led to aggravation of the situation. AWAG's work areas were also not excluded from the riots. The salient feature of these riots was that instead of sporadic incidents, mobs of one community were attacking those of the other. Before one could comprehend the situation, the carnage was intense and wild. At this stage it was impossible for the organisation to respond immediately and curb the situation.

As mentioned earlier, AWAG had felt its work in Bapunagar and Dariapur to be fruitful because despite being riot-prone areas, both these areas were free from riots during the decade 1993-2002. Nonetheless the organisation confesses that after the Babri Masjid incident, the said harmony was destroyed wherein the Hindu mindset was filled with utter hatred towards Muslims. This feeling of animosity towards the Muslim community had spread far and wide and had taken a strong hold in the minds of the people. AWAG felt that the Nation's democratic and secular arms were shaken. Feelings of helplessness, vulnerability, incompetency and frustration soon spread among the team of AWAG. Owing to the organisation's involvement and



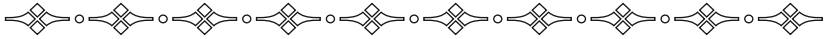
relationship with the women in the areas of Bapunagar and Dariapur since 1985, AWAG kept feeling that something had to be done about the then prevailing situation.

## **2002**

AWAG felt the need to seal the cracks that had developed between the two communities. It was necessary for women from both the communities to get together but this did not seem enough. Biases, misinformation and beliefs about one another were deeply set in the minds of people from both the communities. AWAG's team was grappling with the situation in bringing about a harmonious relationship between women from both communities.

The riots had created a big divide between the Hindus and Muslims. The community members who lived alongside each other in Ahmedabad had now separated from each other especially among the poor sections of the communities. A year later when AWAG resumed its interventions, people started reverting back to their homes but there remained a distance between the two communities as they could not accept one another.

The Dalit as well as Muslim women in addition to being economically poor also shared a similar social situation and position. With this background the need to bring the women of both these communities on a common platform was thought of so as to restore the harmony through a humanitarian approach. Thus, AWAG's approach was centred round the principles of gender and class so as to stress upon the women that the said issue was common to all women and hence needed to be addressed collectively. The women of both the communities were equally disadvantaged and also shared common customs and



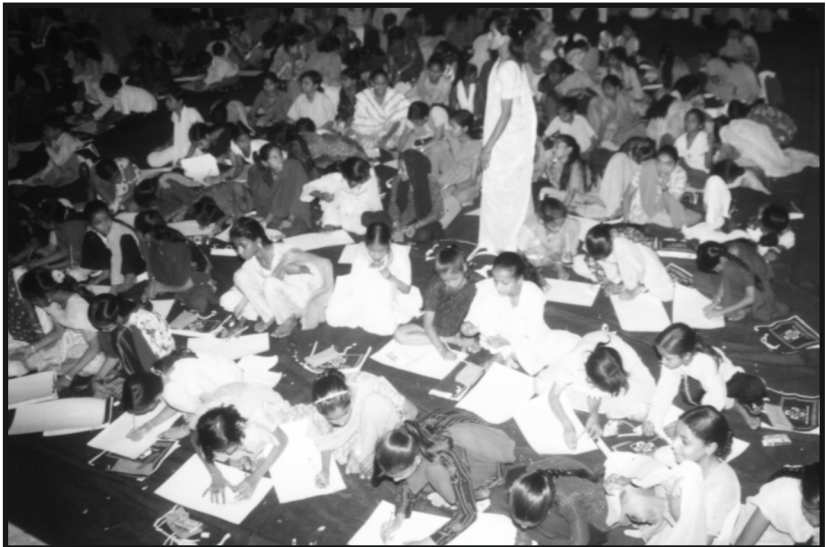
practices. AWAG knocked on to the aspect of their similar poor status. The organisation was quite successful in uniting women from both the communities to an extent.

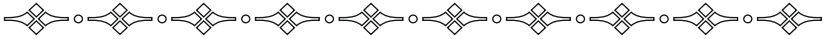
### **Relief and Rehabilitation**

In order to bring about reconciliation, inclusive as well as exclusive workshops were conducted for women from both the communities. The riot-affected areas of Bapunagar, Rakhial, Raikhad, Jamalpur and Gollimda were selected for holding these workshops through Care India's Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation support.

### **Objectives of the Workshops**

- To keep hatred and ideas that created divisions at bay.
- To wipe out the feeling of fear from the minds of the participants.
- To familiarize the participants with spiritual values in



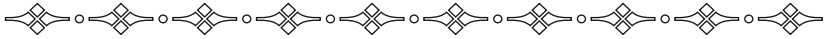


relation to religion and direct them towards humanitarian values.

- To organise the participants on their equal status of gender and poverty and bring about a realization that women of both the communities endure these factors mainly during riots.
- To strengthen the existing bond between them.
- To urge the participants to send their adolescent daughters for the workshop organised for them.
- To organise meetings for women from both communities as well as set up a friendship club for adolescents, so as to foster inter-communal harmony.

After much deliberation the workers realised that it would not be prudent to abruptly assemble the women from both the communities. There was a possibility that their anger would flare up due to the frustration and stress borne by them. Therefore, to start with, women from both the communities were grouped separately so as to give vent to their feelings. In the two-day workshop, the endeavour was to present the actual situation so as to eliminate rumours and misconceptions related to religion.

With regard to the inclusive workshop the Hindu women expressed their readiness to attend it but the Muslim women were uncertain about the same. A total of twenty bold and vocal Hindu women were selected to attend the inclusive workshop; while the Muslim women were encouraged to open up and speak freely in the exclusive workshop organised for them. AWAG organised five inclusive workshops that had the complete participation and attendance of all Hindu women but only fifty percent of their Muslim counterparts.

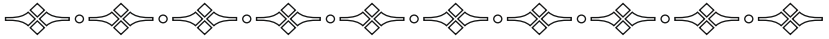


As per AWAG's experience the Hindu women would promptly be present at the venue of the workshop while Muslim participants had to be called for from their homes. This was so because the Hindu women did not have to face any opposition from their families as the Muslim women had to. The latter were going through feelings of fear, insecurity and apprehension.

AWAG found it appropriate to interact with adolescent girls in addition to their adult counterparts. Thus, a two-day workshop was organised for the adolescent girls from both the communities. Topics such as their dreams, human anatomy, parental control and mother-daughter relationships were touched upon.

Bapunagar has remained AWAG's work area from the very beginning. In 2002 this was one of the worst affected areas. AWAG shortlisted sixty women and decided to restore their livelihoods. These women belonged to Hindu as well as





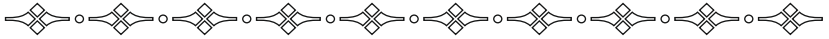
Muslim communities with most of them being widows and the sole breadwinners of their families. They were provided with sewing machines along with the necessary skills. Most of the beneficiaries took advantage of AWAG's market linkages in furthering their vocation. Other ill-effects of the riots that women had to put up with were mental stress, grief, frustration and anxiety. This obviously reflected in their behaviour and temperament. AWAG relentlessly fulfilled the need for counselling them.

Thereafter AWAG released a report – 'Building the Bonds of Harmony', describing the reconciliation of the animosity between Hindu and Muslim communities in relation to AWAG's endeavours and experiences.

Later in 2003, in an effort towards maintaining communal harmony, AWAG participated in the protest and demonstration organised by the network of Gujarat's voluntary organizations-Movement for Secular Democracy. AWAG was instrumental in gathering over a thousand







women from Hindu and Muslim communities. An appeal for peace and justice was put forth to the State government in this gathering.

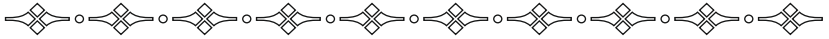
Similarly, a protest demonstration was organised to demand justice for those affected in Best Bakery case. A total of four hundred women had participated in this event. Following the riots in 2002 AWAG had lent support in filing a joint appeal to the National Human Rights Commission.

### **Health**

The issue of women's health is linked to the issue of women atrocities. This is so because in the Indian society there is utter disregard towards women's health and wellbeing. Malnutrition, frequent childbirth and high morbidity depict the health status of women. In addition to lack of proper medical care due to poor financial conditions and the apathetic attitude of the family, women have to rely on home cures. All these are forms of indirect violence inflicted on women.

The poor health condition of women portrays their subordinate status in society. Women have internalized their subordinate status as a result of which they lack self-respect and are known to disregard and ignore their own health.

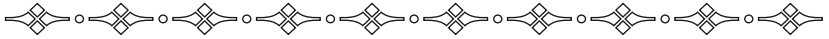
Moreover, the physical and mental health of women who have fallen prey to domestic violence is perpetually feeble. In such cases the family members as well as the affected women avoid seeking medical help. But at the same time the wellbeing of women is very vital in bearing and raising children.



Healthcare has been an important activity in the development programmes undertaken by most voluntary organisations. In course of the awareness raising programmes for women, AWAG constantly emphasizes on women's rights over their bodies and to oppose violence inflicted on them. AWAG has linked the issue of women's atrocities with their health issue. Therefore, the organisation's health activities are limited to atrocities on women wherein all necessary components are woven in. AWAG's outlook on women's health includes – physical health and mental health.

- **Physical Health:** In general, only when the magnitude of physical abuse is extremely severe does a woman approach the organisation. At that time her immediate need for first-aid and primary care is fulfilled. Further medical services are sourced from the government if





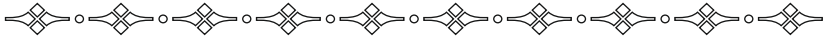
required. The victim is provided care at the organisation's short-stay home.

- **Mental Health:** In addition to physical injuries women are often mentally drained. The victim is brimming with feelings of frustration, disappointment and helplessness. Thoughts of committing suicide are also overpowering at that point of time. Mental stress is treated on the basis of psychiatric therapy under a qualified psychiatrist. Timely treatment prevents the unnatural deaths of women. Furthermore, as per policy AWAG ensures that women derive maximum gain from the government health schemes that are available. Trainings pertaining to the related information are conducted to educate women on the matter.

### Work Area

- **Urban:** The urban wing of AWAG covers women



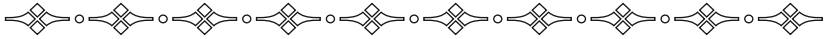


workers from their work areas as well as women taking shelter in the short-stay home. Primary health services are fulfilled at Bapunagar. Based on the determination of committee leaders AWAG supports them in accessing and demanding their rights. The organisation also provides guidance to women in accessing health facilities available at government hospitals/clinics.

- **Rural:** Female health workers have been appointed by the State government to oversee activities related to Reproductive and Child Health. These health workers hold the qualification of an auxiliary nurse. However, health services do not reach the poor for two reasons – rural women are not aware about the services due to them and furthermore these women do not have the knowledge about their rights and procedures to demand them.

### **Radhanpur**

Work related to health in rural areas was commenced upon in the mid-nineties by AWAG. The Radhanpur block of Patan district was selected for this purpose. The region of Radhanpur is backward and drought-prone leading to extreme poverty. The Infant Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality Rate are high in this area. AWAG felt a need to expose the rural women to information related to various health schemes available to them. A total of four awareness building camps were organised in Radhanpur between September 2004 and May 2005. These meetings had the presence of the Sarpanch (elected village head) and members of the Panchayati Raj as well as women from the community that were seeking health services.

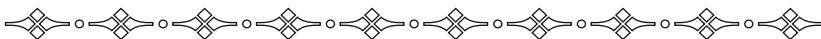


All those present in the meeting were impressed upon the fact that health is a constitutional right of all citizens and hence the need for it to be demanded and accessed by all. Data regarding the utilization of public health services in Gujarat vis-à-vis those pertaining to India was put forth to the participants (Gujarat – 36.7, India 43.3).

The organisation's experience recognised that mere inclusion of Panchayat members in women committees does not fulfil the objective of women empowerment. Women leaders were made functional to address women's rights especially those related to water and health. The panchayat members were emphatically informed about their duty to attend all panchayat meetings wherein their responsibility was to present women's issues. Gradually a large number of panchayat members started attending and participating in these meetings. Various malpractices across the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) were also exposed. AWAG's role was vital at this stage. It was decided to go to the root of the problem rather than passively accept the dysfunctionality of the PHCs. Following this in 1997, AWAG took on a survey with the women committees through which information regarding the available health services was obtained.

### **Findings of the Survey**

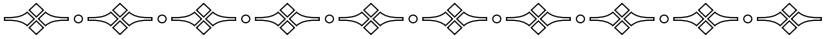
- 1). Three PHCs were set up in the areas of Bandhavad, Gotarka and Nanapara of Radhanpur block but the presence of these Centres did not assure the people of the health services due to them. The issue regarding each of the Centres was different.
- 2). The functioning of the Bandhavad PHC was found to be satisfactory but the local people were unable to benefit from it. The main reason for this was that they



were unaware of the available facilities. The other reason was that due to its geographical location it was difficult to commute to Bandhavad. With transport facilities being available, it was easier to access the Centre at the block headquarter. The choice of Bandhavad was found to be inappropriate from the geographical perspective.

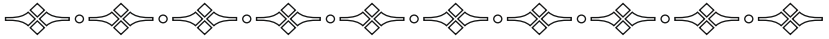
- 3). The Centre at Gotarka seldom remained open and even if it did, the health personnel were absent. AWAG decided to probe in the matter rather than accept the situation. The next step was to complain to the higher authorities. The women committee members took note of two cases with the stated time and date to serve as evidence. Along with a written complaint the organisation workers approached the Medical Officer of the referral hospital under which the said PHC functioned. With the active perseverance of the women committees the Centre at Gotaraka started functioning.





Complaints regarding the perpetual drunken state of the medical officer at Nanapara were voiced. As a result of his political influence he would obtain a certificate of a good medical officer and get away with his misdoings. Here, AWAG increased the count of women committees so as to put in various demands to the District Health Officer. In 2001, the male officers of the gram panchayat joined in the campaign. In addition to reviving the first health centre the location of the sub-centre and issue about dysfunctionality were also included. Due to the persistence and pressure exerted by the women the District Health Officer had to intervene. The latter suggested that the Medical Officer be transferred from there, but AWAG raised objection that he perform his duty in a sober state. The Medical Officer accepted this and brought over his family to reside with him Nanapara. Thus the Centre became functional and the confidence of the women also increased.

- 4). As part of the awareness raising camps for women committees, an educational tour to the hospital at Mehsana and Patan was organised. This saw the participation of around thirty-five women. Through the virtue of this tour the women realized that the presence of a dai (midwife)/nurse is absolutely essential in the village. But the reality was very different. The sub-centres were not functioning. In 2002 an appeal was made to the District Health Officer for the revival of these sub-centres. With no response whatsoever, a survey of the said sub-centres was conducted in 2003, the findings of which are as under:

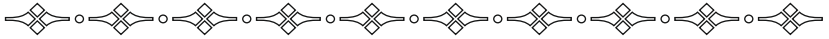


- A number of posts for health personnel at the PHCs and Sub-centres were lying vacant.
- Only four out of twenty-six nurses were staying in the assigned villages.
- A number of nurses visited the village once or at times more than once a week.
- Not a single nurse would move around in the entire village.
- Very few nurses would visit the village and sub-centre.

A meeting comprising of the Block Medical Officers, village leaders, staff of the legislative assembly and sub-centre was organised wherein, the above findings were presented. An appeal demanding that the doctors and the health workers reside in the village was served. In 2003 a meeting was organised with members of all the gram panchayats and taluka panchayats to discuss the issue related to the functioning of the sub-centres. During the meeting the District Medical Officer assured that the doctor would visit the villages once a month. Committee members welcomed the idea though it was not very satisfying. In a meeting that was held in 2004 it was learnt that the sub-centres that were revived were functioning regularly but the nurse was not residing in the village.

To resolve this, AWAG organised a workshop in 2006 involving local nurses, district health officials as well as State Health Commissioner and Director of Health. From then on twelve nurses made a commitment to reside in the village, five of them were ready to do so after getting their quarter repaired, another five nurses started staying in the village with immediate effect, one nurse was absent and yet





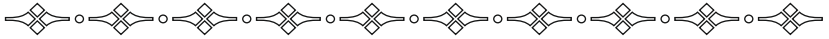
another nurse refused to live in the village for personal reasons. By the end of 2005, 80% of the sub-centres started functioning regularly.

From a total of twenty-six nurses/female health workers twenty of them i.e. 80% started residing in the villages.

AWAG undertook a drive with regard to the issue of health. As an effect of AWAG's positive intervention and catalytic role, the sub-centres were revived to function regularly and the accountability of the responsible officers was also aroused.

AWAG perceived the issue of health as part of its empowerment process with women. Instead of taking leadership and working on their behalf the organisation thought it fit to build competencies and awareness of women about their problems and rights among them. With emphasis on people's health rights a campaign was undertaken by the needy women/people. The positive outcomes observed were:

- The female health work started residing in the village.
- The sub-centres were completely functioning.
- All the three PHCs became functional.
- A gynaecologist was appointed to treat diseases pertaining to women.
- Pregnant women and young children started receiving medical help.
- Women from the community were organised into Self Help Groups (SHGs).



Along with the health project AWAG made the women aware about domestic violence and brief them on the procedure for filing a police complaint with the help of the organisation resources.

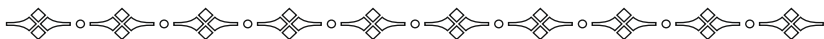
## **Rapar**

In 2004 AWAG initiated the work of awareness building among women in the earthquake-affected area in Rapar, in Kutch district Gujarat. First and foremost, AWAG made women aware about the necessary details in seeking help from the police and doctors. The strategy adopted by AWAG was as follows:

- i). To create awareness about their independent individuality existence and need for social justice among women.
- ii). The availability of healthcare services is a human right:
  - Reproductive and child health is a vital right of women
  - Health service providers should response appropriately to this need of women.
  - Efforts to garner support of the Panchayat with regard to women's appeals.

Between 2004 and 2006, AWAG was instrumental in organising awareness camps across sixteen villages. In addition to social issues, the given issues pertaining to health were also roped in:

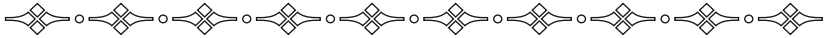
- Violence against women and its effect on women's health.
- Blind faith and its affect on women's health.
- Knowledge about their bodies and health.



Women in Rapar like those in many areas faced poverty and deprivation. Owing to their subordinate status their health was evidently weak. Low blood count and diseases related to reproductive health were prevalent. With the mandate of making healthcare available as a human right, AWAG initiated work in the area. Women generally neglect their bodies and health. Awareness regarding their health was brought about during camps as well as during interactions with women. These women were also taken to the Health Centres in the vicinity and were educated on healthcare of their bodies. Alongside, the participants were informed about the health services available locally and their related responsibilities therein. AWAG thus initiated an intensive health programme in view of the pressing need for the same.

- Around four hundred and twenty women were administered Vitamin A treatment during field visits.

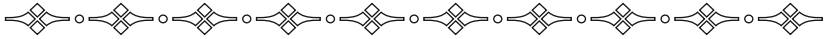




- Eye examination camps were conducted for women and children in seven villages of Rapar. Suitable treatment was advised as per requirement.
- Over a period of three years (July 2004 to May 2006) health counselling was undertaken in around seventy villages.
- Detailed discussions on the government health structures, available health services, people's rights related to it, role of medical officers & female health workers were conducted with the participants.
- Health trainings that were carried out for members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and other leaders had the participation of seventeen Panchayati Raj members. With the objective of increasing knowledge, confidence, enthusiasm etc, AWAG has not seen the issue of women's health as their personal issue. Social, economic and cultural factors of the external environment are responsible in shaping the status and health of women and so also in determining various attitudes towards women. Various benchmarks have been developed to examine the average health of women.

In relation to the issue of women's health, a workshop was organised to bring about a realisation regarding the subordinate status of women, their position and the discreet indirect violence inflicted on them.

- AWAG organised an exposure visit on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2007 for shared learning between the women committees and panchayat members of Rapar and women leaders from Radhanpur.

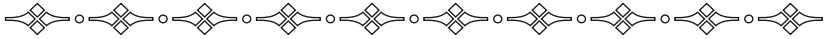


## **Coal Labourer's Union**

From the very beginning, AWAG did not limit its work to middle-class demonstrations and media. The organisation's objective was to take on women's issues beyond the individual level. A policy to build a women's organisation was adopted by AWAG since its inception. With this in mind in 1993, AWAG initiated work with the coal labourers. The idea was to organise them into a union through which they could demand appropriate wages and basic facilities at their work place. The next plan was to work on issues concerning their education, health and nutrition so as to improve their standard of living and thereafter to put in efforts to reinstate them at their native hometown.

The first union of these members was setup in 1984 at the Asarwa transshipment point and the second one was in 1985 at Sabarmati. AWAG was well-versed with the concept of social security and understood that by doing so the labourers across all the transshipment points at the State level and National level would stand to gain.

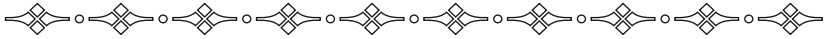
AWAG embarked upon the issue at two levels. One was at the work area of the coal labourers and the other was a policy-based intervention by filing a Public Interest Litigation. Under 'The Gujarat Unorganised Insecure Labourers (Welfare and Regulation) Act', the court passed an order to lay down schemes for the labourers. In June 1988, the government published the said scheme. The court instructed the government to setup a Board to implement the orders passed. This was AWAG's first success.



The Board was finally setup by the government in September 1990. In addition to transporting coal, the transshipment points also undertook the transport of other products and goods. A fair count of labourers was involved in this work. AWAG started making these labourers aware about the prevailing exploitation between them and the contractors. This move led to a number of positive outcomes. The wages of each group comprising of six labourers that was earlier Rupees 90 gradually increased to Rupees 330. Likewise, the wage rate increased from Rupees 10 to Rupees 100 and the wage rate for loading a truck increased from Rupees 1.40 per ton to Rupees 10 per ton. In 1998 the railway authorities accepted the union and made services such as toilets, shed and crèche available to the labourers. With this, oppressive activities at the work place were put an end to.

A total of four hundred and fifty-two women and two hundred and sixty-three men were active members of the

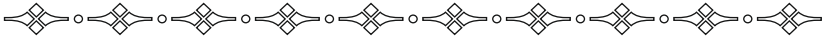




coal labourers' union. An amount of Rupees 23,735 had accumulated in the union's bank account. The union held a good image. Around one hundred and thirteen women were successful in procuring land under the Urban Land Ceiling Act. Each one of them had received 25 square metres of land along the periphery of Ahmedabad city. This was an important achievement for them and was a testimony of their collective strength and negotiation skills. Moreover, thirty labourers received a one-room house from the Slum Clearance Board under the housing scheme for economically weak classes.

Similarly, the government constructed low-cost toilets for one hundred and eleven women labourers in their homes in Panchmahal district. The union was instrumental in securing a compensation of Rupees 1.75 lakhs for the family of a woman labourer who had faced an accidental death at the work place. In short, the union was active. As an effect of AWAG's intervention and pressure, the government had appointed a committee to provide social security to the labourers. The union was successful in obtaining their rights and benefits from the contractor lobby.

However, the coal labourers union had to be wound up midway. Work on the Central Government's decision to convert meter-gauge railway lines to broad-gauge was commenced upon. Subsequently, the transshipment activity at the Sabarmati railway yard was discontinued. The contractor provided the labourers with half a month's wages and discharged them from their duties. These labourers faced a great loss. They started moving into other areas in search of alternative employment. This directly affected the union's functioning. The labourers became disillusioned and the union gradually closed down. This posed a major problem before AWAG.

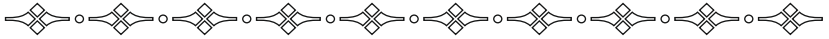


A policy-based decision related to the livelihood of the coal labourers was discarded at a single stroke! AWAG's work with the coal labourers was in a precarious situation. Efforts were put in to explore alternative sources of livelihood. AWAG felt that the labourers had attained a reasonable level of awareness by now. The organisation was convinced that they would be competent enough to ascertain their rights.

Along with the work pertaining to coal labourers, AWAG had simultaneously initiated work with sweepers as well. From the social perspective this community belongs to the lowest rung of the ladder. To start with, AWAG undertook a survey of the area in order to learn about this community's concerns. The organisation felt that non-formal education and awareness camps would be effective tools in organising women of the community. Therefore, fourteen slums were selected wherein women committees were formed in each of the areas. The entire idea was that these





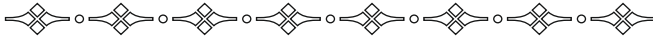


committees would serve as pressure groups in demanding their rights.

These committees were active in the savings activity undertaken by them. With this, AWAG Women's Savings and Credit Co-Operative took shape and functions as a registered, independent, legal entity.

The group of women sweepers have grown competent enough as a result of which they have started demanding social justice for themselves. As such these women function in accordance with the customs and traditions of their caste groups. The decision and judgement of the caste panchayats in matters related to marriage is accepted. The attitude of the caste panchayats is that of disregarding the women's opinions. The panchayat's decisions are based on the subordinate status of women in society. AWAG created awareness about this among these women and expressed that decisions made by units such as caste panchayats that do not pay heed to women should not be accepted. Furthermore women were also educated on the need to oppose violence inflicted on them by their husbands. Women started responding to these stimuli. In many areas they formed pressure groups that supported women victims at any given point of time. In addition, these groups started discussing health services and adopted hygienic practices as well. As a consequence of this survey, women gave up their practice of blind faith and beliefs.

AWAG Women's Savings and Credit Co-Operative functions independently. The women at Bapunagar and Kalupur are linked to AWAG's programme on a need bases.

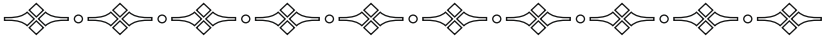


## **CONCLUSION**

AWAG has been actively involved with women's issues in Gujarat, since the last twenty-eight years. Women are at the centre of all issues related to violence inflicted on them. AWAG has attempted to view the issue of violence against women in a wide perspective. Accordingly, various forms of violence direct or indirect, physical as well as mental that are inflicted on women have been taken into the fold of the organization's activities. Thus, forms of violence such as foeticide, saataa marriages and victims of communal riots, come under the purview of the organization's purpose of violence against women.

AWAG is not in agreement with the ideology of preserving families that prevailed in the decade between 1960 and 1970. Resultantly, with the mission of preserving women, AWAG initiated its struggle against domestic violence inflicted on women. With a pro-woman approach, through women, AWAG raised a voice against society and felt the need to bring about a change in the widely prevailing assumptions pertaining to women and so also in their image impressed upon by society. Here, the organization took on the work of wiping out the stereotyped impressions about women and bringing out their strengths and positive factors. Alongside, issues such as gender, poverty, participation of women in development, women dignity and women's Right to Life were also woven in.

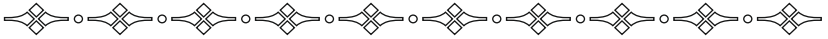
AWAG examines the issues pertaining to women from a female perspective. This has proved beneficial in exerting a policy-related pressure on the government. The organization is also actively involved in exchange of information and thoughts on women's issues with other



voluntary organizations in and outside Gujarat. Be it rape or prohibition, AWAG has taken leadership and expressed its opposition towards these social evils through protests, print and electronic media. With this, the organization works towards fostering a public opinion against such evils.

AWAG's interventions are based on the five fundamental consecutive steps viz. awareness raising, organization, confrontation, advocacy and networking. While awareness-raising is considered to be the first step, but that merely does not resolve the issues related to women. A number of intricate and complex issues remain unanswered. Since collective strength is essential for confrontation, AWAG organizes the awakened women so that they can voice their concerns. Advocacy helps in fulfilling the process of confrontation by creating awareness and promoting sensitivity towards women's issues among government and non-government organizations. In line with this, AWAG intervenes with various government departments such as police, panchayats as well as social organizations and at times even religious leaders in an attempt to fulfil its aim. With the organization's commitment towards the cause, it solicits implementation or amendments in laws as per the need of the situation.

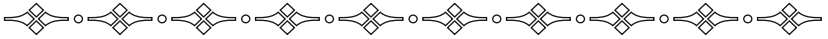
AWAG has expressed its dissent in considering the problem of domestic violence on women as a personal/family issue. The organization does not merely protest and sit back. Research studies related to the unnatural death of women in Gujarat was also taken up, the findings of which are utilized to formulate the organization's work strategy and also to bring the issues on hand to their logical conclusion.



Due to AWAG's determination, a well-defined policy was adopted in the procedures with the police. It was felt that the police's apathetic and biased attitude towards women was an outcome of the patriarchal nature of the system. With this, the organization took on the herculean task of sensitizing them towards women's issues. This led to the undertaking of trainings for the police and publishing a Police Guide for easy access and effectiveness.

AWAG's efforts towards violence against women are boundless, yet limited. The organization is aware about this. Women's issues are also intricate and complex and encompass all the structures – social, economic and political. The patriarchal system promotes male dominance as a result of which individual or small-group confrontations taken up by women are suppressed and hence have a negligible impact. The rape cases of Patan or Saurashtra are examples of this attitude. The struggles undertaken by women do not last long due to lack of support and co-operation of the entire society. The prime reason for this is that men as well as women, knowingly/unknowingly disseminate the values of the male-dominated system. Hence, a tendency for finding faults with women is strongly inculcated and in event of family disputes, she is held solely responsible for the same.

In most cases, the male is kept out of the purview of any doubt or scrutiny. Another reason is that males perceive gender parity and independence as a threat to them because it challenges the male dominance. Through women, the male ego and supremacy is preserved. To add further, sharing of special rights and dominance acquired by them is highly unacceptable to the males.



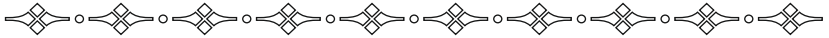
The ideology of free market sees the woman as a commodity. The booming cosmetic industry has captured the imagination of women and has conferred the ideology of pretty/glamour dolls on them. This has led to the exploitation and subordinate status of women to become easier and more subtle. The State's direct or indirect support is responsible for this situation. Moreover, the apathy of the State towards issues concerning women is starkly visible. AWAG has decided to go against the flow. The organisation's efforts maybe limited but are essential.

Structural issues result in domestic violence, rape, dowry, saataa marriages, foeticide and communal riots. The decline in female population that is a cause of great concern also goes against women. While AWAG opposes foeticide, it has not been able to get to the root of the issue. In a society or community that considers females to be a burden, it is not possible to completely eradicate practices such as foeticide and killing of the girl-child.

While girls are given birth to, the major concern rallies around their safety and security. The unnatural deaths and suicide among women are also caused due to the practice of foeticide.

The social and economic security of women is linked to political will and for voluntary organisations to stand up against political will is easier said than done.

With AWAG having continued its work activities with the Muslim women the necessary and vital rapport could be sustained. In this manner, a number of Muslim women affected with domestic violence have derived benefit from the organisation. AWAG's short-stay home and its

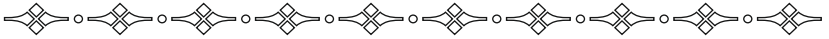


production unit AWAG-Ekta are housed at Bapunagar wherein the Muslim population is high. This facilitates AWAG's interventions with women. Of course, the extent of harmony maintained by women from Hindu and Muslim communities during communal riots is doubtful. While the efforts put in are incessant, AWAG still has a long way to go with regard to challenging the factors linked to religious fanaticism in its work areas.

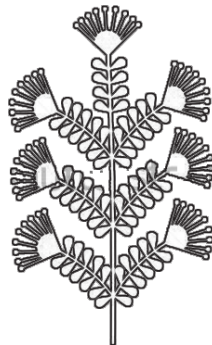
Revival of the dysfunctional PHC's in the rural areas of Radhanpur reflects AWAG's achievement. The efforts of having gone deep into the crux of health issues and available health services in the area, has yielded positive outcomes, the effects of which are visible in the adjoining areas as well. The health issue was apparent. It was to the advantage of all concerned to get to the bottom of the issue. Hence the matter was amicably resolved.

Finally, complex and intricate issues related to women only seem to be getting more complex with the growing global actions. Patriarchy and the free global market policy have in addition to creating effects at the macro level, have also led to multiple social effects at the local/micro level, thereby increasing the hardship in women's struggles. Inequitable implementation of women-related policies creates more problems for the groups/organizations working on the stated issue.

The role of voluntary organizations has not yet been incorporated in policy-related decisions with regard to the National Economic Policy, Political Policy, Education Policy, Health Policy, Environment Policy etc.



Instead of raising objections later, the timely interventions of voluntary organizations can prove beneficial in policy-related decisions. In short, various issues related to women have emerged under the guise of national development. Organizations such as AWAG work towards raising the consciousness of the apathetic society towards women's issues.





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