

# ANNUAL REPORT OF MAJLIS 2007-08

## A. **Financial Profile**

In this financial year Majlis has received fund from HIVOS, Action Aid, Christian Aid and UNDP. HIVOS grant has supported the programme of Fellowship to artists, Godaam: Digital Media Archive and Litigation unit. This grant has also covered most of the administrative and infrastructural expenses for the year. HIVOS, the primary donor agency for Majlis since almost its inception, has initiated the process of 'phasing out' from this year. Under this scheme HIVOS would slowly reduce its contribution to Majlis. In the 2006-07 HIVOS has contributed 80% of the project expenditure and in 2008-09 it would be 70% and in 2009-10 only 60%.

UNDP and Action Aid have jointly supported the Fellowship and Training to Women Lawyers in District Town project. This funding has come to an end in this financial year. Christian Aid has sanctioned a small grant to prepare text book on Gender and Legal Rights. Additionally we have received another grant from UNDP to conduct a study on the family courts in different states. We have also received a small grant for the community education programme for the Muslim girls in Jogeswari from Rajiv Gandhi Foundation.

Majlis has not purchased or sold any major asset or property in this financial year.

*Please see the enclosed audited statement*

## Centre for Inter-Disciplinary Art Initiatives

### Fellowship to Artists

This was the 5<sup>th</sup> term of the Majlis culture fellowship programme. Under this programme Majlis has been awarding fellowships to five artists for 12 months. The awardees are chosen from a large number of applicants from all over the country.

The selection committee for this project comprised of eminent artists and academics:

Gulam Mohammed Sheikh: Poet; visual artist and art historian

Anuradha Kapur: Theatre Director; Director of National School of Drama

Ashish Rajadhyaksh: Cultural study scholar; founder of CSCS (Centre for studies of culture and society)

Gowri Ramnarayan: Author; Media Critic; senior correspondent of Hindu, a national daily

Mitra Mukherjee Parikh: Literary scholar; trustee of Majlis; Head of the Dept of Post graduate study, SNDT Women's University.

This fellowship period was from January-December '07. After completion the fellowship the fellows made a public presentation in front of the selection committee and other artists and scholars during the Conflict Image workshop in Pondichery in February '08.

### **Brief note on the works of the fellows of `07-`08**

#### **Archana Hande, Bombay: *www dot arrange your own marriage***

Archana has developed a public domain website with information, stories, case studies and art works on matrimonial laws. This is an art and technological intervention into the realm of women's rights and popular cultures. Structured as a spoof of the marriage alliance industry in India, the site is simultaneously an art work and an archive; a rights discourse & popular culture production and a case study & an abstraction.

**Ranjit Kandalgaonkar, Aditya Potluri, Saurabh Vaidya, Bombay: *New Maps of Mumbai***

It is a composite project covering urban planning, public culture and visual art. The project has developed some multi-disciplinary maps of localities in Mumbai which represent the multiple narratives of the sites. The cartographic maps were layered with social and cultural observations and visual footnotes, making the works an interface of history and geography.

**Merajur Rahman Baruha, Guwahati: *Pageant in Painted Scenes***

A film on the last commercial public theatre of India – the Mobile theatre of Assam. The theatre, once an immensely popular cultural form, still thrives in the pockets of Assam. The range of ingredients run from melodrama inspired monologue to video projection; from folklores to contemporary international event such as WTC attack and from traditional song and dance to urban pop culture – making it a unique hybrid form. The film documents an important segment of the cultural history of India and makes a contribution to an area within the cultural study which is beyond the hegemony of the urban culture and the popular cinema.

**Sushma Veerappa, Bangalore: *Look Sir, this is how we live***

A film on the public transport of Auto Rickshaw in Bangalore and the public image of a deceased superstar (Shanker Nag) who had iconised the character of rickshaw driver in his film Auto Raja in 1982. The film, still in the process of making, explores the public transport phenomena in the city of Bangalore which is moving on the track of globalization in a crazy speed. It also documents the legacy of working class in the transport industry and the role of popular culture in the public domain.

**Sabeena Gadhihoke, Delhi: *Uncovering Histories: Stories from Official and Unofficial Photographic Archive***

A research study to look at the areas of intersections and departures within photographic archives of various scales, statures and relevance. The study includes documentation of the ‘public’ - as in the nation making ventures and in public debates as well as the structure of ‘private’ in the personal collections. Sabeena Gadhihoke’s previous book **India in focus: Camera chronicle of Homai Vyrawala**, the first woman press photographer in India, forms the genesis of this study.

The works commenced under the fellowship project this year would substantially enrich Majlis’ own works. Archana Hande’s project ([www.arrangeurownmarriage.com](http://www.arrangeurownmarriage.com))

compliments greatly Majlis' concerns about women's rights within matrimony. Presently Archana is working with Majlis lawyers to improve upon the site and to make it conducive for the women who come to Majlis for legal help and also for the law students. The project of New maps of Mumbai by Aditya Potluri, Ranjit Kandalgaonkar and Saurav Vaidya would compliment Majlis' ongoing works of documentation of urban developments in the archive. Sabeena Gadihoke's work on photographic archives, is directly related to Majlis image archiving programme. In this period Sabeena has also become a consultant to Majlis video archive, Godaam. Merajoor Rehman's work on the documentation of Mobile Theatre of Assam (the only travelling theatre repertory in India) should be seen as Majlis' stated commitment to the cultures from the fringes.

Sushma Veerappa's work on the auto rickshaw drivers of Bangalore has the potential of developing into an important contribution to Urban study. However this project could only achieved a part of its scope in this project period. The project is vast and cannot be fully realised within a year. In the past too we have supported such projects which matured fully after a few years (for example, Pankaj Rishikumar's - fellowship year 2004-05 - work on female boxers titled PUNCHES n PONYTAILS got ready two years after the fellowship period; Shikha Jingan's – fellowship period 1989-90 - research on the Mirasans, the wedding singers of Malwa, developed into a film after 4 years; Narendra Srimali's – fellowship period 1989-90 – project on music archive resulted in a book after two years and so on). One of the main lessons of supporting art practices is that the concept of timeline needs to be worked out in a non-linear structure. Otherwise the fellowship would reduce to a deadline chasing didactic activity. It is important to note at this point that our understanding of the nature of art productions and the capacity to adjust accordingly, have not resulted in any major setback in the ten years of this project. Infact this non-bureaucratic approach has made the fellowship project of Majlis endearing to the artists community.

### **Latest Developmet**

Funding for the Fellowship to the Artists project has come to an end with the completion of this term. The task in hand to is not only to mobilise funding but also to revitalise the

project. Ten years back when we started this project there were a very few scholarships/fellowships available in the area of independent art practices. But today the situation has changed with the Mass communication Research Centre of Jamia Milia Islamia University; Sarai, a media and urban study research organisation; Khoj, an art group; IFA (India Foundation for Art) and a few others offering similar fellowships. Hence we propose to stall the programme for the time being in order to re-design our area of focus.

### **Godaam: Digital Video Archive**

2007- 08 has been a very fulfilling year for this project. The gradual processes, which have evolved and shaped the collection over the years culminated in extremely diverse and productive activities and innovative initiatives in dissemination.

In this financial year we have introduced many new segments in Godaam. We have initiated two projects to enhance the quantity and diversity of the collection. The projects are a) Documenting Dharavi: video documentation of the urban redevelopment policy and implementation in Dharavi, slated as one of the largest slums in Asia; b) **PAD.MA**: a Public access digital media archive to make the image collections in Godaam accessible online.

**Collection:** In this project period we made two trips to Kashmir. The trips were utilized to network with the local artists and video makers and collect footage created by the local people. In the two trips we collected material from the mainstream press, local videographers and some rare footage of Doordarshan programme in the '90s. We have also made a substantial collection of local popular cultures such as music videos, independent DVD films, popular satires etc.

The Dharavi documentation project is a new programme within the Godaam project. Known to be one of the densest and most layered human settlements in the world, the origin of Dharavi can be traced back to early 20th Century, at the height of the industrialization in the region. Today, according to official records, Dharavi is marked as

an area spread over 223 hectares, where as many as 18,000 people crowd into a single acre. A 1986 survey by the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) counted 530,225 people (106,045 households) living in 80,518 structures. But considering the large number of 'unofficial/illegal' migration influx, the real number of people living in Dharavi is likely to be much more. Dharavi populace includes diverse language groups, religious communities and economic units. Most of the citizens of Dharavi are urban artisans, functioning out of the outer space of their one-storey shanties. This seamlessness in working and living space, over the decades, has resulted not only in high number of female wage earners but also facilitated occupations to an entire family, making it some sort of a family business.

Currently, Dharavi is in the eye of a storm as the prime land that it occupies needs to be 're-developed' to keep in pace with the economic globalization that is sweeping the city. Bombay, the supposed trade capital of India and India, the media acclaimed neo-Asian tiger of the international market, needs to grab more land and the old fashioned settlement of Dharavi must go in order to facilitate that. Currently the whole settlement – the residents' associations, the govt., the international builders' lobby as well as the civil society in Bombay are engaged in intense debates and complex maneuvering to extract the best possible deal out of this. But the problem is what is best for one of these sectors can be considered damaging by the other sector. Dharavi itself is divided into 10 administrative sectors. Besides the neighbourhoods are also determined by community occupations and infrastructure – such as Kumbharwada (potters' colony), Koliwada (fisherman's colony) etc.

We have started documenting the livelihood trends in Dharavi, women's role and status in the local economy and the impact of homogenizing development policy on Dharavi. Some of the material shot in this period is already available at PAD.MA site. The documentation process is categorized as various livelihood practices, women artisans and wage labourers, community based trades and festivals, the cityscape and the living patterns. Presently only the work on livelihood practices has started.

### **Cataloguing and Dissemination:**

**PAD.MA** (Public Access Digital Media Archive) is a collaborative project initiated by Majlis with Point of View and Chitrakarkhana, two media and art organisations in Mumbai; ALF (Alternative Law Forum) in Bangalore and OIL 21, an internet activist and art group in Berlin. The genesis of **PAD.MA** lies in our commitment to the highest order of dissemination of the Godaam collection and also to the democratic use of information and communication technology.

In this financial period the collaboration developed a structure where Majlis is responsible for the resource material and the theoretical strategies; point of view for the gender aspect and the logistics; ALF for the licensing and legal issues; Chitrakarkhana for the external contributors and content & technology interface and OIL 21 for the software development and maintenance. We have also mobilised additional fund for **PAD.MA** which is channelised through Point of View.

The software developed by OIL 21 enables us to upload large volume of videos with dense text annotation on a site which can be accessed by even the lower band of computers. The **PAD.MA** site was test launch to a peer group in a public event in February. In that event other filmmakers and media practitioners were invited to join **PAD.MA** and share their resources. The public launch of PADMA is scheduled at the end of 2008. Majlis has uploaded 60 events – covering Bar dancers’ movement against the ban on bar dancing; documentation of Bazaar and public cultures, documentation of roadside shrines; artisans of Kashmir; news reports on Kashmir; cemeteries in Bombay; Behrampada slum in the context of ’92-’93 riots; various cityscapes; citizens’ interviews on issues of migration etc. - on **PAD.MA** by March ’08. By the time of public launch we plan to upload 150 events on **PAD.MA**. The development of **PAD.MA** has answered all our anxieties over dissemination of Godaam resources. In this process the offline material in Godaam (which is much more than what could be uploaded in **PAD.MA**) has also being systematically catalogued.

### **Workshop with Peer group**

While we have made several videos from our collection on urban studies available online, we do exercise caution in the case of Kashmir. This caution itself has yielded alternate programme. While **PAD.MA** is designed for widest dissemination, videos on conflicts need a different and more personalized method of dissemination. To address this issue we organized a week long residential workshop titled, **Logistics of Perception: Images from a Conflict zones** in Pondichery, which was attended by 35 eminent artists, filmmakers, art scholars, cultural theorists, sociologists and journalists from different cities of India. There were also 6 postgraduate students who attended the workshop and participated as observers. We had also invited our associates from Kashmir to participate and present their own archives.

The workshop had embedded exercise to create new texts by using the ‘found footage’ collected by Godaam. Five artists – Mamta Murthy, Shilpa Gupta, Amit Dutta, Vishal Dar and Shyamal Karmakar - produced works out of the archival material which were presented and discussed at the workshop itself. This exercise created a prototype for using the archival video material. These may evolve into some elaborate works over time, given individual artist’s interest or lead to other, as now unforeseen, outcomes. There were several more artists who presented their existing works on/around conflict images at the workshop.

One of the key presenters was a young media student Ms. Safiya Lone who presented her grandfather’s collection of photographs. Mr. Lone had photographd the routes of the funeral procession of the people killed in the conflict since late ‘80s. These images from the personal domain provided a kind of a primary hinge to the workshop. The photographs contained a silent and yet volatile history of Kashmir and its people. Still, to an undiscerning and unknowing eye they would be of little or no significant importance. The photographs become layered and animated as Safiya presented them with personal annotation. Among those who attended the workshop, eminent artists such as Ms. Nilima Sheikh and Ms. Sheela Gowda have been contemplating working around these images.



The workshop witnessed intense debates among the peers on contemporary image culture, archival practices and images of conflicts. The direct and indirect impact will as such unfold over the next year as new artworks emerge and express fresh concerns. Critical theorists too are likely to respond to the exercise within their own works.

### **Schedule of the workshop** (*attached*)

### **New Project: Cinema City**

The next programme that has been evolved with Godaam is **Cinema City**. It is an inter-disciplinary project to document the city from the angle of cinema productions. The documentation will cover new cartographs of the sites of cinema, portraits of people who exist at the site of cinema productions, migration trends in the city due to cinema, the real estate politics and its impact on cinema narratives, the components of cinema related desires and aspirations within the cityscape, the sweat shops of the cinema productions etc. The inter-disciplinary project will comprise of urban study, cultural study, film study, migration study, film making, visual arts and soundscapes. All the material initiated by this project will become part of the Godaam archive and will eventually be available online in the **PAD.MA** site. There are many collaborators in this project. In this financial year we have started working with PSBT (Public Service Broadcast Trust), a semi-Govt. documentary production house. We are currently working on mobilizing fund for this project and the actual work will start only in the next financial year.

## **CENTRE FOR RIGHTS DISCOURSE**

### **Litigation Unit**

In this financial period the litigation unit has gone through some structural changes. Three new lawyers have joined the litigation unit. After training them for a few months three senior lawyers, Sumangala Biradar, Apurva Parsekar and Sachi Tiwari have resigned as full time Majlis staffs. They will be functioning as external panel lawyers and litigation consultants with Majlis.

The legal cases handled are categorized as legal consultancy and litigation. Currently this activity is carried out in four different locations. The primary location is the office premises of Majlis where a group of lawyers are available every day for legal consultancy. For the three outreach programme, the lawyers attend the locations of the outreach centres once a week and provide legal consultancy to women who approach these centres. Of these the Maharashtra State Women's Commission can be categorized as a state unit, while the other two, DILAASA and Daya Sadan are NGOs. DILAASA is a project located in a public Hospital and deals specifically with the issue of domestic violence. Daya Sadan is a community programme located in the slum area of Dharavi and the work here is more in the nature of legal literacy and out of court settlements.

The women who approach the main office premises come from various sources - publicity in newspapers and women's journals, client referrals, NGO referrals and referrals by judges, marriage counsellors and fellow lawyers. We are the official legal consultants to two organisations – Aawaz-e-Niswan, a grass root organisation of Muslim women and Special Cell to Help Women and Children, a programme of Tata Institute of Social Sciences which has now been adopted by the State Home Department and is located in three police stations in Mumbai.

The trial court litigation revolves around issues of divorce, annulment of marriage, maintenance to wives and children, child custody issues, right of residence in matrimonial home and rights of women in invalid / bigamous marriages. An overarching issue that we constantly deal with is domestic violence which is a recurring theme in all litigation. After the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act we have initiated proceedings in Magistrate's Courts as well as Family Courts under this new legal provision to obtain protection orders and injunctions against dispossessing women from their matrimonial home.

#### **A. Number of Clients who approached us at the Litigation Unit**

Following table reflects the number of clients who approach lawyers at Majlis office premises for legal consultancy, pre-litigation counseling, for initiating legal proceedings and for legal representation in courts.

MONTH	CONSULTANCY	TRIAL COURTS
April	25	4
May	14	3
June	36	4
July	37	5
August	31	4
September	37	6
October	33	7
November	30	5
December	28	4
January	24	7
February	26	4
March	29	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>58</b>

### B. Number of Clients who approached us through other Referral Agencies

MONTH 07-08	DILAASA		Women's Commission	
	LEGAL CONSULTANCY	TRIAL COURTS	LEGAL CONSULTANCY	TRIAL COURTS
April	5		8	1
May	2		8	1
June	0		1	
July	0		5	
August	5	2	0	
September	3		8	
October	3		4	2
November	1		0	
December	5		1	1
January	10	2	2	
February	10		4	
March	3	1	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>6</b>

### C. Legal Advocacy and Litigation at a Glance

**i. Total No of Legal Consultancy provided to women during the year 07-08: (a + b):**  
**350 + 47 + 44 = 441**

**ii. Total No. of Cases Filed during the year 07-08 (a + b): 58 + 5 + 6 = 69**  
**Add total No. of Cases Pending during the year 06-07 = 147**

**iii. Total No. of Cases Pending in various courts 07-08:**

Family Court - 85	High Court -6
Supreme Court - 3	Thane Court - 5
City Civil Court - 2	Magistrate Court- 4
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>

**iv. Total No. of Cases disposed off during the year : 111**

Out of the 111 cases disposed off during the year around 50% were out of court or pre-trial settlements.

**Profile for 2007-08**

<b>Category</b>	<b>2007-08</b>
Legal Consultancy	441
New Cases Filed	69
Cases Litigated	216
Pending Cases	105
Cases Disposed Off	111

**D. Referral Organisations.**

We have continued to work with both the state and non-state agencies as mentioned in our report for the preceding year which are listed below:

**i. Existing Agencies**

**State Agencies:**

- a. The Maharashtra State Women's Commission (Legal Advocacy)
- b. Special Cell for Women and children in distress
- c. State Legal Aid Authority

**Non-Governmental Agencies:**

- a. DILAASA
- b. Daya Sadan

c. Awaz-e-Niswan

## **ii. Developments During the year**

The additions during the year have been the following

### **State Agencies:**

- a. Central Railway
- b. Western Railway
- c. The Maharashtra State Women's Commission (Complaints Committee)

Majlis has been nominated as an NGO partner for both Central and Western Railways in the newly constructed Committees for Sexual Harassment set up as per the Supreme Court Guidelines in the Vishaka judgement. In a very special case which involved the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace, Majlis has been invited to be on the committee formed by the Maharashtra State Women's Commission (MSWC) as per the directions of the National Commission for Women (NCW).

### **Non-Governmental Agencies:**

- a. Helpline set up by the Mayor's office
- b. Legal Awareness Workshops in Colleges
- c. Community Level Legal Awareness Workshops

This is a new helpline which has been instituted by the Mayor's office which has created a wide network of NGOs in the city and Majlis has been invited to offer legal help to victims of domestic violence. The initial meetings have been held and the actual work of litigation will commence during the next year. Majlis will also be conducting legal awareness and para-legal training for all the partner agencies during the year. Through this network, Majlis will be able to reach more partner agencies and offer legal help to them.

Majlis also conducted legal awareness workshops for students in Burhani College, Advani Law College, Mithibhai Law College and Royal College at Mira Road. Through these workshops we were able to reach out to a large number of students. This is a preventive strategy which will give practical knowledge about issues such as procedure for solemnization of marriage, issues of incest and sexual abuse and sexual harassment at

workplace which are crucial for students. The interactive workshops were structured keeping the needs of students and adopting popular devices such as quiz, documentary films and group exercises.

The important new direction during the year has been the shift from Family Court to Magistrate's Courts (criminal courts) for obtaining protection orders under the newly enacted Domestic Violence Act.

### **E. Brief Note on Special Cases:**

The process of providing legal advocacy and litigation help to individual women helps us to push the boundaries of law beyond the established limits and thereby expand the horizon of women's rights. While providing relief to individual women, the process also helps to create a positive ambience within courts of securing women their rights which then serves to set in a norm and a culture of women's rights within broader precincts. The cases reveal the constant negotiations that are required to protect women's rights at each stage and at times in multiple courts. We also feel that at times even counsellors and Protection Officers do not safeguard women's rights and there is need for constant vigilance and legal acumen to protect women's rights.

Some of the cases discussed below were litigated under the provisions of the newly enacted Domestic Violence Act and through this we have entered into the realm of the Magistrate's Courts in the city.

### **Rukmini Gaikwad**

Rukmini approached us while her case under Domestic Violence was pending in the Magistrate Court at Vikroli through the referral of a journalist. She is married for 20-22 years and has two sons both of whom are majors. She works as a domestic maid. She was thrown out of her own house by her husband and her younger son and she was residing with her elder son. She had filed under the Domestic Violence Act through a Protection Officer but the case had not progressed. Though the notice was served, the husband had not appeared in court and the case was merely being adjourned.

When she approached us she did not know the status of the case or the reliefs that were asked for. We appeared before the magistrate and sought permission to examine her papers. When we realized that the pleadings filed by the Protection Officer were not adequate to reflect the situation of violence, we sought permission to file a detailed affidavit. We sought a week's time and moved the court for ex-parte orders seeking protection orders, residence orders and compensation orders. The Magistrate was pleased to pass ex-parte orders on the same day granting all the reliefs. This was a major breakthrough for us and since then we have filed several cases in the Magistrate's court and have gone beyond the report filed by the Protection Officers and secured women protection orders.

### **Deepika Pitale**

Deepika approached us through our outreach programme at the Women's Commission. She was married for more than 12 years and has two daughters. Her husband filed a petition for divorce and for retaining the custody of the elder daughter who was residing with him. Deepika appeared in the court and signed consent terms. But subsequently she realised that the consent terms did not protect her and her children's right to maintenance. Thereafter through the Women's Commission, she approached us. We advised her to withdraw the consent terms and proceed with her matter and we filed written statement and a counter claim for maintenance. In the mean time we were also trying to settle the matter so that Deepika gets some lump sum amount for the minor daughter's future. Finally just before the trial the husband agreed to give her lump sum amount of Rs 50,000/-. This case brings out the fact that when consent terms are signed in court through the interventions of the counsellors, they do not always safeguard the woman's interest. The fact that Deepika has a daughter to look after was not taken into account at the time of signing the consent terms which would have been detrimental for her future rights and the rights of her daughter.

### **Farzaana Shaikh**

Farzana approached us through our outreach programme at Dilaasa. She was married for 19 years and has two sons one major 18 year and one 11 year old. At the time she approached us she was residing with both her sons at her sister's place as she was thrown out of her matrimonial home. We filed under the Domestic Violence Act. Her husband raised the preliminary objection regarding jurisdiction. But the Magistrate overruled the objections and decided in her favour.

Later, the husband raised another objection in his written statement that he had already divorced her. But again the plea was over ruled and the Magistrate passed an interim order of residence and maintenance. The husband refused to comply and we filed for contempt. Meanwhile the husband fields an appeal in the Sessions Court against the interim order passed by the Magistrate. The appeal is pending.

### **Shaina Sheikh**

Shaina's was a half way matter. Through another advocate, she had already filed a petition for divorce in the Family court under the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act. She had also filed a case for Protection Order and for Maintenance under the Domestic Violence Act in the Magistrate's Court. But she had submitted in court that she has filed for interim maintenance in divorce petition. So she was able to secure interim orders for Protection but it was ruled that the maintenance would be decided by family court.

When she approached us, we advised her to withdraw her divorce Petition and file for maintenance, but her mother objected as she was keen to remarry Shaina after the divorce. So we were constrained but we filed for return for her belongings and the court ordered the husband to return her jewellery and belongings. Accordingly jewellery and some belongings were returned but most of them were damaged. So we filed for compensation for damaged articles and also for mental and emotional distress. While the proceedings were pending, the husband assaulted her, so we filed for breach of the orders passed by the Magistrate's Court and asked for one year of imprisonment or fine. At this time, under pressure, the husband pronounced talaq and produced a *talaqnama*. We accepted the *talaqnama* along with the *meher* amount and were also able to secure



compensation for Magistrate court. Accordingly, we withdrew the case pending in the Family Court for divorce.

### **Reshma Zende**

Reshma was married for five years and has two daughters. The husband filed for divorce and obtained an order to proceed with the matter ex-parte on the very first date in court. At that time Reshma was eight months pregnant and was advised bed rest. When she approached us, we moved the court for setting aside the ex-parte order, and filed the written statement the husband was irregular in paying the school fees of the elder daughter, hence we filed an application for maintenance and the favourable order was passed. In addition to this we also filed a counter claim for residential orders under the Domestic Violence Act. (DVA).

### **Fellowships and Training to Women Lawyers**

The project started in 2003 in order to facilitate the process of access to justice. Under this project Majlis awards fellowship to women lawyers in smaller towns of Maharashtra. The aim of the project is to combat human rights violations of women, and evolve support mechanisms, which will help women to access justice delivery systems and to spread legal awareness to women from marginalized sections. In order to counter the violations, the project aims to evolve a group of community based women lawyers equipped with feminist legal ideology and a practical knowledge of Constitutional mandates, International Conventions, domestic statutes and court skills to deal with issues of rights violations of women. The project also hopes to create machinery in district courts so that the gains of public interest litigation initiated in the higher courts and newer enactments can be made accessible to the district towns to facilitate their implementation.

The current term is the fourth edition of the fellowship. In the current year 30 women are awarded the fellowship. The selection of the fellows are done by a resource committee through a five day long orientation workshop. The workshops are designed to provide

basic exposure and skill to all applicants. But additionally it also helps us in observing the applicants and identify the best candidates. The fellows receive financial help, theoretical inputs and practical guidance from Majlis in their works located in their own regions. The fellows also organize training workshops for other lawyers and activists in their work areas with the help from Majlis. Previous years' fellows are invited to help us in aiding the project and in choosing the new fellows. Some of the earlier fellows have become coordinators of the project and the rest work as retainers for Majlis in various small town courts.

The first year we received 40 application and fellowship was awarded to 10 lawyers, second year 120 application received and 13 fellowships awarded, in third year 75 application received and 13 fellowship awarded. This year around 150 application received and fellowship awarded to 30 lawyers. In the first year the fellows were chosen from 9 districts of Maharashtra, in the second year the number of districts grew to 12, in the third year it became 13. In the current year 30 fellows are selected from 22 districts.

As part of this programme we organized workshops in five districts of Maharashtra – Sangli, Dhule, Nandurbar, Amravati and Lathur. These workshops were attended by members of the bar, a large number of women lawyers from the talukas, District Judges, Public Prosecutors and District Legal Service Authority. Some of the fellows have now been empanelled as Legal Aid Lawyers in the district and also members of the committees set up under the PCPNDT Act (to curb the menace of sex selective abortions) in the districts. An important development during the year has been the selection of two of our past fellows as District Judges. A few other lawyers have been selected as Public Prosecutors and Legal Officers with the state authorities. More than the financial help the fellowship helps the fellows to get an exposure to larger issues and debates and in turn enhance their credibility within the legal practice.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2007 we organized a day long public meeting to mark the completion of the earlier phase of the fellowship programme and to release the report of the work of the fellows during that period. Around 50 fellows from the districts attended the function

which was held at the Indian Merchants Chamber, Churchgate. Several NGO representatives and supporters of Majlis were also present. The cultural programme which was organized addressed some thought provoking contemporary concerns such as a skit on domestic violence within a living-in relationship, the growing up pains of a dalit girl and her struggle for education based on Urmila Pawar's autobiography and sexuality and morality concerns in the context of bar dancers.

### **Gender and Law Text Book**

This is a new project started in this financial year. The lack of adequate and contemporary text books became starkly revealing while scanning the text books used for teaching gender and law in law colleges. Since the law text books are written primarily by law teachers who lack practical experience of campaigns and litigation, the books are devoid of practical observation and do not reflect the strategies adopted by law practitioners and legal campaigners. With the archaic style of writing and lack of contemporary inputs the books fail to attract law students to opt for Gender and law as a subject of serious academic pursuit. Additionally, in many instances communal stereotypes and gender biases are being reproduced mechanically and thus reinforced. In particular, the recent positive developments in the context of Muslim women's rights were obviated from Gender and Law curriculum. It is within this prevailing situation, an acute need has arisen to prepare a comprehensive text book on Gender and Law, which can be used by teachers for imparting legal education in colleges.

The research project hopes to fulfill the existing void in legal education and provide the students an exposure to law practices in the day to day litigation, contextualise legal campaigns initiated by the women's movement and include ground level experience and strategies adopted by non-mainstream law practitioners. Overall it will aid in making the Gender and Law course more interesting to students and hopefully will encourage more young lawyers to get engaged with gender specific laws. We consider this project to be

an proactive measure towards evolving a gender sensitive ambience within the legal practice and court premises.

Since the volume of work is extensive it has been decided to divide it into two parts – Part I - Family Law and Constitutional Law and Part II - Criminal Law and Human Rights. Many interns have worked on this project as research assistants which have helped in structuring the book along the needs of the students

### **Community based educational programme for empowering Muslim Girls**

This project started in 2001. The programme runs under the name of *Darakht-E-Ilm* (Tree of Knowledge) and is supported by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. It stemmed from our basic engagement with the women's rights and concerns of minorities. In the course of our works we came across this existing initiative where Muslim girls are encouraged and aided in achieving education and enter the mainstream. The programme is structured on the principle of earner-learner, where older girls are involved with teaching the younger students and in the process are supported and persuaded to complete graduation and encouraged into skill development. The programme is located in the slums of Jogeshwari which is a predominantly Muslim area.

Our involvement with the project is multi-layered. Though it is essentially a community initiative, Majlis helps them ideologically, financially and with infrastructure. We help them in developing human resources by providing resource persons and resource material. We periodically conduct various workshops towards consciousness raising and skill building. One of the Majlis lawyers visits the community centers to help women in their crisis. This act also helps in building greater confidence and acceptability in the community. After Majlis' involvement with the project it had acquired a community center and a library in the vicinity. Through our initiation the project has an impressive advisory committee comprises of local academics, artists and eminent citizens. The involvement of this committee has brought substantial credibility to the slum which is otherwise always discriminated as a minority ghetto.

Our efforts in this community are yielding fruit now. The first generation earner learners have finished graduation and some have taken admission in law colleges, some are employed in mainstream jobs, a few others in call centres which have sprung up around this area. A few who could not complete graduation were enrolled in technical skill development course in Y.W.C.A. and are now working as skilled nurses aides and teachers in government aided schools.

This project has brought some much needed freshness in Majlis. Dealing with high tension legal cases and production hassles we are often on the verge of burnt out. This project with the young girls with aspiration and tentativeness refreshes our energy and belief. Though it is not exactly in tune with Majlis' other activities, it works as a little breather for the organization. However, the project needs to become self sufficient in near future. We are in the process of initiating some steps towards autonomy and self reliance.

Submitted by

**Madhusree Dutta**

(Executive Director)

***Encl. Statement of Accounts***