

Majlis Manch

Annual Report of Activities

2011-12

Change of Context

Majlis is currently focusing on working in collaboration with Govt. institutions such as Women's Commission, Minority Commission, Legal Board, Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Culture, National television channel (Doordarshan) and other art institutions of the state etc. This development is related to the recent crisis in funding from international development agencies. This has majorly influenced our nature of the work and the search for collaborators. The board of Majlis has felt that the earlier mission of working independently of the state institutions needs to be revisited and altered. The market onslaught and aggressive globalization that has plagued the country in last few years have prompted us to reconsider our strategies of alliance making.

Financial Profile

In the reporting period of 2011-12 the main donors of Majlis were Ford Foundation for the Cultural Centre (FCRA account) and Jamshedji Tata Trust for the Legal centre. In this reporting period the first three years grant from Ford Foundation has come to an end and the second grant contract for another three years has been signed. The three years grant from Jamshedji Tata Trust (JTT) that supports the Litigation Unit will come to an end in May 2012. We have applied for a second grant for another three years and waiting their response.

Some additional fund has been generated by investing earlier grant money from HIVOS over the years. In consultation with the donor the balance of the HIVOS account has been utilised on two specific projects and with this our long standing relationship with HIVOS comes to an end.

Besides these we have also received a small one time grant from Action Aid towards research and publication of a directory of Stakeholders under PWDVA (Protection of Women in Domestic Violence Act). This grant too falls under FCRA. Ministry of Culture, government of India has sanctioned a special grant towards a national level seminar on occasion of the Cinema City exhibition. Though we have already received the fund the same will be utilised only in early next financial year. National Commission of Women (NCW) too has provided two special grants to hold a workshop on Compensation for Rape victims and for research on 498A cases registered in five police stations.

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

Activities

Cultural Centre

The main work that has been commenced under the Cultural Centre aegis in this reporting period is research and production within Project Cinema City. The project that started at a moderate scale in 2008 has grown through a simultaneous process of research, collaboration, production and dissemination. While in the last financial year of 2010-11 concentrated efforts were made to disseminate the project findings in the sphere of art practices and pedagogy in this reporting period we have mainly consolidated the project towards a public exhibition and publications.

In the last count more than 100 artists, filmmakers, architects, urban practitioners, cultural study scholars and, students of media, art and architecture have participated in the project in various capacities. It has been developed through collaborations with institutions and individuals and interfaces between disciplines and practices. In this project Majlis' previous tracks of working in the field of art intervention, cultural pedagogy, public dissemination, and mobilisation of artists and facilitating interfaces between various practices have come together in a coherent and tangible form.

Project Cinema City: Research Art and Documentary Practices

In earlier phase of the project we had collaborated with KR VIA (Kamla Raheja Vidyavidyalaya Institute of Architecture and Environmental Studies) to research and document various configurations, in terms of space, material and people that bring the city and its cinema together. The research has been processed into art works, interactive installations, maps and texts in this reporting period.

The New works Produced

The Residuals and the Miscellaneous: Chiranjilal Sharma started around 1970 by collecting B/W film reels from the wastes at the labs and the editing studio, and discarded prints from the distributors and Films Division (the state run documentary film unit). He extracted silver from the film prints. Chiranjilal burnt heaps of discarded B/W film reels to create a silver-rich ash and then painstakingly separated pinches of silver from the ash. The '70s and '80s were lucrative years as colour prints swept the market and old B/W prints were regarded scraps.

The Bombay film industry went completely colour in 1972 and by mid-80s the B/W prints got extinct. In this phase the coloured film reels were collected to make bangles out of molten celluloid. By the late 1990s the acetate base positive stock for printing film was replaced by the polyester base stock. The livelihood crisis of Sharma deepens as the polyester base stock could not be converted / melted / recycled into some other materiality – barring one, they could be cut into strips. Chiranjilal Sharma, the entrepreneur, who always adapted to the change in material condition, renovated his modest workshop accordingly. He would boil the reels in big drums to make the images soft, then scratch the images off the celluloids and dry them under the sun before cutting them into thin strips. The strips were used as stiffeners for the back of the collars of the shirts on display in shops.

We have documented and collated the livelihood practice of Sharma and many others that usually remain hidden from public eyes. The research is then processed into small sculptures made of acrylics which are to be displayed in an installation.

Street Culture: The Bombay film industry, popularly called Bollywood, has inspired a hybrid street culture that is as contrived as it is naturalized. We can see this phenomenon in the spoken language, in consumer's commodities, in expression of images, in fashion, in social relationship as well as in the notion of memories. As the film narratives take over the place of sayings and adages they not only construct our present but also manufacture a common past in terms of a shared cultural life. Apart from the common popular culture the film industry also produce ancillary industries – fashion, music, training centres etc. - that codify the popular culture.

Young sculptor Shreyas Karle collected various objects, sayings, images, lore that are in circulation on the street and collated them in an imaginary museum of Film Fetish in the post cinema era. He has also produced numerous sculptural objects based on the research. The work is a witty take on the contemporary and critic of the convention of museumisation of live culture.

Cityscape and Development: In this reporting period an animation film, titled *Of Panorama* is produced. The 10 minute film comprises of 15000 water colour paintings on the history of urbanization and development. The film portrays the city as a natural port and the period of aggressive urbanization of the late 19th and early 20th century, the mayhem of real estate and then a speculation on the decay in the 21st century. The film also addresses the romance of urbania that the cinema has hawked through the last decade.

In the next phase the animation film is made into a part of an interactive installation. In the installation the viewer is invited to ride a gym cycle and as s/he rides the cycle the image of the rider gets projected over the images in the film. This device is created by innovatively using the video mixing technology. This project is part of the agenda of demystifying the filmmaking process. It is a playful way of teaching the basic of image reproduction. The device is also a reminiscent of the early cinema where painted backdrop was used for outdoor locations. For its obvious association with the romance of films and outdoor locations people find the project very attractive. Taking advantage of popular culture the project addresses the issues of urban development.

Popular Commodities: We have also designed a few commodities as a dissemination strategy. The research findings are converted as imprints on these commodities.

- i. **A set of 6 coasters.** Each coaster is designed as a publicity text for productions in early cinema era. The history of early cinema in India conceals its brush with colonialism, modernity, urbanism and narrative traditions. This scheme was developed as a popular level dissemination of the history of early cinema.
- ii. A measuring scale titled **Cinema City Bombay / Mumbai on Foot.** It is a folding scale of 10 feet. Each foot represents a decade in the 20th century. One side of the scale has text on important events that took place in that decade and on the other side a list of films on the city produced in that decade. It is envisaged as a popular level dissemination of the Timeline project.

- iii. **Calendars on the 20th century.** Date calendars are important indicator of its time. They not only represent the contemporary popular culture and dominant aesthetics of its time but also document the evolution of the market products - as most of the calendars are produced as campaign for market products. Taking cue from this phenomenon we launched a special project to imagine date calendars for the 20th century as an interpretation of the recent past. In this reporting period 30 such calendars are made by eminent artists and art students. The calendars are based on the Cinema-City-Modernity timeline text that has been evolved through the years of research and the collection of street images. Altogether 56 calendars are made over the years by eminent artists such as Gulmmohammed Sheikh, Nalini Malani, Nilima Sheikh, Arpita Singh, Vivan Sundaran, Ranbir Kaleka and filmmakers Kamal Swaroop, Paromita Vohra as well as young student of art and media. Though designed independently by diverse people when collated together they create a pictorial timeline of the Cinema City.

The calendars in their original sizes will be part of the display in the travelling exhibitions. But we have also printed them as picture postcards in order to make them available for people to take home. This unique production process has developed into a multi-phased dissemination exercise. Firstly, the research is disseminated among the participant artists by inviting them to respond to the research. In the second phase we plan to exhibit the calendars widely as a contemporary reading of 20th century public culture. We also plan to insert the calendars into the informal market of antiques and second hand goods in order to achieve the widest dissemination of the project.

All the above mentioned programme are imagined as a strategy for popular pedagogy and information sharing device. Through the traveling exhibitions in the metro cities in the country and in the interiors of Maharashtra through the year of 2012, we hope to develop a campaign to protect popular cultural spaces on basis of these works.

Neighbourhood and Youth Fellowship

In this reporting period we have launched a new programme of Neighbourhood Youth Fellowship. In the first cycle that has been implemented in this reporting period two sets of fellowships are awarded to 6 people. Under this project a group of three is selected from a chosen neighbourhood. The group is then given basic training in documentation procedure and use of technology. After the training the group worked for three months on documenting the spaces of public culture in their neighbourhood and related social issues under the mentorship of one resource person selected by Majlis.

In this reporting period one group had worked on the spaces of cinema and public cultures in the Juhu-Bandra area in the Western Suburb. The spaces that are documented are the old neighbourhood movie halls which are demolished or under the threat of being shut, newer establishment of fancy multiplexes, the semi-legal movie centres in shanties that cater to the migrant wage workers and the popular locations for film shootings. These areas are documented in the context of livelihood practices, changing pattern of access to entertainment outlets, shift in

neighbourhood demography and gentrification, real estate issues, architectural concerns and women's perspective.

The second area that is documented is the Parel-Girangaon area, the working class precinct that has in recent years seen aggressive gentrification. With the decline of the textile industry the service sector and finance institutions have taken over the former mill compounds and turned the industrial area into a high end business district. But quite a few pockets of the working class settlements are still adamantly holding onto their spaces. Under the fellowship the shrinking of the public space and public culture in the area is addressed. More specifically the fellows have documented how the public festivals (Govinda an open air celebration of monsoon rain and Ganapati, the most popular public festival of the region) are changing due to the space crunch.

Research on Public Spaces and Public culture

In previous years we had documented the graph of constructions and demolitions of movie theatres in the city through the 20th century. The graph clearly indicated the development pattern and the demography of the neighbourhoods. In this reporting period we have collated testimonies of the owners and the workers in the theatres, general public in the neighbourhood, and prevalent tales and lore around the theatres. Neighbourhood theatres is the most commonly used public space in the urban cultures. These establishments serve as community centres, popular gateways, source of small scale livelihood and cultural hubs. The testimonies not only document people's relationship with these establishments but also trace the rise and fall of a certain kind of neighbourhood cultures and the placement of migrants in the culturescape of the city.

Other than the testimonies we have also collated official documents regarding laws and regulations pertaining to movie theatres – constructions regulation, land use records, tax structure and censorship laws. We plan to continue with this research in the next year too and eventually launch a campaign for protection to some of the neighbourhood theatres.

The Film Project

In the entire project period we have produced 10 documentary films, among which eight are telecast at Doordarshan, the national television channel. Negotiations for telecast in other channels are ongoing. Some of the films are distributed by the premier distribution house Under Construction. The films have also been shown in numerous international and national film festivals and in class rooms.

In this reporting period we have also finished the documentary on Manipuri Film Industry titled ***Fried Fish, Chicken Soup and a Premier Show***. The 90 minute long documentary is directed by Mamta Murthy. This film is part of our commitment to non-metropolitan and indigenous practices in cinema. Besides, it is also a result of our long term effort to expand the archive project to the North East region. The film took three years to complete as the sensitive political situation in the region required cautious navigation and prolong negotiation with the community. After much deliberation it was decided to make the documentary by following a feature film unit at work. This strategy has enabled us to address the issue of popular culture at the time of conflict as well as document the precarious journey of the film unit that is torn between the dominant culture of Hindi cinema and the local movements of identity assertion. It was a tricky job and our moment of

rejoice came when the film industry in Manipur recognised our effort and endorsed it as a local film.

The film is widely appreciated and so far has received International Jury Award at MIFF (Mumbai International Documentary Film Festival), John Abraham Best Documentary Award at SIGNS Festival in Kerala and National Award for Best Documentary on Art and Culture.

Though the film on Manipuri film industry has been successfully completed the other project under this scheme – a documentary on the film industry of Malegaon (independent and digital film industry at a small industrial town near Bombay) – had to be aborted midterm. Even after repeated attempts to send film crew and researchers to the location the output did not result in a film of reasonably good quality. Malegaon industry is an unique subaltern practice that functions as an anti-thesis of the industrialized and commercial Bombay industry. Hence it was essential for the project to represent the social and cultural complexities of this milieu. Since the work could not achieve the desired depth and quality we had to abandon the film.

But in this process we have collected a lot of video, text and visual material on the Malegaon industry. We plan to present this unedited material in the publication and in other future projects. Hence the project findings will be disseminated, though not in the form of a film.

Publications

The other work that is carried on in this reporting period is towards the two volumes of publication. One volume will be the Timeline text accompanied by a parallel narrative in graphics. The book titled **dates.sites: Project Cinema City Bombay / Mumbai** comprises of assorted text on the evolution of the city, its public cultures, political chronology, development highlights and the history of cinema industry in the city. The text is accompanied by eclectic visuals, mostly found in the public domain, and the 56 calendars that are produced for the project. This volume is envisaged for popular consumption. **dates.sites** is authored by Madhusree Dutta and designed by Shilpa Gupta. The book is currently in the press and expected to be out by the time the public exhibitions begin.

The second one is an edited volume of text written by scholars and practitioners as well as representation of all the works commenced under the Cinema City project. This volume is planned as an academic book in the area of cultural study whereas the first volume is conceived as popular history project. All the texts and visuals have already been generated and currently being edited and designed, The editors of this volume is Kaushik Bhaumik, Film Historian and Vice President – Osian's; Madhusree Dutta, Filmmaker and Executive Director, Majlis; and Rohan Shivkumar, Architect and Deputy Director, KRVIA (Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture and Environment Studies). The publication will be brought out by Tulika Books, New Delhi and scheduled to be out in the second half of the next financial year.

Website

Project Cinema city is a complex endeavour with parallel streams of research, productions, public exhibitions, pedagogical courses and academic inputs, and archiving and dissemination plans.

Hence the project required a website of its own where all the simultaneity can be laid together. The site has been designed in this reporting period – www.projectcinemacity.com

Public Events

Following the spirit of innovative dissemination we continued to hold public events, though at a smaller scale. The next financial year is marked for extensive dissemination programme of the project.

- a) Visual Methodology Workshop organized by American University of Cairo and South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development (SEPHIS) at Cairo, Egypt. Majlis team made a day long presentation on the Cinema City project as an example of collaborative research and archiving of the contemporary.
- b) Film Curatorial Practice Workshop by India Foundation of Art and Katha Centre for Film Studies. The workshop was conducted for debutant and aspiring curators. The inaugural day was dedicated to showcase the Cinema City project as an example of interdisciplinary curatorial practice.
- c) Excerpts of Cinema City art works were displayed at India@100 exhibition. The group exhibition was organized by Urban Initiative Platform comprising architects and town planners. It was a month long exhibition at India Habitat Centre at New Delhi.
- d) Cinema City short films are screened at various film festivals and film society initiatives. Important among them are London International Documentary Film Festival; Jugad Urbanism at New York; Bring Your Own Film Festival at Puri – a self organized festival of indie festival, Jeevika festival – South Asia Livelihood Documentary Competition, SIGNS film festival in Kerala, Film South Asia (FSA), International documentary and Short film Festival of Kerela, Monthly screening of documentaries and short films at Chennai, Madurai Documentary Film Festival.
- e) Cinema City films are also being taught at Film and Media Studies centres at UC Santa Babra and NYU.

Works Produced in Previous Years

The Western Suburb: Sweatshops of Cinema

The Western Suburb Video installation on Sweatshops of Cinema with 13 monitors and projection on acrylic sheets

Video by Avijit Mukul Kishore, Mamta Murthy, Rikhav Desai and Video Footage Archive of Majlis Research: Design Cell, KRVA

This video installation represent the tiny production units – hidden holes-in-the-wall – spaces, faces, objects, neighbourhoods that are kept invisible in the history of cinema. These units and the people form the base line of the film industry. Yet the contribution of these wage workers, unorganized labours and urban artisans are seldom mentioned in any study of cinema or urban economy. But these small production units, scattered all over the city, are the places where most of the aspiring individuals who migrate to the city in flocks to attain stardom in cinema finally get accommodated.

Engulfing the video images of the sweatshops is an iconic image of Marine Drive that the cinema produces and hawks.

Tactile / Imaginary: Memory and Material of Cinema

Architecture: Apurva Parikh and Deeksha Surendra, Graphics: Simran Dhaliwal, Motion graphics & Video Editing: Abeer Gupta, Research: Paroma Sadhana

The Studio is a factory space that accumulates production material from disparate sources. The Theatre is a shrine that constructs and projects social and personal associations and memories.

These two establishments/spaces stand on two ends of cinema culture. The studio space converts the accumulated material from different sources and lands into spectacles that turns even the familiar into distant and desirable. Whereas the experience of viewing cinema in the theatres creates a sensorial experience for its patrons that makes the even the distant appear familiar and accessible. This process represents the inherent quality of composite and hybrid composition of cinema and its ability to influence the sensory perceptions for its patrons. This process gets even more complicated when we get to explore the position of women as cinema viewers in this context. Women's limited access to public spaces makes their relationship with cinema viewing further complicated. More often than not women perceive the world outside through the cinematic representations.

This installation collates various foreign materials that have come to the city to facilitate its film making endeavour and juxtaposes them with the memoirs of several women regarding viewing cinema in public spaces.

Bioscope: Cinema-City-Modernity Timeline

By Kausik Mukhopadhyay with Amruta Sakalkar

It is an interactive device to disseminate the history of the city and cinema in the 20th century in a playful way. Bioscope is a pre-cinema moving image form that did not necessarily follow any narrative structure. As the touring image box moved its merchandise from one neighbourhood to the other its only commitment was to the images that moved.

In this project the bioscope is built with the contemporary urban material of acrylic sheets as a marker of its agility and street smartness. Inside the bioscope snippets of information, gossip, lore and tales on the city of Bombay, its cinema and its engagement with modernity swivel around in random order. The game is to create a tangible narrative by arranging appropriate series of data through an interactive device.

Cinema City Lived: A Dossier on Space Use in Cinema

By Design Cell, KRVIA (Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture and Environment Studies), Editor: Rohan Shivkumar

An anthology of passages traversed by cinema citizens and cinema goods across the metropolis of Bombay. The protagonists are the labyrinths, the cross sections and the holes in the walls that produce atomic units of cinema.

The dossier traces the Cinema City assembly line by mapping spaces of pre-production, production, post-production, distribution, display and archiving/recycling, that co-exist with other livelihood practices in the urban topography. The various spaces and units of production lay scattered in the city and then assemble through a complex network of labour and material at the shooting location. In order to foreground the hidden labour, invisible spaces and unrecognized networks we have designed this dossier with photos, maps, drawings and testimonies.

The Film Project

In 2008-10 we have produced 9 documentary films, among which eight are telecast at Doordarshan, the national television channel. Negotiations for telecast in other channels are ongoing. Some of the films are distributed by the premier distribution house Under Construction. The films have also been shown in numerous international and national film festivals and used as class room texts.

These films together create an album of Cinema Citizens.

Certified Universal Avijit Mukul Kishore (15 mins)

On the many cinemas that exist and constantly get reproduced in the city.

Dhananjay Kulkarni 'Chandragupt' Rivu Laha (10 mins)

A film writer impersonates a night watchman.

Have You Dreamt Cinema? Hansa Thapliyal (15 mins)

On three women who live along Film City Road – their relationship with the idea of recreation and the place of cinema in their lives.

Dark Room Renu Savant (10 mins)

On the materiality of cinema – chemicals and moving people. The city as a darkroom.

Sin City Shrikant Agawane (15 mins)

On the filmography of crime in the city.

Anna Sound Please Madhavi Tangella (15 mins)

The unauthorized cinema house that creates a community around itself.

Do Rafique Rafeeq Ellias (15 mins)

Photographer Rafeeq Ellias walks the talk around the city and its cinema with veteran city-phile Rafique Baghdadi.

Director Painter Shri Baburao Laad Saheb Richa Hushing (15 mins)

In the shanty town of Dharavi, in his 10 x 8 feet home, Baburao runs an acting school.

Works by Associated Artists

These works are produced by individual artists in collaboration with the research team of Majlis. These works belong to the individual artists though Majlis enjoys exclusive rights to display them

and use them for non-commercial and pedagogical purposes. This aspect of the project is developed as collaboration between Majlis and individual artists.

Fourteen Stations Paintings

Artist: Atul Dodiya

Station signboards along the Mumbai Central Railway Line are painted with portraits of popular Bollywood villains. Between Ghatkopar (the residence of the artist) and CST (Victoria Terminus) there are 13 stations – the artist has added one to the list – Atul Station.

The city of Bombay as tantalizing site of crime and opulence is juxtaposed with the artery line of commuters' train and the grind and grime associated with it. The colour red in opaque patches on the cracked surface of the signboards refers to the city's recent history of public violence. 14 Stations of the Cross turn into 14 stations of the iconic villains of Bollywood.

The presence of an eminent artist of the stature of Atul Dodiya has fetched the project great visibility and certain credibility.

Untitled a settlement of moving objects made of teak-wood

Artist: Anant Joshi

The imagination of the city of dizzying speed and escalating desire is replicated in an installation of moving wooden objects that are shaped in the form of firecrackers and painted/printed in the idiom of matchbox labels. The objects also resemble threaded spindles, the base for production in the textile industry – the erstwhile nerve centre of the city. 100 units of objects, randomly rotating in opposite direction, simultaneously create a colourful energy and an edgy apprehension – a state that is quite similar to metropolitan public life.

The high speed of movement makes the objects ephemeral and yet desirable, much like matinee idols who are often referred to as *patakas* – firecrackers. Some also associate the colourful moving objects with the Bollywood dance sequences.

So Near Yet So Far Sound installation with telephone instruments - PBX set and public telephones

Artist: Paromita Vohra

Similar to the city and the cinema, the telephone is a part of the fantasy machine culture that allows one to be something else, somewhere else, to travel without moving. This installation collates various telephone related sound tracks belonging to various eras and lay them on appropriate instruments of the pre cell phone time.

A PBX set evokes the genre of 'city girl' in the office set up – the secretaries who were the symbol of urbanity, the red phone runs dialogue and music from Hindi films of the 1960s and 70s where the city was the site of sensual excess and hedonism, and the public telephone is part of the street culture that altered the notion of distance through the PCO/STD booths.

Return of the Phantom Lady or Sinful City Performance and Photography

Artist: Pushpamala N.

In a series of photographs shot in various hidden quarters of the city the artist invokes the avatar of Phantom Lady – a fantasy female character in Robin Hood genre in early cinema of Bombay. The Phantom Lady gets caught in a dark web of murder, intrigue and foul play in contemporary Mumbai. While rescuing an orphaned schoolgirl, she encounters the land mafia and their land-grab operations that unfold through the sites that are either contested or forgotten, in terms of

public memory. This project wishes to bring back the memory of female action stars of early cinema and their encounter with the city.

Locations: Bharatmata Cinema at Parel, Dharavi Kumbharwada, Demolished Drive-in-Cinema at Bandra, Maker Maxity building at BKC, Gorai Beach and an Office at Pheroazshah Mehta Road.

Forthcoming Works

Pipeline Network: The research on the urban architecture and public culture will be converted into a massive installation of pipes. The pipes will represent various networks of production and distribution associated with cinema in the city of Mumbai. The entire installation will be a visualization of the complex interfacing of people, machine, material and infrastructure that make the industry of cinema in the city. This installation is conceived as a sculptural representation of the labour, location and material inputs in the film industry,

Library cum Laboratory: The various researches and collected material on text, found images and cartography will be converted into small sculptural objects and laid on an oversized work table. This work is being planned as a mobile library for people to spend time on, make notes and prepare for their own arts / research / narratives. The table will also contain a part of the collection that makes the archive of Project Cinema City.

Censorship: The introduction of censorship laws in cinema was governed more by the need to control the urban public that congregates to watch cinema than actually to regulate the production of cinema. Hence in 1921 a religious film titled *Bhakt Vidhur*, where the protagonist resembled Gandhi, was banned whereas in 1991 the actress appearing in nude in another religious film titled *Mahasati Ansuva* was cleared. The censorship laws, the way it had developed through the century, have also largely shaped the notion of public morality. We are in the process of collating the instances where the censorship laws, public morality and governance of public came together. This material will then be converted into an interactive exhibition work.

Exhibition Plan: The Cinema City project is one of Majlis' most popular projects. It could attain such popularity because the project is anchored in popular culture. Majlis' other cultural activities are viewed by general public as too ideologically oriented and thus not meant for easy access. We need to work more towards bridging this gap between popular culture and critical works.

When we initiated this project we did not expect it to become so large and attain such popularity. The initial project was aimed to be a small endeavour with limited objectives. But over the years as more people and institutions joined the project it grew in stature and scope. As the works were getting produced we had held many public events and workshops in Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Berlin, Seoul and Cairo. These occasions not only boost the morale of the group but also gave the project phenomenal visibility. The next financial year is being planned as a series of large scale public events.

The year 2012 has been marked as the centenary year of Indian cinema. Taking advantage of this we are negotiating with various state agencies towards public exhibitions. We are in the process of signing an MOU with National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) for collaborating in taking Project Cinema Cities to several cities in India. We are also negotiating with the Govt. of Maharashtra to make a travelling version of the project to be exhibited in smaller cities of Maharashtra.

Expansion Plan: Though currently Project Cinema City is based on the city of Mumbai we plan to expand the project to other cinema producing cities in India and other Asian countries. Cities and cinema are the twins of the 20th century. Though in the first half of the century the west primarily developed and produced cinema, since the '50s the Asian cinema has slowly developed a distinct identity. The post colonial cities, the vast metropolises and the moving people of the region have evolved a certain discipline which is as much about city narratives as about a distinct cinematic representation. The ambition of the project is to develop similar endeavours in other cities in Asia in association with local initiatives. Thus the project may eventually grow up to be an archive of Asian Cinema Cities through a network of loosely connected independent endeavours in each city. Towards this aim we have already initiated discussions with artist groups in Shanghai and Seoul.

Legal Resource Centre

The legal centre has continued with its activities of providing access to justice to marginalised women and spreading legal literacy among various stake holders. A new venture during this period is our exploration to work more closely and enter into partnership with the Ministry of Women and Child Development to monitor the cases of domestic violence and to train stake holders. At another level, we are also planning to work closely with the judiciary, the public prosecutors and the police to evolve protocols for all concerned stake holders for investigations and trials of rape cases, which will be binding on them. The negotiations are at an initial stage but we are hoping that they will yield results in the following year.

Defending Women's Rights

Legal advocacy, outreach programmes and public campaigns

Litigation

Family Court – We have a team of five lawyers working in this team to represent women in cases of divorce, custody, maintenance etc. With the introduction of the PWDV Act for cases of domestic violence the focus of litigation has shifted from Family Court to Magistrate Courts and to this effect even Majlis litigation has shifted its focus. Most poor women who come to us do not want divorce but requires relief of maintenance, custody, protection and injunction orders which can be obtained under the PWDV Act.

In this year we litigated 345 cases in Family Court. Of these 177 cases were disposed off during the year. 168 cases are currently pending litigation in the Family Court.

High Court – We litigated 9 cases in High Court. These were cases where the Husband went on appeal against the maintenance order passed by the Family Court in favour of our clients. Most of the cases were dismissed before admission based on initial arguments advanced by us. There are three cases in the High Court pending litigation.

Magistrate Courts – We have a team of five lawyers working in this team and they cover the 10 magistrate courts in Mumbai. Cases under the PWDV Act can be filed in any of them as per the

convenience of the women. Under the PWDV Act there are a number of stakeholders like Protection Officers and Service Provider who can also file cases on behalf of women. The role of Majlis lawyers is to assist these stakeholders in the cases in court and advice them on procedure and strategies to be used in each case. Apart from that we also handle independent cases of women who approach Majlis directly and want our intervention to file cases under PWDVA. We also file cases under Muslim Women's Act, in magistrate's courts where Muslim women can claim full and final settlements after accepting triple talaq pronounced by the husband. We have filed 73 such independent cases in this reporting period, out of which 25 were disposed off. We now have 48 cases pending litigation in various Magistrate Courts.

Session Court: Orders of Magistrate court go on appeal to the Session Courts. 7 of our cases went on appeal. While most of the cases were filed by Husbands two of the cases were filed by women through our centre. One was where the Magistrate Court rejected maintenance. In appeal, the woman was awarded Rs. 7,000 maintenance. The other case was where the Magistrate refused to accept the case of a Muslim woman under PWDV Act. Below is a detailed note on the relevance of this case.

Some Profile of Cases where we intervened

Sharmila Parmar Helping women access their rights becomes easier when fellow organizations come together and put in their resources and expertise to support the woman in distress. One of the best examples we can give is of Sharmila Parmar's case with regards to this.

We filed the case of this young girl who was deserted by her husband and was living with her parents along with her child. Her husband refused to take her back and was not ready to come for any reconciliation meeting. We filed her case under PWDVA. We get her immediate orders of maintenance in under a month. To execute the order we approached a local level organization. CORO in Chembur has developed close contacts with the local police. CORO approached the police at Govandi with her order, the husband was called to the police station and asked to deposit the entire amount on the same day. When the matter was posted for the next date even the magistrate was surprised at the speed at which the order was executed.

Later Sharmila and her husband wanted to reconcile. We thus referred them for counselling through a court order to the social worker of Kurla Special Cell for Women and Children. The counselling succeeded and her husband agreed to get an independent dwelling where both of them are currently residing. The matter is pending in the court to oversee the husband's future conduct.

Sakina Rathod a young Muslim girl came to us after being deserted by her husband who was a chronic alcoholic. We filed her case for compensation, residence, maintenance and return of her belongings under the Domestic Violence Act in Mazgoan Court. Her husband would appear in court intermittently and kept delaying the matter. We managed to convince the Judge of the great hardship that Sakina was facing. The Judge eventually passed one of the best order that we have got in recent times. Sakina was granted a sum of one Lakh as compensation; return of her belongings and if that was not done a further sum of one and half lakh in lieu of the same; monthly maintenance and rent of Rs.2,500/- per month.

Naheeda Imam Naheeda approached us around 6 months ago. Her case was that she was an orphan and had no support. While working in her tele-marketing job Naheeda met Rajesh an elderly client, and they fell in love. Naheeda was aware that Rajesh had a previous marriage and three adult daughters, but he convinced her that he had nothing to do with them anymore. When Rajesh proposed marriage she agreed and they got married in a temple by exchanging garlands and he putting sindoor on her head. From the said wedlock, she had a son who is now four years old.

Rajesh rented an accommodation in Naheeda's name and gave her monthly maintenance (in cash). He visited her frequently. One fine day his first wife got to know about his relationship with Naheeda and she created a scene and thereafter due to the fear of his daughters and first wife, he stopped all contact with her. She approached a number of women's organizations and even sought the intervention of police to settle her case, but in vain. When Naheeda approached Majlis, we told her that her marriage was not valid, as she was a Muslim and he a Hindu, without any conversion from either side. Further the temple marriage was extremely difficult to prove.

In terms of evidence Naheeda's case was weak. She showed us some photographs of the two of them together along with the son. But the photographs did not disclose any relation between husband and wife. The birth certificate of her minor son had the name of Rajesh but the application form had only her signature as only one parent is expected to sign on the form.

We filed in Magistrate court for maintenance and residence for herself and her minor son. The husband appeared and denied the relation and paternity. His main contention was she was taking advantage of his innocence and blackmailing him as she had some nude pictures of him and hence he gave her money. He further stated that as he was her father's age, there was no question of a relationship. He denied the birth certificate and raised the contention that anyone can procure it. He further stated that the proceedings should be quashed at the initial stage itself.

Our defense was on the photographs, also the fact that there was no instance of his filing a complaint against her assuming that she was blackmailing him. We relied on a number of reported cases to support our contentions. Also we urged that birth certificate has to be relied on as the same is a government document as per the rules of Indian Evidence Act. If he was aware about his name in birth certificate of the child he should have raised an objection and filed a complaint against her. We relied on a number of legal authorities to prove our contentions. The husband was obstinate, and was ready for even the DNA test. The battle seemed herculean, but on one occasion when the son ran after Rajesh addressing him as "daddy" the judge observed the same. There has been an effort to constantly expand our work by exploring newer activities which will lead towards providing access to justice to women from marginalised sections. Amidst all these, we initiated settlement talks with the husband but he was reluctant to speak as he was always accompanied by his wife and daughters. His lawyer kept delaying the matter under the guise of settlement. We appealed to the judge for mediation.

Finally Rajesh agreed to pay Rs. Five Lakhs. We explained to Naheeda that this was the best she could get for herself and her child and she would have to look at a better future beyond this man. She was practical and realized the futility of pursuing the litigation and settled for monetary compensation and withdrew the case, in view of the settlement.

Rights of Muslim Women under the Domestic Violence Act

It has been an uphill task for us to convince the magistrates that a divorced Muslim woman is not excluded from the ambit of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA). Each time we file for reliefs for divorced Muslim women for protection, residence, return of her belongings, maintenance and for a fair and reasonable settlement, clubbing two different beneficial legislations i.e. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 (MWA) and PWDVA, we are confronted with the question whether provisions of PWDVA can be clubbed with MWA and more generally, whether divorced women can claim relief under PWDVA for residence and protection as this violates the provisions of Islamic law.

Gradually, magistrates were convinced about our persuasive arguments and started awarding interim orders to divorced Muslim women of protection, residence and maintenance under PWDVA. These interim orders helped us to negotiate with the husband for a lump sum “fair and reasonable settlement” under MWA. This was an innovative strategy which paid great dividends and helped us to arrive at a speedy resolution to the problem faced by divorced Muslim women.

But recently, when a husband approached the High Court by way of a writ petition for quashing the application filed by the wife, we got an opportunity to argue our point in the High Court. Since there were two contradictory single judge rulings regarding a divorced woman’s right to claim reliefs under PWDVA the judge who heard the case was inclined to refer the case to a division bench. We argued the matter for several days and convinced the Judge about Muslim women’s rights both under PWDVA and MWA.

Rape Victim Support Programme

Majlis started a new venture during the year to follow up and provide legal and emotional support to young girls who are victims / survivors of rape. This was started in the background of a four year old girl getting raped in her school by a watchman in the same neighbourhood where Majlis office is. We are still following up this case in court along with **six other cases** in sessions court regarding rape of minor girls and the programme has become extremely successful where cases are referred to us by Police and local NGOs.

Often the cases fail because of inconsistencies; lack of evidence, Public Prosecutor not able to produce relevant case laws to counter the defense arguments and lack of sensitivity towards the victim. Our presence as watching advocates helped plug these gaps in the justice delivery system. Following are the brief summaries of the two cases in which we were able to secure convictions so far.

Case of the Teenaged Survivor – Rape by Neighbour

We were called in to intervene on this case by a community based organisation at Chembur. The accused attempted to rape the teenage girl and was caught in the act by a social worker of the organisation. She shouted and alerted the neighbourhood. Subsequently the FIR was filed.

By the time we intervened the girl was in the children's home. Meeting her was extremely difficult as it required special permission. She was to depose before the Court and she was very nervous. Her mother was extremely traumatised about the girl being in the children's home as everyone in the community thought that she was in jail while the boy was roaming around freely. We moved Child Welfare Committee to intervene and secure permission to meet the girl. We met all the witnesses in the case and also visited the place of offense so that we could help the girl with her deposition before the court.

We were present on every date during the trial. The Public Prosecutor kept changing besides being lackadaisical towards the job in hand. She would not take objections when the lawyer for the accused asked derogatory questions. Our presence was extremely important as it assured the victim and gave confidence to her. The judge too was very appreciative of our presence. He was patient and sensitive to the victim. At the end of the trial, the accused was convicted for three years imprisonment for attempt to rape and was imposed a fine of Rs. 5,000/- plus compensation through the legal services authority.

Father Gets Life for Raping Teen Daughter

This is the second conviction since we started our rape victim support programme. We consider this a major victory given that conviction rate in sessions court is less than ten percent. A fourteen year old girl had been continuously raped by her father over a period of two years. The mother tried to approach the police but her complaint was not recorded. Finally she contacted a social worker of CORO, and through their intervention, the FIR was registered. The father was arrested and the girl was sent to the remand home as she was a minor.

When Majlis lawyers first met the girl she was very disturbed and could not speak about the incident. Our first challenge was to prepare her for cross examination as the case was at the stage of deposition in court. The case was time bound as the accused was behind bars and had not been released on bail. So we had to work relentlessly. We visited the scene of the crime. We also met the girl's mother and other witnesses to gain clarity. Being advocates we could anticipate the questions to the witnesses during deposition and could thus prepare. Our main role was to make the girl, her mother (poor, illiterate women who are not used to court environment) feel comfortable and confident while deposing and not be cowed down by the defense lawyer. Since the judge understood our role as a legal NGO providing support to victims, we could intervene at relevant moments to safe guard the interests of the witnesses and the victim girl. We also ensured that the mother's evidence was recorded in-camera.

During the case there were allegations from the defense lawyer that Majlis was influencing the Public Prosecutors and tutoring the witnesses etc. However we did not retract and continued with the vigil. We did our legal research and provided relevant case law to the Public Prosecutor and also submitted our written arguments. The medical evidence revealed that the girl had been subjected to frequent sexual intercourse and that the hymen was torn. The defense tried to make out a case that the girl was found in the room with her boyfriend and when the father objected to this she filed a false case. He also alleged that the mother wanted revenge after he gave her a talaq. But the court brushed aside as none of it could be proved. Our consistent efforts paid off and after appreciating the evidence; the accused was convicted for life imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 50,000 was imposed.

[Please Note: All names of clients have been changed or concealed to protect their identity as per the ethics policy of confidentiality adopted by Majlis Legal Centre.]

Pre Litigation Counselling

The litigation work in court helps us to provide women accurate legal counselling at the pre-litigation stage. During the year, we provided counselling to **1761** women. One third of these cases have been referred to us by state agencies such as women's commission, police stations, crime branch, state run help line etc. Rest of the cases came through other NGOs, community organisations, associated lawyers, former clients and personal contacts. The majority of these women were in conflict marriages and victims of domestic violence. The pre-litigation counselling work involves explaining to women their legal rights, exploring the best legal strategies which would suit their specific situation, explaining the process of litigation, arranging joint meetings for mediations and out of court settlements.

The bulk of our clients approach us through community based organisation that we are in constant contact with. Majlis lawyers visit the communities periodically. On the appointed day the women of the community gather at the local office and are given legal advice on an individual basis. Negotiation and settlements with the husband and in-laws are attempted at this level. Only when these efforts fail and it becomes imperative to approach the formal court structure is the woman asked to visit the Majlis office to initiate the legal proceedings.

In addition, a large number of women approach us through word of mouth publicity by our old clients, through newspaper and internet reports on the work of Majlis.

Legal Awareness Campaign

During this reporting period we continued with our base work of spreading legal literacy through various community based and college level programmes. In addition to the regular organisations that we work with, we established contacts with several new organisations, such as SHED, SHARE, YMCA, Manav Seva Sangh etc. During this period we broached the concept and feasibility of setting up a network of community based organisations for dealing with all issues concerning domestic violence within particular localities. This is an experimental idea which we have been trying to follow for the last six months. Network of community based organisations will comprise of NGOs and other organisations with different skills and facilities that are based on a particular neighbourhood. The network will gather support for the women in tandem with each other and will also assist the police and the magistrates and the protection officers appointed under the Domestic Violence Act. The plan is to prepare area wise directory of the network organisations and other service providers, make them easily available for the women.

As part of our effort of creating a network of organisations to respond to violence against women we organised programmes on the topic 'Stand Up Against Domestic Violence' on the occasion of Human Rights Day.

Stand Up Against Domestic Violence

The idea was to create awareness both amongst the community as well as in colleges regarding the menace of domestic violence and how in their own way, they could stand up against it and also support each other at times of crisis and how their own little efforts can go a long way to help themselves.

The college students do not have a long attention span and they also detest anything resembling a lecture. In order to hold their attention we designed a competition where they could participate and put forth their ideas. In this way we could address their misconceptions as well as explain to them the rights path and options. In the community the interaction had to be basic and yet interactive. We decided to use audio visual like plays, short films, radio jingles so that we could initiate the conversation.

In colleges the programme was titled: *Expressions!!! Stand Up Against Domestic Violence*

In communities the programme was called: 'Awaz Uthao, Hinsa Roko'

College Programmes - Expression

We invited students to take part in a competition and *express how they would like to stand up against domestic violence* through

- Non Verbal Expressions (Poster Competition)
- Verbal Expressions (skit, slogans, jingles, speech, song)

Students were encouraged to participate individually or in groups. External judges were invited to judge the competition - one from any of the organisations from our DV Network, one from the faculty of the college and the third a senior advocate at Majlis. This programme was held in Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Deonar; St. Andrew's College, Bandra; Rizvi Law College, Bandra; Advani Law College, Bandra; IES College, Bandra; SIES College, Sion; Swami Vivekanand College, Chembur; National College, Bandra

Organising events in colleges is a huge challenge. The students have programmes throughout the year. Convenience of students and their exams had to be taken into consideration. Also attendance in most college is compulsory so unless they get attendance they usually don't attend such events. Yet the programme received a tremendous turnout at the college events. What was heartening was that a lot of boys too attended the programme and even participated. They spoke passionately from their real life experiences. This is not to say that there was no resentment or misconceptions about the issues were not there. But the participatory nature of the project managed to get the attention of the students and create an atmosphere of dialogue and sharing.

Students at Rizvi Law College had a suggestion that women's fear needs to be worked on in case of domestic violence and that can be worked out only if there is a strong support system available to her. The best thing is that it came up from a boy...



Celebrate Youth for Human Rights with us, express how you would like to

Stand Up Against Domestic Violence

✓ Non Verbal Competition ✓ Verbal Competition

Poster, Collage, slogans, Jingles, Skit,

Installation Speech, Songs...

Participate and
Win prizes



All participants
will be awarded
certificates

Date: Time: Venue:

Register with:



Ph: 26661232 / 2304



The non-verbal competition i.e. poster making competition too worked out well. The idea behind this was that there are some students who might not have the courage to speak up on the stage or perform on the stage but might have a way to express their thoughts on paper

Community Programme *Awaaz Uthao, Hinsa Roko*

The second program was for the community level women. It was a simple program to help them understand the reliefs under the domestic violence law, the basic strategies, the machineries available which they can approach in times of crisis like police station, hospitals, protection officers, service providers, organizations, etc. This programme was held in the neighbourhood of Behrampada at Bandra, Rafique Nagar at Chembur, Pipe Road at Kurla, Vakola, Bandra and Dharavi in collaboration with community organisation. The women of organisation SHARE presented a skit on domestic violence and in some places clips from the public service advertisement Bell Bajao and other video resources were screened. But mostly this programme was based on discussion with the women from the community. In order to make the discussion participatory we evolved a simple quiz format with basic queries.

While working on the networking programme we have received several requests from the other organisations to conduct a course on rights and procedures for their officials and workers. Responding to that Majlis had developed a course titled PLUS (Para-Legal Understanding for Social workers). The course runs for 10 weeks with the participants attending a four hours long session every week.

Mashwara – a YMCA and Majlis collaboration

Majlis has got into collaboration with YMCA vocational training centre at Agripada to offer counseling and other support to women. The Mashwara (meaning consultancy in Urdu) counseling centre will reach out to Muslim women in the area to create awareness about legal rights of women. We also hope to create a library and interaction centre for young women to come together to share and interact. The centre will build a network of organizations that help women facing domestic violence in order to provide holistic support to women who approach us. Majlis has already undertaken similar imitative in the suburbs of Mumbai which has been extremely successful.

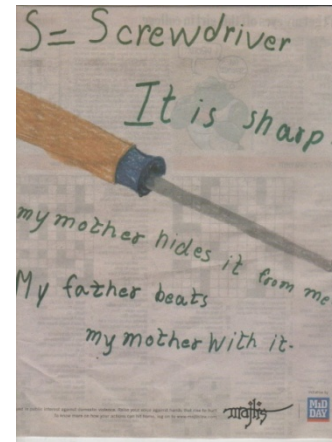
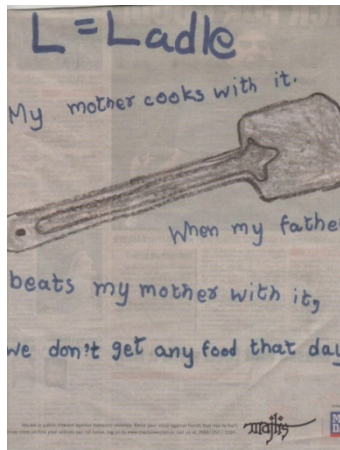
We have published a resource directory of Protection Officers, Police Stations and Service Providers for use for all stake holders under the jurisdiction of three Magistrates' Courts in Mumbai Suburbs – ***Bandra-Kurla-Vikhroli***. The aim is to provide ready reference along with phone numbers of all the services in a local area which the magistrate and other stake holders can use. We plan to expand this programme in other areas of the city and also in the district towns of Maharashtra.

Advertising Campaign against Domestic Violence

In 2012 Mid Day Mid Day Infomedia Ltd., Mumbai, ran an advertising campaign against Domestic Violence on behalf of Majlis. The Ads were designed by advertising agency Origin Beanstalk Creative Consultants. In the recent INMA awards held in LA, California this ad was awarded a gold medal.



Other Advertisements in the Series



Policy Level Interventions

Matrimonial Property

In this reporting period one major campaign work was in the area of women's right to matrimonial property. Majlis invited to draft a bill on Division of Matrimonial Property, by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Though the draft prepared by us was accepted by the ministry of WCD but the Ministry of Law and Judiciary raised a few objections based on the responses from some quarters of the Muslim religious leaders. Thereafter the Bill was referred back to the WCD for further deliberations. In order to reach a consensus we held meetings with senior members of Muslim Personal Law Board and Ulemas on the issues of women's property rights. Now we have constituted a committee of representatives of different religious denominations for further discussions on the Bill and hope to get the next draft endorsed by all quarters.

Section 498A, IPC

At the request of the National Commission for Women, we conducted a research study in five police stations on the number of cases filed under Section 498A, IPC (cruelty to wives). The study was commissioned in response to the widespread allegations that women are misusing the provision of 498A. The finding of the study is to be tabled in Parliament for the debate on a proposal to dilute the provisions under this law by making it bailable and compoundable. But our research has enhanced the point that there are indeed very few cases filed in police stations under this section.

Against Death Penalty

Majlis which work on issues of gender and human rights has always opposed death penalty even in cases of rape and murder. The case of Fahmida Syed who was awarded death penalty by both sessions court and the Bombay High Court has provided us with an opportunity to actively intervene against death penalty, that too for a woman. She, along with her husband, and another man was convicted in the 'Gateway Bomb Blast Case' of August, 2003. We took up the case of Fahmeeda and her 17 year old daughter both of whom were charged with the draconian POTA, the anti-terror law. The case has been followed by human rights advocate Maharukh Adenwala and supported by several human rights and women's rights lawyers and organizations. We were successful in releasing the daughter and discharging her of the charge under POTA, but we could not do much in the case of Fahmeeda.

Though the evidence against her is very slender – that she was present when the plot for the bomb blast was hatched, she had been awarded death penalty by both the sessions court and the High Court. Fahmeeda has pleaded that she is innocent and her argument is that had she known about the explosives stored in the taxi, she would not have taken her two daughters with her and risked their lives. Her plea was that she was not aware of any plot regarding the Gateway Bombay Blast. Fahmeeda's house is a small one-room tenement situated within a chawl in suburban Mumbai. We have raised the question – if a plot is hatched within this constrained space, where can the woman go in order to distance herself and does an illiterate and *pardnasheen* Muslim woman have a choice to leave the home and her husband and whether it is just and fair that she should be hanged for being in the vicinity of the crime.

India is one of the few countries that has not abolished death penalty. However it is only awarded in the "rarest of rare" cases - rape and murder, multiple murders and offences under anti-terror laws. But so far in India no woman facing death penalty has been hanged. The only other case is that of Nalini who was charged with the murder of Rajiv Gandhi. Through a mercy petition by Sonia Gandhi before the President of India, the death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment.

It would indeed be a travesty of justice if Fahmeeda becomes the first woman to be hanged in independent India. We also fear that this may become a precedent. Women have no other sanctuary apart from their home. If men conspire in the confines of the home where would these women go? Will they be in a position to stand up and oppose the men. We need to see this in the right perspective. While not supporting terrorism how do we examine the culpability of women in such context? Our appeal is now admitted in the Supreme Court and is pending.

(This campaign has been carried out through individual donations and voluntary work of several

lawyers committed to human rights and who are against death penalty. We also thank our Trustees for supporting this campaign.)

Irretrievable Breakdown of Marriage (IBM) – a Ground for Divorce

Majlis had taken up this campaign last year and had resisted the government's move to introduce this legal provision under the Hindu and Special Marriage Act. Because of our timely action, the Bill was referred to the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC). We deposed before the committee and explained the hardship such a move will cause women in long time marriages for whom it is question of economic security and shelter. So we prevailed upon the committee to recommend that the provision of IBM may be introduced only after the provision of division of matrimonial property has been included in the statute. The PSC accepted our suggestion and made the required recommendation in its report submitted to the Law Ministry in April, 2011.

Thereafter, again the government introduced the similar amendment in the Parliament with the addition that the judge will have discretion to divide the husband's property at the time of divorce. This was an improvement on the previous Bill but not sufficient safeguards were incorporated to protect women and hence the provision lacked a sincere and honest approach to the resolving the issue. Due to opposition from various groups, again the Bill has been differed.

Publications

Negotiating Spaces: Legal Domains, Gender Concerns and Community Constructs, eds. Flavia Agnes and Shoba Ghosh, Oxford University Press. The publication comprises of papers presented at the seminar held in January, 2010, is edited and currently in the press.

Informal Resource Books

Title: Defending Muslim Women's Rights. Bridging Muslim Personal Law and Court Judgments This book examines the manner in which Muslim women's rights have evolved over the last two centuries within the Muslim Personal Law, through court orders. The court verdicts have strengthened and expanded the horizon of Muslim women's rights and highlighted the principles enshrined in the Quran.

When archaic anti women incidents or judgements are picked up by the media for their sensational value and get an endorsement for the same from some quaint local qazi who may or may not be an authority on Muslim law, and project them as binding principles of Muslim religion they tend to get reinforced and become not only part of the folklore but influence those who mediate, negotiate or adjudicate on the rights of Muslim women – women's groups, lawyers, judges, scholars and policy makers. Then these views get perpetuated as though written on stone, to the detriment of Muslim women's rights. Within a communally vitiated political environment, the myth that the Muslim law is archaic and obscurantist and does not award any rights to women is allowed to proliferate and forms the base for mounting the communally tinted demand for enacting a uniform civil code by right wing parties as a stick to beat the Muslim minorities with.

This formation provides a fertile ground for framing the issue of Muslim women's rights as 'women versus community'. In the best interest of Muslim women there is a need to reconcile this position and examine Muslim women's rights and the manner in which they have evolved over

the last two centuries both within Islam as well as within the broader framework of rights in order to counter the prevailing myths and advance the accurate legal position.

For the last two decades the thrust of our work at Majlis has been to protect the rights of Muslim women in court. We have been doing this by invoking Muslim law as well as positive court rulings to augment our position. This book attempts to combine the collective knowledge gained in the process and to act as a tribute to Muslim women who, while retaining their identity as Muslims, staked their claim for justice by defying community norms and patriarchal dictates.

Title: Defending Women Against Domestic Violence

This book was published first in 2010 and we had run out of copies. Now we have brought out a revised, updated and more extensive version of this publication to be used by protection officers, judges, magistrates and other stake holders under the Act.

Title: A Study of Cases filed under S.498A, IPC

This short term research study was conducted at the request of the National Commission for women where five police stations in Mumbai were studied and cases recorded under S.498A over the past five years were documented and submitted to the National Commission for Women. The request for conducting this research was because a question was raised in Parliament regarding the misuse of the S.498A and that the section should be made compoundable. In order to answer this query, the Department of Women and Child Development had to prepare a report and the National Commission for Women was asked to conduct the study. The study was submitted within the prescribed time and was useful to NCW in its submissions to WCD.
(The study was conducted through a small grant from the National Commission for Women.)

Title: Resource Directory under the Domestic Violence Act

After conducting extensive research we published a resource directory of Protection Officers, Police Stations and Service Providers for use for all stake holders under the jurisdiction of three magistrate's courts in Mumbai Suburbs – *Bandra-Kurla Vikhroli*. The aim is to provide ready reference along with phone numbers of all the services in a local area which the magistrate and other stake holders can use.

We have received feedback that the police officers and protection officers are finding this directory extremely useful. This model will now be followed at the district level by protection officers under the Women and Child Development Commissionerate in Pune.

(The financial support for the research and publication was through a grant from Action Aid.)

Conferences & Workshops

Consultation on Compensation to Women Victims of Crime

The consultation, organised by Majlis in association with National Commission for Women. was held on 28th August, 2011 in Mumbai. Justice A. K Ganguly, Judge, Supreme Court delivered the key note address. He also released the Majlis Publication - *Defending a Woman's Right to Maintenance – A handbook for judges and lawyers*.

The other speakers were Adv. Flavia Agnes, Director, Majlis; Justice A. M. Khanwilkar, Judge, Bombay High Court, Dr. Mridul Eapen, Hon. Fellow Centre for Development Studies and Former Member of State Planning Commission; Dr. Pam Rajput, Director, Women's Resource and Advocacy Centre, Chandigarh; Mr. Ravi Patil, Deputy Commissioner, Dept. of Women and Child Welfare, Maharashtra; Dr. Rajat Mitra, Clinical Psychologist; and Human Rights Lawyers Adv. Vrinda Grover, Delhi; Adv. Aparna Bhat, Delhi and Adv. Sheela Ramanathan, Bangalore.

(The financial support for this conference was through a small grant from National Commission for Women, New Delhi.)

PWDVA Workshops in Small towns

In this reporting period Majlis has conducted training of trainers among women lawyers functioning in the courts in the district towns. We introduced them to the resource material and manuals we have created to spread awareness about the provision of Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. The PWDV book is a ready reckoner of case law, procedure and forms that are required to register a case under PWDV Act. We have also prepared a guide for trainers to help them conduct the two day workshop for community based stakeholders in smaller towns.

In the first phase training was imparted to a larger group of 80 women lawyers. Out of the participants we selected mid-level lawyers who were then given the brief to conduct 20 district level workshops in their local areas. These workshops, structured around eight segments, were aimed to train the stakeholders who are appointed or designated under the Act.

The Act provides a very wide definition of domestic violence to include physical, verbal, emotional, sexual and economic abuse. The reliefs that are available are protection orders, residence orders, maintenance orders, monetary compensation and custody orders. The relief is supposed to be quick as notice must be served within two days and reliance on commercial lawyers is reduced as the Act provides for a new position, that of the Protection Officer (PO), who is a non-legal social worker whom the women can approach and who is to guide the women to access the courts. Besides, several social work agencies have been designated as Service Providers (SP) under the Act with similar powers of filing DIR (Domestic Incident Report), and helping women to access courts and police stations and to enforce orders.

But the officers designated as PO or SP do not have an exposure to the tasks they are mandated to perform for a victim of domestic violence. In many cases, there is not even any designated place where a victim of domestic violence could go to avail the services of the PO. Since the POs and the SPs are not trained lawyers, they are not familiar with court procedures and do not have even the exposure to fill up the forms that are mandated by the Act. So in many cases the intervention is cursory. Hence the initiative to reduce the role of the commercial lawyers by developing a non-legal interventionist agency has turned into an inadequate and ill-equipped provision. It is in this context that we decided to take up this issue and train some of district level lawyers from our network as trainers for the POs and SPs.

The first task was to have a Marathi manual which would explain the provisions of the Act, procedures to be followed under it and the case law that has evolved over the last five years through various High Courts and the Supreme Court under this statute. This was meant for use of all stake holders -- judges, district magistrates, Protection Officers, Service Providers, grass root level community based organizations and individual women. The book turned out to be

highly popular at the Maharashtra Judicial Academy where we conducted four sessions with trainee judges during the year. More than the English law reports, the judges found the Marathi guide very useful while deciding complex issues under the Act, such as a woman's rights in the matrimonial home which is registered in the name of the mother-in-law, or the right of a woman to maintenance who could not legally prove the marriage, etc. Foregrounding the positive case law in local language has helped creating an ambience in favour of the rights of vulnerable women.

In the next phase we worked on a training manual in Marathi which can be used by trainers to train the grass root activists and non-legal court officials. We also designed a two day course to be conducted by the trainers. After the first workshop with 80 participants 20 lawyers were selected as trainers. Each Trainer was allotted a budget of Rs. 10,000 for conducting the two-day training session. The participants in these workshops comprised of protection officers, service providers, shelter home superintendents, social workers and local activists. The participants were drawn from not only the district towns but also from the surrounding rural areas. Since Majlis already has a base in these districts through our network of district lawyers, and some of our district lawyers are well known in their local areas, the workshops could be organized with relative ease.

The course of Majlis activities in the next financial year will broadly follow the tracks that are curved out in this reporting period.

Submitted by

Madhusree Dutta

(Executive Director)