



Sound & Picture Archives for Research On Women

Childhood and Growing up

Bimla [B:] : I was born and brought up in Orissa in a small town called Rajpur. We are seven, six sisters and a brother. A large family. So as a child, I grew up in that area and went to school, primary school. My father was a High school headmaster. So he believed in education.

C S Lakshmi [CSL]: And your mother?

B: My mother, she studied up to seventh standard. And her name is Sarada. She was born in the year when the Sarada Act was passed.

CSL: Oh! Really ? So they called her Sarada! What was your father's name?

B: Kashinath. Kashinath Mishra. So from my childhood I was very curious about things. I was not getting fixed into the set norms. So I was always breaking the rules...

Setting Up Ekta

B: ...And I used to do a lot of reading, using my training skills. So I went around Tamil Nadu doing training, particularly gender satisfaction training. Those days, in the early part of mid-eighties, not so much of talk on gender. So we started a lot of training programmes on gender. Gender and Development. And then after two years, I realized that women need space to learn, where they can come fearlessly and learn. When there are men around, women feel threatened. And their learning suffers. So with that conviction, I spoke to a couple of my friends. We joined together and started EKTA.

CSL: Which year?

B: '90. 1990.

CSL: Oh? Who were the other two friends?

B: Gandhimathi and another friend Indira, who was in the donor agency at that time.

CSL: But you were the founder?

B: Yeah, yeah. It is a society. We thought we will create a space for women. Women's learning. So that is how we called ourselves a Resource centre....

Ekta Activities

B: ...So in that sense, it has been a sort of action and based on that action, again learning and again action. So we started working in schools and colleges, colleges, huge population. Per year we interact with around ten thousand students. Through the NSS, Women Studies Department programmes. And schools, when I say, only schools in the Corporation. Government schools. A large number of poor children, they come to study there. And the issues we identified as lack of understanding about this development process. And media influence—negative influence of media is very high. And suicide rates—most of these kids come from families where the families are either broken or the father is alcoholic. Mother is engaged with another man, or something like that. It is a very sad picture of the family. So we wanted to strengthen these young minds. That whatever the situation, you need not opt for suicide. You can manage your own life. We call it a Life Education programme. We have designed a syllabus, which starts with self, society, family. Then your health and hygiene. And then finally it goes to goal-setting, conflict resolution and goal-setting; so once a batch of students go to all the classes—9 or 10 classes, we give them a certificate. And this is a designed course, that is going on in schools.

CSL: It is like an extra-curricular course.

B: Yes, yes. We have the recognition from the schools. The Education Department and the Corporation Commissioner....

B: ... Although it is a women's organization, we also made a conscious decision. The decision-making body will be all women. But the general body, we have made representatives.

CSL: Because the society has memberships.

B: Yeah. We deliberately wanted to have men there.

CSL: You did not want to be rigid.

B: Yeah. We need to interact with men. But the decision will be ours. See, this is EKTA's programme. It is very heartening to see men coming to a women's organisation meeting.

CSL: And participating.

B: Yeah, participating. And they contribute a lot too, and they express their solidarity in all our programmes.

CSL: With the issues.

B: Violence against women. Why it has to be always women? Men in solidarity on women's issues has to [be there]. And of late in 2000, we launched this campaign called White Ribbon campaign. We made our G B members, male G B members launch it, okay? But if you really believe in women's empowerment, you believe this social injustice is there, then you have to do something. So they came to this White Ribbon Campaign and we are very happy about it.

CSL: What was the campaign about?

B: This campaign was initially launched in Canada. Protesting against the violence by men on women. Michael Kaufman is seen as the father of the campaign. I personally was highly motivated by some of his writing like The 7 P's of Men's Violence and things like that. So when we started with our friends here, friends and colleagues, they said, 'Okay, here in our society, where the violence against women has already increased, why don't we initiate something like that and introduce a lot of young minds into this debate, 'Masculinity in crisis'?...

So if you really want to create that space for women, one side we have to empower women. The other side, also, we have to create an environment which is conducive to sustain this growth of women. Otherwise they will be packed off. So I think we have been successful in convincing and passing on this message that when I am asserting my right, I am not denying your rights. We also know that the socialization process has created a lot of difficulties for both men and women. So let us identify those grey areas and remove it.

CSL: White Ribbon Campaign was to express all this. So that the men also feel about the violence done to women.

B: And we also want to give them the confidence. Biologically women are non-violent. So biologically men cannot be violent, okay? So this has been triggered off by the socialization process, legitimization of male violence in the public sphere...

B: ... You see, most often people grumble that Donor Agencies really control. But to me, even if you give me a piece of stone I can make it a gendered stone (Laughter). So whatever purpose they give money for, you can take it and use it as you like.

CSL: You can make it your own.

B: Yes. So, you have to be very clear in what you want to do. How do you really put into that perspective, Women's Rights, Human Rights perspective? That is all you do. Grassroots women, they give you a lot of insight.



SPARROW

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EKTA

A Resource Centre for Women

*Give me a place to stand
and
I will move the world*



Ekta - Centre for Women was established in 1990. It aims to empower women and conscientise men towards a gender-just society. Ekta also aims to install conceptual clarity in women and men with regard to gender issues, through its learning programmes.

✦ Ekta's Learning Programme

★ Gender and Development

This programme focusses on the social construction of gender and how it creates the base for the hierarchical power relations in the society. While doing this analysis, gender is not seen in isolation, but from the perspective of its inter-lock with caste, class & religion.

