

A JOURNEY TOWARDS JUSTICE

Men's Action for Stopping Violence Against Women

(MASVAW)



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- When a female student is harassed by a teacher in a university in Varanasi in UP, a group of male students support her to file a police report against the teacher.
- A woman is burnt for dowry and the case is made to appear like a suicide in a village in Eastern UP. A delegation of men from three neighbouring districts meet the district administration repeatedly and ensure that a case of homicide is registered and the guilty are arrested.
- A man regularly beat his wife at home and the rest of the village could clearly see the blows and her cries. Now he has been asked by the youth in his village to stop beating his wife or leave the village.
- A father-in-law pushed his daughter-in-law off the roof when she refused his sexual advances. She lost both her legs in the amputation needed to save her life. A citizen's group from Gorakhpur, supported her with her hospitalization, helped her register a case and has even arranged for prosthetics to help her regain her life and confidence.

These are few examples of the winds of change that have started blowing across the plains of Uttar Pradesh, in India. Uttar Pradesh has for long been vilified as one of the most backward regions in the country with very low social development indicators. It is also well known as being a strong hold of patriarchy where 'mooch' (mustache) and 'lathi' (staff) have been the potent symbols of 'mardangi' (masculinity). In a region where 'izzat' (honour) continues to be the foremost reason for keeping women in 'purdah' (isolation) and denying them the basic rights of health, education or mobility or even a life of dignity and free from violence; a small number of men throughout this vast state have started a quiet revolution.



The Genesis - MASVAW or Men's Action for Stopping Violence Against Women was started in 2001 when male activists involved in supporting a state wide campaign on violence against women realized that this issue was not just a women's issue but an issue that involved society at large. In order to focus men's attention on this issue, and to build a larger coalition of concerned and active men, a series of meetings were held and the MASVAW campaign was launched.

Uttar Pradesh is a vast state, and with a population of 170 million is bigger than all but six countries in the world. It is also a very backward state, with a large number of social development organizations spread throughout its hinterland. Male workers and activists in these social development organizations have been the backbone of MASVAW, and starting from these nuclei, the message of MASVAW has now spread to schools and universities, to villages and to urban communities. Farmers and businessmen, students and teachers, journalists and their readers from segments of society are all associated with MASVAW. MASVAW groups are now active in 40 districts of Uttar Pradesh and three districts in the neighbouring state of Uttaranchal.

Our Belief and Objectives - Violence against women (VAW) has perhaps been commonplace in India all through history. But in the last few years there has been an increasing visibility of VAW as a result of the work of women's groups. Men have usually looked down at these efforts; domestic violence is justified as a husband or father's prerogative and a 'family matter'. There is social acceptance of marriage as a license for spousal abuse and the overwhelming concern is to

keep such incidents "within the family".

However MASVAW understands that violence against women is not only a women's issue but an issue of concern for society at large. We also hold that it is the responsibility of all members of society, men and women to ensure a violence-free society for women. Men are culpable not only as those who most often inflict the violence, but also as those who endorse it through their silence. Therefore, men's roles in preventing and eradicating this pervasive form of social injustice has to be more pro-active. Starting from this belief MASVAW works towards gender justice and seeking gender equality in society with the twin objectives of

- Increasing awareness among men about the different forms of VAW and that VAW is a larger social issue
- Motivating men to shun violence, protest against violence, support survivors and provide new role models



Our Activities and Successes – Over the last four years MASVAW has slowly grown from a thought and a resolve to a state wide campaign. This has been possible since some men from different walks of life have been ready to change, to reflect and work towards a better world for themselves and future generations. The catalyst for this change has been a series of workshops on gender, men and masculinity; training programmes for creating a cadre of facilitators who have reached out to tens of thousands of youth and men in hundreds of villages. Youth groups and men's groups have been formed in rural communities, in colleges and universities, where men discuss events in the daily newspapers, issues from their own communities, reflect on their own lives and then decide to take action. Some of the MASVAW activities and successes are described below.

Activities with Youth – MASVAW has initiated activities with male youth in schools, colleges and universities in the cities of Varanasi, Faizabad, Chitrakoot and Lucknow. These include workshops, debates and poster competitions, film-shows, taking a pledge and road-shows. The road-shows are an innovative mechanism to reach school and college going youth in public places and engaging them in topical discussions on VAW. Youth who become interested and involved become organizers of future activities. These youth also become involved in casework, providing support to survivors, supporting sexual harassment committees in their institutions and so on.



Campaign against Sati – 'Sati' or widow immolation is ancient Indian custom of compelling the widow to join her husband in his funeral pyre. This practice was outlawed over a hundred and fifty years ago, but it is still glorified as a form of idealized woman-hood. There have been

sporadic reports of Sati from the Bundelkhand region of UP in the last few years. MASVAW groups in the four districts of Banda, Chitrakoot, Mahoba and Hamirpur have started a campaign against Sati through identifying cases, stimulating public discussion on the glorification of Sati in collaboration with other social groups in the region.

Violence prevention Watch groups – Over a hundred watch groups have been organized in villages across UP and Uttaranchal. These groups intervene in cases of violence within the village, provide support to survivors and ensure that local schools and colleges are violence free zones. These groups observe the International Women’s Day (8- March) and Montreal Massacre Day (6 December) through meetings and cultural programmes and taking a pledge.

Partnership with the Media – There are a number of media persons within the MASVAW core group; and we also acknowledge the powerful role of the media in identifying cases and building public opinion around VAW. MASVAW has started a programme of identifying, training and supporting journalists from mainstream media who are based in rural areas. Over 25 journalists from 12 districts have now linked with local MASVAW groups who follow-up cases which are reported by these journalists.

District MAVAW forum – The district MASVAW forums provide members and associates of MASVAW from one district to work together and support each other. Incidents of VAW often have strong local political links which prevent these cases from being officially registered. District forums provide a platform for collective fact-finding, bringing pressure to bear on the district administration, interacting with the media for positive coverage and so on. The district forums regularly scan media reports to identify and act upon cases of VAW. In addition district forums also organize film shows, workshops and discussion groups to bring more men into MASVAW activities.



MASVAW also conducts and partners with state wide campaigns. Some of these have been on the occasion of the International Women’s Day or the 16 Days of Activism against VAW.

The change begins with myself –



“Initially I thought I would only work with others. I didn’t think I wanted to change myself but later realized if I don’t make change within myself first there’s no way I can bring change in others.” – A MASVAW activist

There is a growing realization in most men who become involved in MASVAW activities that social change is not only about changing others but to change ourselves as well. MASVAW provides support to initiate and facilitate this change by organizing workshops on gender, masculinity,

sexuality and similar issues with those who become involved in its activities. MASVAW groups also provide opportunities to men to discuss their own conflicts and confusions in a supporting environment. MASVAW has also been training facilitators who can help men in freely discussing their personal issues. MASVAW recently conducted a small study to understand the nature of change in MASVAW activists. The study revealed that in addition to the public action on VAW -

- There is a qualitative change in the relationship with wife and other members of the household including cessation of coercive sex
- There is greater understanding of VAW and their own culpability
- These men are practicing mechanisms to manage conflict and anger
- Being involved in MASVAW has given them a broader range of emotional expression
- They are taking a lead in mentoring, influencing others using formal and informal opportunities

I used to think that things like beating up your wife or rape constitute violence but now I think that doing something without a wife's permission or consent is a kind of violence. If a woman wants to say something and a man stops her from expressing herself, even that will count as violence.

Earlier I had this feeling that if [my wife] went out of the house, I would lose face in the community. Now I know that her going out gives me prestige.

People tell me: "You're like a woman you cry so easily."I think it is a strength I have that I can feel this pain. I consider it a virtue.

Institutional Structure – MASVAW is an unregistered network of individuals and organizations with a common purpose – the campaign to involve men in the journey towards gender justice. The foundation of MASVAW is a group of 500 individuals who have demonstrated their commitment to the issue. Besides these members MASVAW includes thousands of affiliates in the villages and cities of UP and Uttaranchal who participate in and help facilitate MASVAW activities. Active affiliates are invited to become members and there is constant peer vigilance in living one's values in practice.. There is a central core group consisting of members from different districts, and there are regional and district forums. MASVAW also has a National Advisory Committee comprising of women and men who are engaged in similar activities in India. The Secretariat of MASVAW is currently located in Lucknow, the state capital of UP and is hosted by SAHAYOG, one of its founder members.



Join us in our Journey – For additional information about MASVAW and its activities and for discussing ways in which you too could join or support us, please contact us at:

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