

## **How Can We Build a More Gender Sensitive Society?**

- Webinar/Virtual Panel Discussion by WEDC, VFSTR

It is a paradox that India has a rich culture of worshipping female goddesses and deities but violence is exerted on women in all walks of life. From Nirbhaya to Disha, and more recently the brutality at Hathras, stands as a testimony to the continuing brutality against women. As a society, every time we seem to be hitting new lows. The antidote to this lies in right education. In this context, educating and sensitising youth and making them aware of gender issues is very important.

Responding to the gruesome and sad incident at Hathras, VFSTR has come up with this small initiative to bring such issues into the open and deliberate on the topic "How can we Build a More Gender sensitive Society? " and debate on the causes of gender violence and other associated issues. Organised by Women's Empowerment & development Cell ( WEDC) of VFSTR, the panelists, MS. Tara Krishnaswamy, Social Activist and Co-Founder of Shakti Foundation, Dr. S. Rajyalakshmi, Member of National Commission for Women, A.P, Dr. Swaroopa Rani, Professor, Centre for Mahayana Bhuddist Studies, ANU, Dr. Sharada Allamneni, Professor & Head, Humanities Division, VFSTR and Dr. N. USha Rani, Chairperson, WEDC and Professor of ECE Department, VFSTR met on a virtual platform on the evening of 8th October 2020, to deliberate on the topic and came out with a wide spectrum of views.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice-Chancellor, Dr. M.Y.S. Prasad expressed his appreciation for the WEDC faculty team for exhibiting what B.R Ambedkar had referred to as 'social conscience' and responding in a timely way to the horrifying incident that took place in Hathras, U.P.

Tara Krishnaswamy spoke eloquently about the need for women to be more assertive in their day to day lives, and learn to stand up for themselves, whether in the home or in the public sphere. She also said that young women should be first aware of their rights. When any injustice, say sexual harassment is meted out to them, they should choose not to remain silent, but seek redress by approaching help-organisations like NCW or Shakti Foundation, so that their complaint can be registered and legal redress sought. Ms. Tara Krishnaswamy condemned the callousness and ineptitude of the law enforcement machinery of the state. She also said that the manner in which crimes against women are measured or recorded in police files and national statistics does nothing to indicate the true scale or nature of this dreadful social issue.

Dr. Rajyalakshmi of NCW suggested that parents should be more mindful about the upbringing of their boys and girls; particularly how they are using gadgets today. Parents should keep vigilance on what kind of content children are consuming because there is a lot of objectionable content freely available on the internet that contaminates young minds and interferes with their healthy development.

Dr. Swaroopa Rani expressed her sadness at the latest turn of events in UP and said that dalit women are victims of triple oppression, caste, class and gender. Dalit women for their livelihood are forced to go out and work in fields and as domestic servants, where they are subjected to daily indignities and abuse. She said that it is highly regrettable that even in the 21st century, women of lower sections of society have to face this kind of oppression.

Speaking on the occasion, Professor N.Usha Rani Chairperson, WEDC opined that the growing number of incidents related to gender violence was due to the gradual erosion of our tradition and cultural values. She felt that, when we lose our cultural moorings, all kinds of aberrations set in. She also shared the contributions of WEDC at VFSTR and the efforts being made to spread a gender sensitive culture in the institution and make it a safe campus for women staff and students. WEDC conducts round the year events by inviting eminent speakers to sensitise students and staff on gender issues. It also hosts special events for motivating and inspiring women students to be more aspirational and strive for higher positions in life. There is also a subsection of WEDC, is the Internal Complaints Committee( ICC), which addresses and resolves grievances and complaints of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, whenever they are reported on the campus.

Prof. Sharada Allamneni, also the Co-Chair of WEDC expressed her deep anguish over the Hathras incident and said that it is not enough that we react when such unfortunate incidents occur. She felt that gender sensitisation should start at home. Young boys and girls should be given cultural training, from their formative stage. Parents should provide equal opportunities, without discrimination to both boys and girls to participate in domestic duties. Boys from a young age should be trained to assist in housekeeping duties and cooking at home, so that they learn to appreciate the service that women members provide to the rest of the family. By carrying out such duties at home, they will develop empathy towards their mothers and sisters, which becomes a part of his value base. Such boys will surely grow into responsible adults and behave with gender sensitivity when they go on to make their place in the world. Likewise girls should not be too cocooned, but should be provided with exposure to the complexities of the world outside and trained to become more confident and assertive, so that they can resist any kind of overtures from the opposite gender.

About 182 participants joined for the two-hour long deliberations, which was conducted as a panel discussion. The programme was moderated by two dynamic student coordinators of SAC, Ms. Bhagya Lakshmi and Ms. Shabnam , and the technical support for the programme was extended by the faculty team of Ms. Nazma of IT Dept., Ms. Jalaja of Biotechnology Dept. and Ms. Jyotsna of CSE Dept.