

Women's rights urged to be treated as human rights

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TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Shillong: In the past two decades the concept of 'Women's Rights' as Human Rights has strongly emerged from the women's movement the world over; the editorial in a publication by the North East Network (NEN) says.

An understanding of women's rights as human rights needs to be adapted by systems which function on the lines of a patriarchal order and are primarily responsible for the subordinate position of women.

In North East India, as per the findings of NEN, the position of women is relatively better than that in the rest of the country (practices of dowry etc. not being prevalent in a majority of the states).

This argument, however, has often been used to overlook instances of violence, especially, domestic violence (DV) in the region.

In course of study on DV, and interaction with many local organisations, the NEN found that there has been a uniform feeling that the instances of DV have been on a rise over the past couple of years in the North East.

Analysis made on such violence range from the ills of drug abuse, alcoholism to materialism and poverty.

NEN has initiated a network of organisations working across the country on violence against women (VAW) and domestic violence (DV) to bring about cohesiveness in addressing the issue at intervention and advocacy levels.

In a petition with a difference, the NEN observed that Violence Against Women (VAW) has been increasing in Meghalaya despite it often being said that women in the state enjoy greater mobility and visibility than women in other parts of the country.

The year 2002 alone saw a total of 48 such reported cases.

Responses from survivors of violence after the International Fortnight Protesting Violence Against Women and Girls which was observed from November 25 to December 10, 2002 further points to the gravity of the issue of VAW in the state.

Women in the state experience various forms of violence including wife-beating, rape, desertion, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment and intimidation at

the work place, educational institutions and elsewhere sexual abuse, and mental trauma.

The petition observed that the response from the state has been "inadequate and disappointing".

"We believe that unless there is a firm commitment and willingness from the legislature, nothing much can be achieved to improve the status of women who constitute half the population of the state," the petition said.

The state of Meghalaya needs to acknowledge that VAW is an issue of concern that requires urgent and sincere attention.

The NEN petition asserted while adding that it is also imperative on the part of the Government to fulfill state obligations, as India is a signatory to the UN Convention on CEDAW.

The petition demanded that VAW in Meghalaya be acknowledged as an issue that needs urgent attention; Women's issues and Violence Against Women in particular be represented in government's concerns and policies; To upgrade existing support systems that are available in the state and provide quality support systems for women.