



Fahmida Riaz

## Singing to a Different Tune

*In Pakistan, a popular video song is being used to alter attitudes on honour killing*

*Apna Faista* – a video song dedicated to the thousand women who are murdered every year in the name of honour – is being used in Pakistan to bring about change in attitudes. Produced by Farkhanda Shaheen, the video depicts the fear of a mother who lives in perpetual anxiety for her daughter's safety where even a slight allegation about the behaviour of a woman could lead to her killing by close relatives.

The idea behind the song is to create a space for dialogue on the issue of honour killing and come with answers on how to end it as it robs women of their right to life and dignity. As this is to be telecast on prime time over and over again, our aim is to reinforce the message," said Shaheen.

The video has the weight of eminent Pakistani women behind it. It has been written by Fahmida Riaz, sung by Tahira Khan and rendered by film and television actress Samina Peerzada.



Samina Peerzada



## Pro-women, Anti-violence

*In Sri Lanka, women lead the process of change*

Geetha of Periyakulam, Ampara, Sri Lanka, has dedicated her life to working with women affected by violence in her area. She has been able to take on this difficult task because she herself has survived violence inflicted upon her by her husband and her in-laws. Geetha enlisted the help of Affected Women's Forum to set up a poultry rearing enterprise and become self-reliant. Her dream is to enable other women who suffer violence to find their feet.

Gnanamalar from Vankalai, Mannar, Sri Lanka, decided to work with Mannar Women's Development Federation to support her four children, as her husband was a drunkard and would beat her regularly. The organisation helped her gain back her self respect and also extended counselling to her husband who has since stopped his abusive behaviour. Today, Gnanamalar is a field worker and has formed several village groups - of men and youth - to speak against violence against women

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## The Many Faces of Change in South Asia

### Riding on Airwaves

*'We Can' messages for change ride on airwaves in Nepal's Kathmandu valley with a population of two million*



Jaya Luintel

*In Jaya Luintel's words:*

I have been working with Radio Sagarmatha for two years. One day, our station manager briefed us about Oxfam who was keen to fund a programme on gender issues with its allies for a campaign. I had long discussions with the NGOs and together we planned the format for the programme. *Saha-Astittwa* was born in this manner. The name means 'co-existence', and this is the focus of the programme.

It airs every Saturday between 9.15 and 10 in the morning. It starts off with a song always one that is not demeaning to women. Then it covers all the week's news items related to women. After that a real life story is presented and discussed. We always relate the story to policy and have a discussion around it. Sometimes we ring up policy makers and ask them why they are not doing more for women.

*Saha-Astittwa* finishes at 10 am. By the time I move out of the studio and head back downstairs to my desk, the phones start ringing frantically. We have one listener in Bhaktapur who calls in often. He is married and is in his late '20s. Before the programme started, he says didn't know what women's rights were. Now he feels that he has been sensitised to respect his wife and take responsibility for the housework together with her.

For a while we aired a five-minute module called 'model male'. Every week we would acknowledge a male listener who shares the responsibility for household work or for the children. We got an overwhelming response. People would often send us poems, letters and songs. We are currently planning listeners' clubs. The idea is to form groups of around ten people who listen to the programme together, discuss the issues and encourage others to listen too.

A while ago I personally became involved in the 'We Can' campaign. Now I am going to encourage the members of the listeners' clubs to become Change Makers and join the 'We Can' campaign to end violence against women.

### Different Fare

*Thousands of visitors who thronged Ranchi's ten-day traditional annual Jaganathpur rath yatra mela, in Jharkhand, from 8 to 17 July 2005, were in for a surprise at the fair!*

Amidst the dizzy giant wheels, the flute and bangle sellers, and hawkers of an extravagant variety of food items at the Jaganathpur *rath yatra mela*, Ranchi, was a stall set up by the 'We Can' team. It was choc a bloc not with wares for sale but posters, banners and leaflets on the issue of violence against women.

Curious visitors, from across the state, who crowded the stall, were greeted by the members of the 'We Can' alliance, invited to sit down and interact with them. The topic of discussion was domestic violence.

The alliance members used specially designed posters of the Change Makers kit to raise debate on domestic violence and awareness on the different forms of violence. The participants were then urged to bind themselves to change by taking a pledge not to commit violence and to talk to ten others to similarly change their attitudes and practice.

The young 'We Can' team recruited 2,900 such Change Makers who have made a commitment to disseminate the campaign message further and influence more people in the community to end gender abuse.

For the team this is just a beginning, they are already planning ways in which they can spread their belief in change.



## A New Window for Change

*In Bangladesh, 'We Can' messages are sometimes spoken through windows from the outside in*

*In the words of Shamim Ara, director of Polli Sree (Rural Beauty)*

“In the beginning when we went to the villages to talk about dowry, the villagers wouldn't let us inside their houses. We had to stand outside and talk to people through the windows. But their views have changed in a span of a few years. Today, they let us come inside.



*Shamim Ara*

Dowry the practice by which a bride brings money or property to her husband at marriage is widespread in Bangladesh despite being illegal. It is a serious cause of domestic violence and is deeply engrained in many communities.

The members of *Polli Sree* began their efforts by arranging a marriage between the son of a group member and the daughter of a member of another group. No dowry was exchanged. The marriage proceeded wonderfully and people in the community began to be convinced that marriages without dowry are possible.

*Polli Sree* began this initiative in 1993. In 1997, there were three marriages without dowry, in 1998 there were five and in 2004 there were 13 marriages of this kind. Between 1997 and 2005, there have been 104 such marriages; an outstanding achievement.

*Polli Sree* has spent the last few years forming groups of 15-20 members comprising both men and women from different communities at the district level. It started work on raising women's awareness but soon realised that if men are not involved, women will not be able to use their new-found awareness. Today, it has 550 groups and 11,000 members.

We do face a lot of resistance. But we are determined to carry on as we know that change will eventually happen. It may be slow and sometimes small, but it is still change.”

*Polli Sree is a community-based organisation in Dinajpur district in north Bangladesh. It is an ally of the 'We Can' campaign. The organisation has a staff of 192 persons working in 11 offices*

## VIEWPOINT

“The gunmen (militants) and we want change in our society. The gunman has his guns, and we have our music. People are scared of guns, but they enjoy our performances. Our messages stay back in the hearts of people.” -*Ram Kison, a singer in the 'We Can' theatre group in Ranchi, places his group's work in the context of Jharkhand*

“We Can, *Mumkin Hai, Hami Sakcho* - During a short span of six months these words have given the women of AWAG EKTA (who worked to make bags for the campaign) a new meaning to their lives and a new identity. We feel proud to have reached the campaign message to a larger community of women.” -*Sara Ben Baldiwala, Ahmedabad Women's Action Group (AWAG)*

“The range of activities that we girls have undertaken to end domestic violence in our neighbourhood have made us and others in our area confident and empowered.” -*Adolescent girls in Kathmandu who have banded themselves into 'kishori' groups to help women combat violence in homes*

“A group of us have begun helping women who suffer abuse at the hands of drunken husbands. Our work is not easy but we will persist.” -*Sushil Khard, a eleventh class student, Amalitgunj, Bara district, Nepal*

“I campaign on my own for change in people's attitudes towards domestic violence because I think something needs to be done and someone needs to do it. I go from house-to-house and talk to people and students in particular. I have managed to change the perceptions of my father, my immediate family and some of my friends. I have spoken to a 1,000 families living in my neighbourhood. I am sure others will soon join me in my efforts.” -*Ronzu, Gaibandha town, Bangladesh*



*Ronzu*

“When I get priority over my sister, I think that's violence. When I get better food than her, or when I get to do things and she doesn't, it is also violence. But before, I didn't recognise that.” -*18-year-old boy in a college discussion group, Barisal, Bangladesh*

“In the past 50 years, I have been fed first and the best food at home. It is time for women of the household, especially my daughter-in-laws, to enjoy this privilege.” -*Abdul Kaim Sarkar, Advocacy Coordinator, Empowerment through Resource Mobilisation Project of Bauchte Chai, Bangladesh*

# VIOLENCE FREE LIVES FOR WOMEN

Quarterly Update of the 'We Can' Campaign

## Winds of Change

The 'We Can' campaign is now exactly a year old!

Bangladesh launched its campaign last September and campaigns in Sri Lanka, India, Nepal and Pakistan have followed suit. Changing long-held beliefs is difficult; guiding the process of attitudinal change is even more so. But one year on, the 'We Can' is steaming ahead in Bangladesh, touching the lives of ordinary people in small and big ways. It is truly on its way to becoming a people's movement having already reached 700,000 people directly with the help of 180 organisations.

Around 30,000 Change Makers have taken the lead to introduce a new order and their 'small' actions are beginning to make 'big' changes. New ideas have indeed begun taking shape in people's minds. More important, people are beginning to realise that it is within their power and ability to bring change in their lives and in that of others.

Let's see how: Monowara Haque of East Goran in Dhaka distributes campaign booklets, leaflets and holds regular one-to-one discussions with six families in her neighbourhood. "I find domestic violence afflicts every family around me but so far it has been a hidden crisis. Our campaign has helped women to talk to each other. This is definitely a big change but we still need to engage men," she says.

Change Maker Dr A R M Farooque, a medical practitioner in village Kapasia, Gazipur district, has actively begun to counsel his women patients on the health hazards they face due to discriminatory practices at home. "Many of them suffer from reproductive tract infections and my talking has helped them for the first time to understand how they can cope with such problems."

School headmistress Umme Khair Fatima of Shahid Rafique Ahmed Girls High School in Pabna takes every available opportunity to sensitise her girl students about practices that endorse gender inequity and violence. "Some teachers frown at my initiatives but I don't directly confront them. Instead, my girls and I try to ease things by winning their trust. This is the beginning of our effort to change attitudes. We still have a long way to go."

In Pabna, a group of Change Makers acted collectively to organise a public event. They are upbeat about mobilising 3,000 people (70 per cent of whom were men) to speak out against violence against women.

"Domestic violence is not a private issue, it's a social issue. When my neighbour beats his wife, my husband gets an excuse to beat me. So I have the right to intervene in other people's behaviour," argues a woman in a women's group in Barisal. A change in social attitudes is a reality today!

## Kinds of Change Makers

*As there are no set guidelines to change mindsets, Change Makers do not fit into a single mould. They can be young or old, a man or a woman and can belong to any class. Different situations call for different kinds of Change Makers.*

A Change Maker can be:

- \* An individual who works to change his/her attitudes and practices and influence ten others to do the same
- \* A group of persons who act together to change community attitudes and practices

\* Employees who work to bring change through their work (in schools, offices, government institutions, factories, medical centres etc) by reaching out to their colleagues/clients and influencing them

Please do send comments to: [secretariat@wecanindvaw.org](mailto:secretariat@wecanindvaw.org)



# We can

## South Asia regional campaign



end all violence against women

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