

National Conference on Women, Religion And Family Laws

Newsletter December 1989

The National Conference on Women, Religion and Family Laws organized by the Women's Centre and the All India Council of Christian Women, was held in Bombay from Jan 21-23, 1989. Over 130 participants representing all major religious groups from all over India attended the conference.

The conference was called together to reflect on the increasing fundamentalism in all religions and the impact of this on women. Family Laws, which are linked to various religions are the most tangible expressions of how women are kept under control. Therefore the conference reflected on the laws that govern the major religious and tribal groups in India.

It was affirmed that the ultimate goal would be to work towards a Uniform Civil Code that would govern all people in India and be free from gender biases. However, it was felt that the plurality of religions and tribal identities must be safeguarded when the Common Code is drawn up. In the meanwhile any attempts to amend outdated or unjust Personal Laws must also be supported.

Resolutions passed at the National Conference on Women, Religion and Family Law, organised by the Women's Centre, Bombay and the All India Council of Christian Women, 21-23 January, 1989, at Bombay.

RESOLUTIONS:-

1. We at the National Conference on Women, Religion and Family Laws, unanimously demand that all women irrespective of religion, caste or community, be included in the purview of Section 125 of the Cr. P.C. by the Government of India.

The Government's pretence of improving Sec. 125 Cr. P.C. after refusing Muslim women the right of access to it, is nothing but a fraud perpetrated on women of India.

We call upon women's groups to refuse to give any recommendations on Sec.125 unless this demand is immediately acceded to.

2. The Government recommendation of compulsory registration of marriages is unclear and ambiguous. The conference demands that the Government sheds more light on the consequences of this measure and calls for a national debate among women's groups prior to foisting registration on women.

3. This National Conference on Women, Religion and Family Laws denounces the recent statement of Ms. Vijaya Raje Scindia, Vice President of the B.J.P., justifying and glorifying the custom of sati. We believe that customs like sati are cruel and inhuman even though they were justified in the name of religion in earlier Indian history. We consider that this glorification is an attempt by communal forces to use women for their political purposes. This glorification strengthens the economic base of such forces. We appeal to all women, to condemn all such efforts to revive or glorify the custom of sati. We demand that the Government take immediate action under the commission of Sati (Prevention) Act. 1987, against Vijaya Raje Scindia and all those persons glorifying and reviving the practice of sati.

4. We feel that there is an inherent sexist bias in all the existing laws that makes the father the natural guardian of the child. This bias must be removed and both the father and the mother should be recognised as the natural guardians of the child.

5. We demand appropriate legislation to ensure that:-

(a) all property acquired after the date of marriage shall be jointly owned by the husband and the wife, and

(b) that the wife has the unconditional right to reside in the matrimonial home.

6. We demand that mutual consent be introduced as a ground for divorce under all family laws.
7. We denounce the Government's support and encouragement of all religious fundamentalists in the name of secularism. We demand that the state stop aid grants and withdraw tax exemptions to religious trusts. The state should make it compulsory for all religious trusts to make public their accounts and display it in a prominent place.
8. As a Government owned medium, Doordarshan is under a special obligation to avoid the telecasting of material that contributes to a ritually charged atmosphere. Such an atmosphere encourages obscurantist thinking, inimical to women. We demand that the Government stop playing all items on T.V. and radio networks that promote religious fanaticism.

Taken from the Saheli (a women's resource group) Website:

<https://sites.google.com/site/saheliorgsite/women-s-conferences/national-conferences-of-women-s-movements/national-conference-on-women-religion-and-family-laws>