

'Pink Chaddi' and 'Pub Bharo' campaigns against Moral Policing gather momentum, InfoChange India (2009)

People are being urged to fill pubs and send pink underwear to the Sri Ram Sena chief on Valentine's Day to show their anger and disapproval at the recent violence unleashed by the fundamentalist group against women in a pub in Mangalore

The social networking Internet site, Facebook, is where women are hitting back at those who deem 'pub culture' and Valentine's Day antithetical to 'Indian culture'.

The violent attack on women who were in a pub in the Indian city of Mangalore, in Karnataka, on January 24, 2009, by members of a fundamentalist Hindu organisation, and the declared intention of the latter to use similar tactics to stop young people from celebrating Valentine's Day, impelled Tejaswini Chowdhury, daughter of Union Minister for Women and Child Development Renuka Chowdhury, to start a 'Pub Bharo' (fill pubs) community on Facebook. The community has 1,000 members who are set to express their solidarity by filling pubs all across the country on February 14.

Another group calling itself the Consortium of Pubgoing, Loose and Forward Women has launched a cheeky 'Pink Chaddi' campaign, urging people to send pink underwear to the chief of the Sri Ram Sena that masterminded the attack on the women in the pub. This campaign too has been coordinated on the Internet and has received 3,000 positive responses including from women who do not frequent pubs but are outraged at the tactics of the self-styled Sena.

The state government's ambiguous response to the January 24 attack (the violators are out on bail and have threatened publicly to disrupt any celebrations on Valentine's Day) has, however, raised some concerns about the safety of the protesters. Chowdhury said the government had refused to provide security to campaign members on the day.

She points out that while the Ram Sena was allowed to hold a 'victory' march for beating up the girls, with no police intervention, when NGOs and students want to participate in the campaign it is suddenly against the law to do so and the government has refused any protection for February 14. As a result some NGOs that were set to participate have backed out.

The definition of 'pub culture' is unclear. The state government allows licensed pubs and yet the state's chief minister says he "will not allow pub culture to grow in the state". The disapproval actually seems aimed at women frequenting pubs -- a blatantly sexist way of thinking. There is also little distinction being made between disapproving of pubs and Valentine's Day celebrations and using illegal means such as physical force to coerce and harm people who don't share this point of view.

Several local people who have spoken out against the attack believe it has more to do with political thuggery than anything else. The coastal belt, particularly Dakshina Kannada, of which Mangalore is a part, has become a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stronghold, and communal divides have grown.

In 2008, churches were attacked here for the first time, with another Hindu fundamentalist outfit the Bajrang Dal claiming responsibility.

"The basic reason is politics. The coastal region was a Congress domain but now it is a BJP stronghold. Hindutva is on the rise," says Kumble Narasimha Prabhu, former president of the Kanara Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Source: Indo Asian News Service, February 11, 2009
www.thepinkchaddicampaign.blogspot.com, February 2009

<http://infochangeindia.org/200902117607/Women/News/'Pink-Chaddi'-and-'Pub-Bharo'-campaigns-against-moral-policing-gather-momentum.html>