

REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2007

Muslim women's groups have been very actively working on issues of Muslim women and the community for last many years. The Muslim women at the grassroots who are extremely marginalized, socially, educationally and economically have in a sense taken the lead in forwarding the cause of, initially, fellow Muslim women and now the entire community. This process of this empowerment began during and after the 1992-93 communal violence unleashed by the State, post-Babari Masjid demolition. During the violence which mainly comprised of police brutality and shameless connivance of the ruling government with the right-wing forces, women came forward to shield their men from police firing, illegal detention and enforced disappearances. They confronted the police by taking to the streets and showed willingness to even face the bullets.

The following years saw a huge upsurge in Muslim women's involvement in the public sphere. Many women who had lost an earning member of their family had to take up some economic activity to sustain themselves and their families. Others took to education with a vengeance and scores of other women simply could not go back to their homes after having played a crucial role in protecting their men and their community from police brutality. The transition from the 'private' to the 'public' had begun.

The women at the grassroots began to slowly organize themselves through various means. Some joined the political parties, others took support of the NGOs to partake in the developmental and welfare activities. NGOs, who till then believed in the homogeneity of the women's causes, realized that special attention needs to be given to Muslim women. At least the process of understanding their issues had begun.

Today in practically all major community dwellings in Mumbai, Muslim women have organized themselves and are negotiating their rights with their family, with their community and with the State. It is a heartening sign that the most marginalized are taking a lead in tackling the challenges of unemployment, illiteracy, discriminatory personal law, police atrocity, communal polarization and State's omission and commission in relegating the community to utter neglect and alienation.

As in other states, villages and towns across the country, Mumbai too was ready for a revolution. Unwittingly, the ground work had begun right after the riots by the women themselves. With the formation of the Hukook-e-Niswan Mahila Sanghatana [HNMS] in 2005, the seeds of which were sown in 1994 with the formation of the first mahila mandal, Muslim women found a platform from which they could demand their Constitutional rights. HNMS is a Federation of 30 community-based women's groups [Mahila mandal] in Mumbai. The process of formation of mandals which begun in the mid-90s culminated with the formation of the Federation, the membership of which is currently growing and stands at 1500 women today. The Federation has done pioneering work in providing legal aid and support to many Muslim women who have faced the brunt of a discriminatory personal law. Since more than a decade, close to 5000 women have been legally supported by the members of the Federation. In Mumbai it is in the forefront to raise the issue of Muslim personal law reform.

The formation of the Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan [BMMA] was a natural corollary to the empowerment processes that had been happening in Mumbai by the HNMS and elsewhere by similar such efforts. The BMMA was inaugurated in January 2007 and the Mumbai Unit of it was inaugurated in March 07. Mumbai inaugural was attended by close to 400 women who listened with rapt attention to the Chairperson of the Andolan Dr. Razia Patel who explained its vision, objectives and activities and extolled women to participate and take their destinies in their own hands by charting a course of action to ameliorate their own condition. Since then the Unit has taken upon itself the task of bringing visibility to the BMMA.

The Hukook-e-Niswan Mahila Sanghana has dovetailed its activities into the activities of the Andolan. Active member of the Federation are now Conveners of the Andolan and have taken up the 4 issues as their prime responsibility.

SUPPORT TO THE SECRETARIAT

- Report correction of inaugural, Rajasthan and Pune meeting
- Preparation of accounting and programme guidelines
- Preparation of statements on important issues
- Attended 4 meetings with fellow Founder members
- Prepared annual report of the Mumbai Unit of the Andolan

GIVEN TABLE SHOWS THE ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE MUMBAI UNIT OF THE BMMA

No.	ACTIVITIES DONE
1	General membership -600 Levy members - 10
2	Started preparation for survey to ascertain the views of students and teachers of the BMC schools on the quality of education offered by the state.
3	Visited Osmanabad district of Maharashtra to meet more people and spread the message of the Andolan
4	75 women/girls took admission for higher education through SNTD University
5	Advocated for Urdu as one of the mediums of instruction in the Distance Department of SNTD University
6	Prepared draft law on Muslim marriage
7	Inauguration of Mumbai Unit
8	Preparation of the demographic profile of Maharashtra and Mumbai
9	6 training workshops on the BMMA with the members of the HNMS
10	Rally against the fatwa issued by Darool Uloom Deoband prohibiting the intermingling of girls and boys. Submitted a memorandum to the State Ministry.
11	Submitted a memorandum to the State Ministry to look into the issue of discriminatory personal law
12	Printed 1000 Ramzaan timetable with gender friendly messages
13	Identification of 25 conveners of the BMMA-Mumbai Unit

14	Representation of Andolan at <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maulana Azad Vichar Manch • National Minority Commission • Police Parivartan Dal • Dharna on issues of Mehtar community • Rashtriya Bihar Mahila Mandal • Rally by Nyaya Andolan for the implementation of Shri Krishna Report
15	Dharna for implementation of the Shri Krishna Commission Report
16	Meetings in Chita camp / 27 th October 07 Meeting in Goregoan /3 September 07
17	Attended the second National State Conveners meeting in Pune in August 07
18	Preparation and participation in the 1 st annual convention of the BMMA – presentation of Mumbai Unit report and plans for 2008
19	Meeting in the Chita camp and Juhu Galli on BMMA
20	Preparation of Maharashtra Yatra for BMMA outreach
21	Visited Dharwad, Belgaum and Banglore for bringing visibility to Andolan. Did press conference and public meeting in these places
22	One-day seminar on ‘MPL and Muslim women - Theory and Legal Strategies’ in Orissa.

The BMMA finished one year of its existence on 10th January 08. The Annual Convention of the Andolan was celebrated on 16, 17,18th of November 07. 400 women from different states attended the meeting. The Convention focused on the issues of Dalit and tribal Muslims. A book on Supreme Court judgments in favour of Muslim women called the ‘Supreme Court Speaks’ authored by Saumya Uma and published by WRAG was released on this occasion. The nominated state conveners presented the report of activities which they undertook under the aegis of the BMMA. They also presented their plans for the year 2008. A resolution was also passed at the end of the Convention. The representatives of the Andolan met the Vice-President and apprised him of the vision, objectives and the activities of the Andolan.

TABLE OF FEDERATION MEETINGS AND TRAINING

Date	Attended by	Topics covered
5 th May	Federation members Training	About BMMA World, national and local geography Elected representatives and their designations
2 nd June	Federation meeting	Video recording of federation activities BMMA membership process
22 nd June	Co-organized a meeting with Wisdom foundation	To felicitate the maulanas who took part in the essay competition on peace and harmonious co-existence

7 th July	Federation meeting	BMMA membership, preparation for press conference.
21 st July	Training on BMMA	Andolan vision, strategies and objectives.
28 th July	Core group meeting of the Federation	Andolan membership, division of responsibilities as per the issues of andolan and jhagda meeting
18 th Aug	Federation members Monthly meeting	Preparation of format for education survey, HeN membership and accounts
25 th Aug	Federation training for federation members	HeN a/c and membership, BMMA membership
26 th Aug	Meeting on BMMMA in Goregoan	BMMA and its vision and activities

ACTIVITIES OF THE FEDERATION

The strength of the Federation has increased in the year 2007. There are 25 mandals who are active members of the Federation and 36 women have become members in their individual capacity. All the 86 members [50 women representing mandals and 36 individuals] attend the training programme. In the meetings only the representatives attend to take decisions and to share and report about their work in their respective communities. We have also restructured the Federation as many more women are keen to come for the meetings and trainings. To bring clarity in the issues the Core Group of the Federation attends special training programmes which WRAG organizes so that the Core leadership of the Federation is well versed in the issues that confront the Muslim community. In these 2 months, the Core team attended 2 sessions on the BMMA with special focus on history of the Muslim community in India. In the larger meeting, the Federation members were introduced to Yoga and stress management. WRAG has also prepared modules on the draft of alternative law and on the BMMA.

GENDER TRAINING

The 6th, 7th and 8th batch of Gender training were held. More than 40 women participated in the training. The topics covered were gender, sex, patriarchy, feminism and sexuality. Through these training newly joined mandal members are given inputs on the above issues to help them develop a healthier gender perspective.

DRAFT OF ALTERNATIVE MUSLIM LAW

As an outcome of the national consultation on the bringing reforms in the Muslim personal law it was decided that WRAG will take the initiative to start drafting an ideal Muslim law that will ensure the rights of Muslim women. The process of drafting that law has started. It has been circulated to eminent lawyers and activists for their feedback and suggestions. It is heartening to know that the suggestions received have been extremely valuable and they are being added to the draft. Right now we are concentrating on marriage law.

To get feed back from the community once again, smaller meetings were held with different groups for a detailed feedback. The groups were the single women's group. We felt that it was important to get the feedback from the single women who will look at the prospective law from her perspective. Consultations were also held with young girls who also gave their suggestions. Once again the Federation was involved in the process of giving their detailed feedback on the draft. These suggestions have been incorporated in the draft which is now ready for wider consultation.

WRAG is in the process of finalizing its position paper on the issues of Uniform civil code and MPL reform. The debate on UCC versus Reforms-in-personal law has been going on for a very long time. In WRAG we felt that we need to address this issue and put forth our position on it so that we can go beyond debates and arrive at a concrete idea to proceed forward. To arrive at a consensus WRAG has drafted its position paper and will make it public after an in-depth discussion within the organization. This paper will make our position clear on this very controversial and complicated issue.

PUBLICATION

Dr. Zeenat Shaukat Ali's book on the Muslim marriage and divorce is being translated in Hindi and Urdu for wider reading on the subject. This was also a demand raised by the women activists who are working on this issue with Muslim women. The 5 booklets on MPL have been translated in Bengali by a group in West Bengal.

WRAG also published a book on Supreme Court judgments in favour of Muslim women. The book titled 'Supreme Court Speaks' was authored by Saumya Uma [Co-Director of WRAG, lawyer and a Human Rights activist]. The book was released at the 1st Annual Convention of the BMMA and will go a long way in helping women, lawyers and activists in their struggle for accessing legal rights.

OUTREACH AND NETWORKING

- Activists from Mahila Patch Work, Gujrat visited the Hukook-e-Niswan Sanghatana to understand its structure and functioning. They were also able to participate in a Dharna to demand the implementation of the Shrikrishna Commission Report.
- Conducted a 2 day workshop on Organisational Development with staff and activists of Tehreek who are also Andolan partners.
- Participated in the 'Imagine a New South Asia' campaign which involved conducting surveys, interviews and FGDs with people from the community on the issues of peace and conflict resolution in South Asia.
- WRAG in collaboration with the Muslim Women's Organisation in Orissa conducted a one-day seminar on 'MPL and Muslim women - Theory and Legal Strategies'. The seminar was attended by activists and police personal who were keen to know the law and understand the strategies that were being used to help Muslim women. More than 70 people attended the seminar. The DIG of Police also attended and actively participated in the discussion. As a follow-up of this meeting, more such seminars will be organized. The books published by WRAG on MPL will be published in Oriya.

- As part of the preparation for the Maharashtra Yatra to bring visibility to the Andolan, WRAG staff did a visit to Osmanabad to make preparations for the Yatra. We met Nusrat Pathan who runs SHGs in the Osmanabad district and has many women who are willing to join the Andolan. About 75 women attended the meeting in Osmanabad and the Nusrat also attended the Annual Convention of the ANdolan in Delhi in November 07.
- To strengthen our support to the Convener of the Karnatake state, Ms. Nagma Nadaf, we visited 3 districts of Karnataka. In Belgaum a press conference was held which was attended by around 30 representatives from the local press. A public meeting with the women from Dharwad was held which was attended by about 70 women. A press note was issued in Bangalore regarding the activities of the Andolan. A meeting was held with the representative of a conservative group in Bangalore. The Convener is very dedicated to the Andolan activities and needs a lot of support and training to carry out the activities.
- The WRAG team did a presentation on 'MPL and Rights of Muslim women' in the Youth Convention of the Indian Social Science Congress. Many research scholars attended this seminar and showed their interest in the issue by raising pertinent questions related to the issue.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Successful Federation trainings and meetings
- Dovetailing the activities of HeN and BMMA
- Successfully completed the first year of the BMMA
- Increased the visibility of the Andolan in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Orissa
- Drafted the ideal Muslim marriage law

CHALLENGES

The response to the Federation is overwhelming. The women are keen to know more. The human resource at our disposal is not enough to meet the increasing demand for more trainings and inputs. We have restructured the Federation and have redistributed responsibilities within WRAG to be able to cope up with the demands from the community and to respond to the challenges of running a campaign.

The Muslim women have welcomed the Andolan with open arms. The challenge is to live up to the expectations that women have from the Andolan. The Andolan must strengthen its mass base at the same it must make itself visible so that it comes across as an alternative voice of the Muslim women.

The draft alternative law must now go to the activists and lawyers in different parts of the country for their feedback and suggestions. This process will throw up many questions which the campaign will have to answer as it goes along.