

Panel discussion on gender justice, gender violence and the police.

The Women Lawyers' Association (WLA) and Prajnya organized a panel discussion on gender justice at the WLA Main library Hall on December 3rd at 430 pm and the hall was packed with women lawyers, a few men and volunteers from Prajnya. Welcoming the gathering, Shanthakumari, President of the WLA and Swarna Rajagopalan, Founder Prajnya put the discussion on track on Gender justice: gender violence and police with introductory remarks on the campaign against gender violence.

Vasuki, General Secretary, AIDWA, placed gender violence in the context of all the other kinds of violence that occur in society. While underlining the symbiotic relationship between lawyers, civil society and police, she posed several questions to the panel and audience: How do you empower lawyers and activists to act? How do you get police to be proactive? Who is accountable for police violence, in situations like the rush for flood relief? When police are complicit in violence, who can it prevent violence from happening? This set the tone for the rest of her speech regarding the fact that women are not a homogenous category and violence against women is structural. Responding to a question on misuse of protective laws by some women, she said "Don't think of the few who misuse a law; think of the many that don't use it to protect themselves.

Geetha Ramaseshan, leading lawyer in the city, in her presentation stressed the need to be aware of how the structure of gender discrimination and gender violence works in the justice and legal arenas. Quoting several case laws and case studies, she mentioned that at every level, the need to understand the way gender becomes a tool of injustice is crucial. Many instances where a woman's behaviour and morality are questioned in a rude and unjustified manner by eminent judges and lawyers themselves, especially in cases of rape and violence against women are a case in point she said. "The more women are becoming visible in many spheres, the more a large number of women are getting invisible", she

Stressed saying we should not be satisfied with making a few strides in gender equity.

Malarvizhi, Assistant Commissioner of Police, made a case for the changing scenario among the police in terms of gender bias and equity citing that today gender sensitization is part of the training towards that end. "The fact that Tamil Nadu tops in the number of All Women Police Stations in the country speaks volumes for our commitment to gender sensitivity" she emphasized. Stating that the transition period was always difficult she added that slowly police officers, both men and women, are learning to deal with gender justice with sensitivity and understanding. "Quite often we are the counselors playing the role of elderly family members to people who come to us in a fit of anger" she quipped citing examples of couples who walk in to file FIRs and walk out hand in hand.

A lively discussion followed with many lawyers, policewomen and other members adding comments, remarks and asking a few questions that were summed up by Shanthakumari's closing remark "there must be an interface among all stakeholders – women victims, activists, lawyers, judges, the police force and members of the society".



Vasuki, General Secretary, AIDWA, speaks at the panel discussion aorganised by WLA and Prajnya



Section of audience at the panel discussion



Swarna Rajagopalan starting the panel discussion as Shanthakumar(President WLA - 2nd from left, Geetha Ramaseshan, Vasuki and Malarvizhi look on