

CENTRE FOR CHILD AND HUMAN RIGHTS, NLIU

news letter.

EDITION II

Welcome to the second edition of the CCHR Newsletter, your monthly source for insights, updates, and action points from the Centre for Child and Human Rights.

SILENCE AND STRENGTH CONFRONTING THE QUIET CRISIS

As silence deepens, so do stories that often go unheard — of women working through indignity, of quiet acts of defiance, and of communities striving for justice. This edition brings together voices, milestones, and movements that break the silence and demand dignity and rights for every individual.

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JOIN US IN
CHAMPIONING
HUMAN RIGHTS —
READ, REFLECT,
AND RAISE YOUR
VOICE.



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FEATURE STORY: COMMEMORATING INTERNATIONAL SEX WORKERS DAY

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REFLECTIONS FOR READERS

AN INVITATION FOR READERS TO SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON STANDING UP FOR DIGNITY AND RIGHTS.

International Sex Workers Day, observed on June 2, honours the 1975 takeover of Lyon's Saint-Nizier Church, where sex workers demanded labor rights, safety, and dignity. With a focus on access to justice, the 2025 observance was particularly noteworthy since it marked the 50th anniversary. The day calls for social and legal reforms while highlighting ongoing fights against police abuse, criminalization, and hazardous working conditions. It acts as a potent reminder to respect the human and labor rights of sex workers, guaranteeing their acknowledgement, defense, and integration into legal and policy frameworks.



India has nearly 3 million sex workers, contrary to the misconception held by many, a good number of them are also male. In India, sex workers hold a complicated legal and social situation where their labor is not entirely accepted as lawful but is partially decriminalized. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA) still criminalizes surrounding aspects through Sections 3 brothel-keeping, Section -4 living off earnings, and Section- 8 soliciting, despite the Supreme Court's affirmation of their right to live with dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution. Regular harassment and denial of fundamental rights result from this.



The apex court added that "prostitution is a profession and sex workers are entitled to dignity and equal protection under the law. "A three-judge Bench under Justice L Nageswara Rao gave six directions for safeguarding sex workers' rights. The Bench said, "Sex workers are entitled to equal protection of the law. Criminal law must apply equally in all cases on the basis of age and consent. When it is clear that the sex worker is an adult and is participating with consent, the police must refrain from interfering or taking any criminal action. The Court underlined in *Budhadev Karmaskar v. State of West Bengal*[1] that sex workers should be protected from police brutality and treated with dignity. They still do not have access to formal labor law safeguards, though, and are therefore denied rights like social security, minimum pay, and safe working conditions.

Demands for legal recognition, access to healthcare, and participation in policymaking have been made in large part by unions such as the National Network of Sex Workers and the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee. They are further marginalized when consensual sex work is confused with trafficking, which is frequently covered by Section 370 of the IPC. Protecting their human and labor rights requires a rights-based legal framework that decriminalizes sex work, guarantees complete labor protections, and separates voluntary work from exploitation.



K UMADEVI V. STATE OF TAMIL NADU

Bench: Justice Abhay S. Oka, Justice Ujjal Bhuyan

The court grants that Maternity leave is a fundamental right, reinforcing its recognition as part of women's reproductive rights.

**SARITA CHOUDHARY V. HIGH COURT OF
MADHYA PRADESH & ANOTHER 2025**

Bench: B.V Nagarathna, Justice N. Kotiswar Singh

The court emphasized that merely increasing the number of female official officers is insufficient if a sensitive work environment and proper guidance are not ensured.

The significance of women's representation in the judiciary, stating that it promotes gender equality, challenges stereotypes, and increase women's willingness to seek justice"

SUKHDEV SINGH VS. SUKHBIR KAUR

Bench: Justice Abhay S. Oka, Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah, Justice Augustine George Masih

The Supreme Court held that:Referring to a Women who is party to a void marriage as an "illegitimate wife" or "faithful mistress" is derogatory, misogynistic, and violative of her fundamental right to dignity under Article 21 of the constitution.

The Court emphasized that under Section 25 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 (HMA), a spouse from a void marriage is entitled to claim permanent alimony and maintenance. The Bench criticized the language used in the Bombay High Court's decision in Bhausahab @ Sandhu v. Leelabai (2004), stating that describing a woman as a "faithful mistress" or "illegitimate wife" affects her dignity and is against constitutional ethos.



RETHINKING WOMEN'S PLACE IN STEM



June 23rd marks International Women in Engineering Day (INWED), a global moment to recognize the achievements of women engineers and a swift reminder of the urgent need for greater inclusion in STEM. What began in the UK as a national campaign by the Women's Engineering Society (WES) has grown into a worldwide movement under UNESCO's patronage.

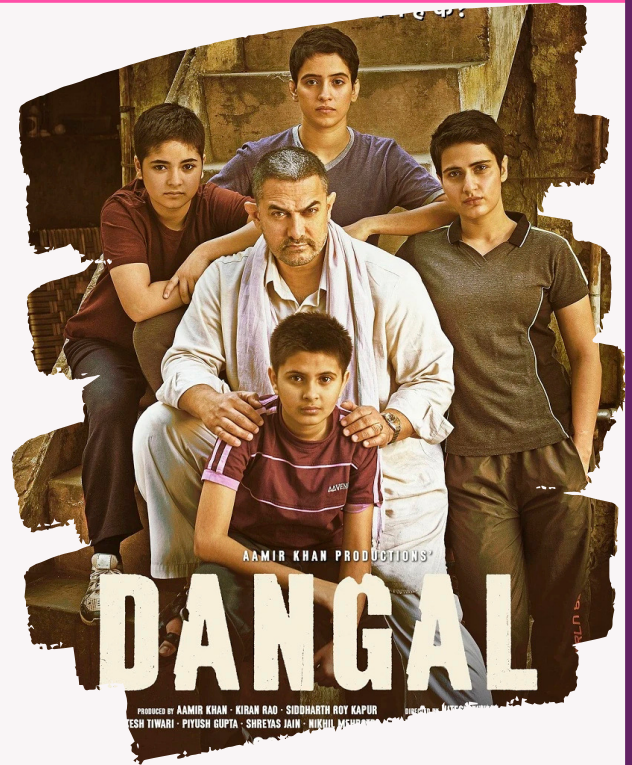
While Engineering holds the keys to building a safer, more sustainable world, it is still missing out on half of its potential. Women represent less than 30% of the global STEM workforce, despite often outnumbering men in graduation rates. According to government data and various industry reports, women comprise around 26% of the engineering workforce, 14.2% of registered doctors, and approximately 11% of senior roles in government services, with the presence steadily declining at leadership levels or in traditionally male-dominated fields. The road to closing the gender gap in STEM in India is long, but achievable with sustained effort. As the tech industry continues to grow, the inclusion of women is no longer just a goal but a necessity to drive innovation and economic progress. By promoting STEM education for girls, supporting women throughout their careers, and implementing gender-sensitive policies, India can bridge this gap and ultimately build a more inclusive and future-ready tech ecosystem and as we celebrate women in engineering this month, we must also ask - What will it take not just to bring women into STEM, but to make sure they thrive, lead, and stay.



“Dangal” is a powerful and inspiring film set in the heart of rural Haryana. It tells the real story of two sisters - Geeta and Babita Phogat and their father, Mahavir Singh Phogat, who together break centuries of gendered expectations in Indian sports. Trained in the male-dominated world of wrestling, the young girls face ridicule, rejection, and resistance not just from society, but sometimes from within, as they grapple with the cost of defying tradition.

The film goes beyond the arena of athletic glory to wrestle with deep-rooted patriarchy, the stigma surrounding female ambition, and the fundamental question of who gets to dream. At its core, Dangal is about reclaiming space: for girls in akharas, in stadiums, and in the national imagination.

The film's impact was not only cultural but also global. Dangal won the 64th National Film Award in India and went on to become the highest-grossing Indian film in China. It was named Best Foreign Film at China's Dourban Film Awards and received a nomination in the Asian Brilliant Stars category at the 68th Berlin International Film Festival. Beyond accolades, the film compels viewers to reflect on the transformative power of belief, when a father sees not limitations but limitless potential in his daughters. It redefines empowerment, reminding us that justice often begins at home, and equality is not handed down but it is earned, demanded, and courageously fought for.





In the heart of Maharashtra's sugar belt, a disturbing trend has emerged. a rising number of unnecessary hysterectomies (removal of Uterus) performed on female sugarcane cutters. Beed sends approximately 1.75 lakh workers, including thousands of women, to other states every year for sugarcane cutting, a task marked by long hours, harsh weather, and physical toil. Women are undergoing hysterectomies, not out of medical necessity but as a desperate solution to avoid wage loss during menstruation.

Women, as young as 35, have resorted to permanent surgical removal of their uterus just to continue working, staking their life. This miserable surgery is either forced directly or indirectly by the contractors, to keep them working as laborers, the motive- Women are being exploited for labor. Contractors often provide them with private doctors and money for the surgery. This is not only about medical issue but deeply layered human right crises, which stems from poverty, illiteracy, early marriages, poor health system, lack of menstrual hygiene. Women are forced to choose between their body and bread.

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A seven-judge committee has been set up under deputy chairperson of the Maharashtra legislative council. Early marriages, lack of awareness on women's health issues, poverty, lack of pre- and post-operative counselling, water scarcity and absence of menstrual hygiene and toilets have been enlisted by the committee as the causes for the mass scale hysterectomies in the district.

But what makes this crisis even more disturbing is the lack of national outrage. Despite its scale, the issue of mass hysterectomies in Beed has received minimal media coverage. Neither national news nor social media has amplified the voices of these women. Their cries remain local, their trauma unheard.





In a truly historic moment for the Indian legal system, Aanchal Bhateja has become the first blind woman advocate to argue before the Supreme Court of India.

She was born with weak vision due to complications during birth, and lost her eyesight completely.

With her strong determination, she cleared the competitive Common Law Admission Test (CLAT) and became the first visually impaired student admitted to the prestigious National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru.

The case for equality-

The petition filed by Aanchal challenges the Uttarakhand Judicial Service notification dated May 16, 2025, which restricts reserved categories for Persons with Benchmark Disabilities (PwBD) to just four types: leprosy cured, acid attack victims, muscular dystrophy, and cerebral palsy – unfairly excluding blindness and other disabilities.

Aanchal argues that this violates Section 34 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which ensures equal opportunity in employment for all persons with disabilities. It also challenges the unreasonable denial of necessary accommodations like providing a scribe during exams and the imposition of domicile restrictions that disproportionately burden PwBD applicants.

By stepping into the Supreme Court for the first time as an arguing counsel, Aanchal has not only achieved a personal milestone but also opened new doors for women and persons with disabilities in the legal world.



“We were never just training to be women officers. We were training to be the best officers.”

— A woman cadet, ahead of the historic Passing Out Parade

In a nation where brass boots and military greens were once a man's uniform of honour, May 30, 2025, carved out a new milestone in India's journey towards gender equality. For the first time since its establishment in 1954, the hallowed grounds of the National Defence Academy (NDA), India's premier tri-service military institution, witnessed a milestone that will inspire generations - the graduation of the first batch of women cadets. In 2021, the Supreme Court passed a landmark interim order in the ***Kush Kalra v. Union of India*** case. The Court held that the denial of entry to women into the NDA was a clear violation of the constitutional guarantee of equality. The judgment dismantled an outdated policy that kept women outside the gates of India's most prestigious military training academy.

Four years later, these trailblazing cadets stood shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts-leading drills, topping academic streams, and taking command positions. In the 148th Spring Term Course, 336 cadets graduated. Among them, the spotlight belonged to a 17 Women Cadets who became **the first-ever female graduates of NDA** - a culmination of grit, courage, and silent revolution. This moment symbolizes a national shift where leadership and service are no longer defined by gender. This milestone inspires systemic change, empowering future generations of Indian women to aspire for roles in national defence and beyond. It should be celebrated as the historic moment as a powerful reminder that when law aligns with courage, even the most fortified gates can be unlocked.

Every revolution begins with one voice that refuses to be drowned out. In India, for voiceless- children orphaned by HIV, LGBTQIA+ youth living in fear, and people denied basic healthcare, that someone was Anjali Gopalan. She emerged as a resolute voice, advocating with integrity, empathy, and unwavering commitment to human dignity.

Anjali was born in Chennai, studied political science and journalism in India and the U.S., and later completed her Master's in International Development.



Her early career in New York exposed her to the devastating human toll of HIV/AIDS but it was the silence back home in India that shocked and unsettled her the most. When she returned in the early 1990s, she found a country unwilling to recognize a crisis and unprepared to face the mounting HIV/AIDS epidemic. In 1994, Anjali founded the Naz Foundation (India) Trust, an NGO that offered not just care, but dignity. She set up India's first care home for HIV-positive orphans, trained caregivers, raised awareness, and held the government accountable. Naz became more than an organization, it became a safe space, a voice in the wilderness, and a challenge to systems that overlooked the most vulnerable.

Anjali's most courageous move came in 2001, when Naz Foundation filed a Public Interest Litigation to strike down Section 377 of the IPC, which criminalized homosexuality. Her fight lasted 17 long years through courtrooms, public backlash, and bureaucratic delays. But she never gave up. In 2018, the Supreme Court finally strike down Section 377. The law changed. But it had taken a woman to make the Constitution listen.

Her work echoed far beyond national borders, drawing international recognition for her unwavering advocacy: Anjali Gopalan was named among TIME's 100 Most Influential People (2012), shortlisted for the Nobel Peace Prize, awarded France's highest civilian honour—the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur (2013), and won the Franco-German Prize for Human Rights and Rule of Law (2025), recognising her lifelong fight for justice, equality, and inclusion.

In response to the reflection prompt in our May 2025 Edition, we invited readers to reflect on **whether public awareness campaigns alone are sufficient to protect children's rights, or if more community-led legal interventions are needed — and what role individuals can play.**

We are pleased to share two thought-provoking reflections from our readers that underscore the need for deeper, more sustained action:

Kartikey Mishra, Batch of 2025, writes:

"While public awareness campaigns like Tamil Nadu's anti-child labour warnings and Bhopal's "Beat the Heat" drive are commendable, they are not enough to dismantle systemic exploitation. Behavioural change requires sustained community-led legal interventions.

India's Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, as amended in 2016, under Section 3, prohibits the employment of children below 14 years in any occupation or process, and adolescents (14-18) in hazardous occupations. Yet, as per the 2011 Census, over 10.1 million children are still engaged in labour — a figure that likely underrepresents the current crisis.

In order to alleviate this situation, India may refer to certain international best practices such as Brazil's Bolsa Família program, which provides conditional cash transfers to low-income families, mandating school attendance and vaccinations, proven to reduce child labour by 16%, and Uganda's Child Helpline 116 which receives over 300,000 reports annually, connecting victims to support within 24 hours. The role of a common individual is not insignificant. Reporting violations, supporting NGOs, engaging in school outreach programs, or even starting conversations in one's neighborhood can create ripple effects. As a law student, I believe real change begins not just in courts, but in classrooms, bastis, and bus stops, wherever a child's rights are at risk.

Children deserve summers of safety and joy, not stolen ones — because silence is complicity!"



Jiya Gulati, Batch of 2029, writes:

“In the everyday fabric of life, every person who faces the dilemma of helping out a begging child might believe that the laws are enough to protect children labouring at day and begging at night, but are these children even aware of these laws? Are their parents aware of these laws? Or have they conformed to the acceptable standards of society because that is all they have known their whole life?

Child protection laws are communicated officially through governmental sources, websites, and various media formats, such as print media and social media. While various pro-bono initiatives and NGOs aim to educate vulnerable people, and are successful as well, it is impossible to be able to cover every sect of the population if innovative ways are not utilised.

Individuals who are entitled to such benefits often find themselves devoid of resources like internet, mobile phones, and other communication technologies. Therefore, there is a desperate need to help them learn about policies such as abolition of child marriage, free education, higher education loans at low interest rates, scholarships, etc., in ways in which they are familiar – stories, localised legal clinics, collaborating with local panchayats, and door-to-door campaigns.

This requires actually helping them to learn to access these benefits when they need to. The bottom line is that there is no point in making laws if the protected people cannot enforce them voluntarily, and present communication channels are hardly enough.”

We thank Kartikey and Jiya for raising their voices and enriching the dialogue on protecting children's rights. Their reflections remind us that real change is built on both laws and lived awareness, and that each individual has a role to play in ensuring justice reaches those who need it most.

We look forward to featuring more of your reflections in future editions.

This edition has brought to light stories of struggle and resilience — sex workers demanding dignity, women breaking barriers in the military and courts, girls sacrificing their health to earn a livelihood, and changemakers who refused to let silence prevail.

These accounts show us that injustice is often quiet, hidden in plain sight, and perpetuated by indifference. Change begins when we choose to listen, to question, and to act.

Consider the following question as a prompt for thought, dialogue, or even legal advocacy:

- When you witness a situation — in your neighbourhood, workplace, or social circle — where someone's dignity or rights are being ignored, what is one concrete action you can take to stand up for them without putting them or yourself at risk?

Submit Your Reflection:

We invite our readers to send in a short reflection (100-150 words) in response to this question. The best entry(s) will be published in our next newsletter and receive a shoutout on CCHR's official social media handles.

 Please mail your write-up to cchrc@nliu.ac.in with the subject line: "Reflection - CCHR Newsletter (JUNE 2025 Edition)."

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**RAISE YOUR VOICE, CHANGE BEGINS
WITH ONE.**

”

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