



Making public transport safer for women

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महिलाओं की यात्रा हो सुखद एवम् सुरक्षित



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The Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) experience

Engendered public spaces: a background

Recording the highest incidence of crime against women, Delhi has claimed the title of being the most unsafe city in the country for the last several years. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2005 statistics, the city accounted for 1/3rd of all reported rape cases and almost 1/4th of the molestation cases in mega cities. A survey done by Delhi Police in 2004 showed that almost 45% of the reported cases on molestation took place in public places like the public buses and 25% of those on the roadside.

On the one hand, Delhi gears up with its “world class city” look for the Commonwealth Games in 2010; on the other hand, incidences of sexual harassment and rape continue even at broad daylight, in public places. More and more women, of varying ages, classes and occupations, continue to live their life in fear of violence and sexual harassment.

In order to address the issue of women’s safety in public places and the restrictions imposed on them because of *fear* of unsafety, JAGORI launched the Safe Delhi Campaign, in 2005. The campaign is built around our conviction that safety in public spaces, whether for women or for other vulnerable groups (such as the senior citizens and people with disabilities) needs the involvement of all those who use these spaces.

The Campaign then initiated a survey (called safety audits), where 500 women around the city, shared their experiences on the nature of sexual harassment they faced, places where this takes place and the reasons behind it.

JAGORI's survey showed that 80% of the 500 women respondents reported having faced sexual harassment in buses and other public transport and 62% faced harassment on the road. It also showed that more than 95% of the interviewed respondents took precautions to protect themselves from violence.

The report of the safety audit, the survey and a film documenting women's experiences of sexual harassment in public places, *'Is this our city?'* was released in March 2007, where Sayeeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission, Anshu Prakash, Chairman and Managing Director, Delhi Transport Corporation and K.T. Ravindran, School of Planning and Architecture, were the guests of honour. Mr. Anshu Prakash expressed the desire to collaborate with JAGORI in making **DTC** buses safe for women.

In September 2007, Ms. Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi, and Haroon Yusuf, Minister of State for Transport, announced the partnership between DTC and JAGORI. They announced the helpline number that **DTC** has started for women facing sexual harassment on buses. They introduced the advocacy materials prepared by JAGORI for the campaign. At the launch, Mr. Anshu Prakash also announced that gender sensitisation sessions with the **DTC** bus drivers and conductors would be started with immediate effect.

The objectives of the session were two-fold

- ↔ To create a common understanding of the term "sexual harassment in public places"
- ↔ To identify strategies with the **DTC** staff to deal with sexual harassment against women and girls on buses

Sessions

From September to December 2007, trainers from JAGORI conducted sessions at the **DTC** training school at Nand Nagri for their bus drivers and conductors. The JAGORI team would go three times a week to discuss the issue of sexual harassment in public places. The sessions were conducted inside a stationary **DTC** bus to get out of the "classroom" situation and to place the drivers and conductors literally in the shoes of **DTC** passengers. The participants were divided into two groups; the trainers would conduct sessions of one hour with each group.

The main focus of these sessions was to understand that sexual harassment is a punishable offence, and is not playful and frivolous (as the terms "*eve-teasing*" or "*chedkhani*" would suggest). The participants were divided into two groups: the trainers would conduct sessions of one hour with each group. The team would talk about sexual harassment in the context of gender discrimination and discuss how we could bring about a shift in the way it is popularly perceived today.



The facilitators would enact a small role-play; one person (sometimes two) playing the harasser and the other, the woman being harassed. The **DTC** participants on the bus were asked to perform different roles: one person as the driver, one as the conductor (their “natural” roles) and all the others as passengers travelling on the bus. This role-play or simulation exercise gave the **DTC** staff a chance to explore how it would be to raise their voices against “actual” situations of sexual harassment.

The sessions brought out many deep-rooted beliefs that exist in all of us and that often provide the necessary sanction for certain kinds of violence.

- ♦ *“Ham apney beton se kehetein hain ki ek ke badley mein paanch laga kar aa... par hum apni betiyon se kehtein hein ki agar tumhe koi ched raha hai to chup chaap bardaasht karke wahan se nikal jaana aur kisi se is baat ko mat kehna”.*
- ♦ *“A man would never harass a woman who doesn’t want to be harassed. It’s only when she gives some form of signal that he will go ahead and do it.”
“Aaj kal ki ladkiyan chote kapdey pahenti hain, aur media ke nashey mein rehtein hein. Issey to becharey ladke bahaut aakarshit ho jaatey hain”*



Some staff members who had indeed tried to intervene in situations of sexual harassment by stopping the bus next to a PCR van or by taking the bus to the police station, often felt let down by the women they were trying to help.

- ♦ *“Jab hum help karne ke liye PCR van ke paas gaadi roktye hain, tab ladkiyan gayab ho jaateen hain. Hamein police ko jawab dena padta hai.*

How we teach our daughters to *accept* rather than *retaliate* in different situations. This added to their understanding of why women hesitate to file an FIR or follow up on a case of sexual harassment for reasons of shame, honour and morality.

The sessions would end with a planning of strategies of how the staff themselves could help women passengers deal with sexual harassment and ensure a safe travel for women and girls. It was very encouraging to hear the kind of action ideas many of the drivers and conductors came up with. The actions varied from stopping the bus and refusing to move until the perpetrator(s) get out of the bus, to taking a detour to drop off the woman closest to her home if required, especially late at night, to making use of the **DTC** helpline number and the **DTC** poster on the issue.

The facilitators would then give a definition of sexual harassment, the laws to curb it and also some strategies that the **DTC** staff could use in case of harassment. Each participant was then given a Safe Delhi helpline booklet (which were also made available at depots and pass counters), with an information leaflet.

Experiences of the JAGORI team

Over a period of three months, over **3,500** bus drivers and conductors had undergone training with JAGORI as part of this initiative. The trainings were very interesting and interactive. The participants were open to discussion and learning, even though there were instances of participants being three times older to than the facilitators! For the JAGORI team, the experience taught them to think about the issue in a non-biased way (since we were dealing with groups of up to 50 men at a time) and to communicate to the staff in language that was calm and reassuring.

This extremely encouraging response from the staff as well as the management has made the JAGORI team ready to continue its association with a major public transport company like the **DTC**.
