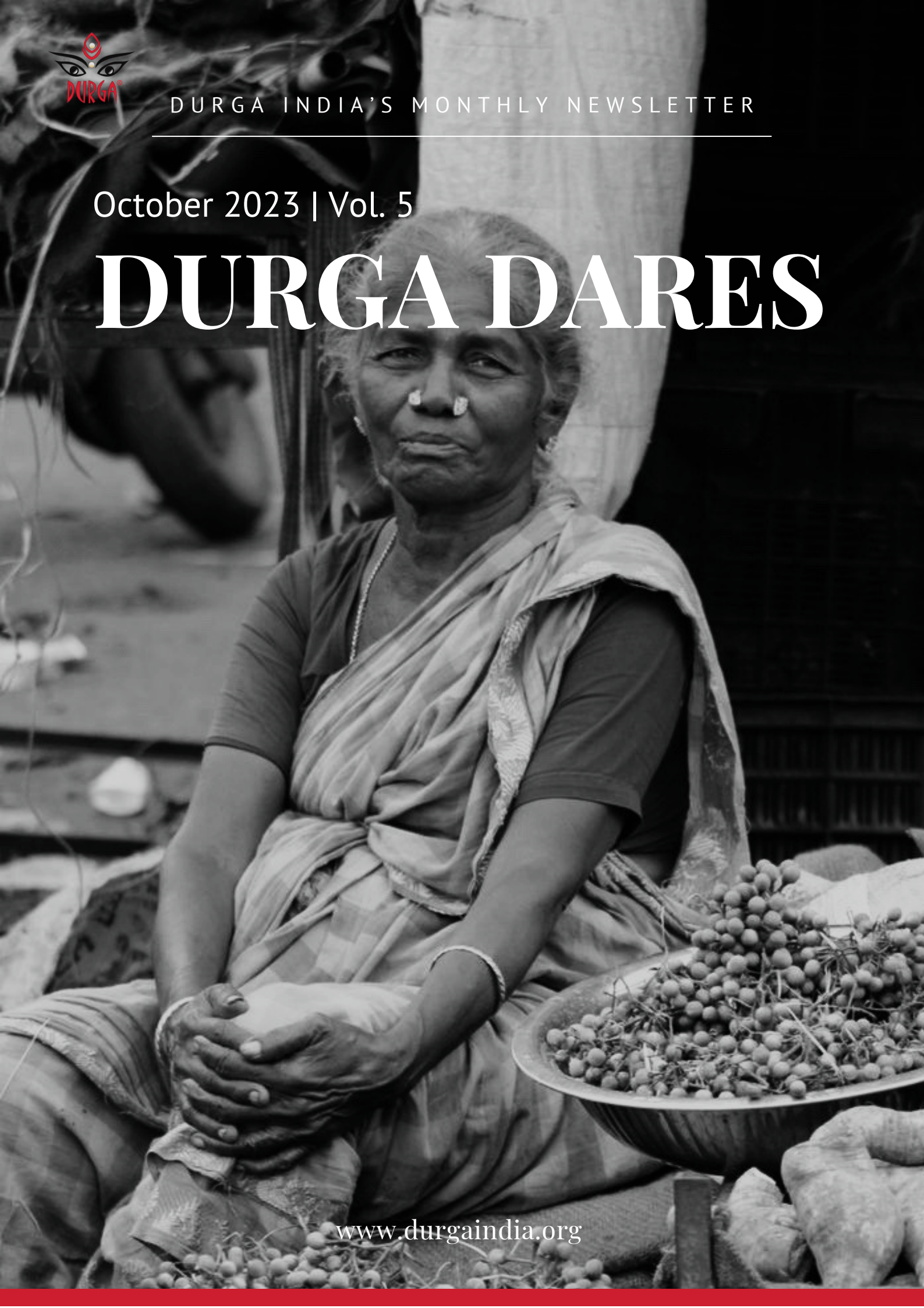




DURGA INDIA'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

October 2023 | Vol. 5

DURGA DARES



www.durgaindia.org



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

WINNIE PANDE

DESIGNER

WINNIE PANDE

PHOTOGRAPHERS

LIKHITHA SHETTY

CONTRIBUTORS

LALITHASHREE
GANESH

KILEY WOODS

VAAMAA BALDOTA

WINNIE PANDE

COVER IMAGE

PAVITRA D

Is withholding crucial mental health support for women and girls; who end up being survivors of abuse; violence in and of itself?

This year's theme for World Mental Health Day was "Mental Health is a Universal Human Right." However, it is shocking how people with varied mental health conditions have their rights violated on the daily. Several people find themselves unable to participate in everyday life while many others cannot access mental healthcare to enhance their wellbeing. For October, we delved into the importance of intersectionality in mental healthcare and how safe spaces for survivors could be created collectively. Moreover, we looked at sexual harassment at the workplace, and the steps that could be taken to deter harassment and gender-based violence.

We hope that this edition reminds you of safeguarding your mental health, and to prioritise it, always. Until next month!

Winnie Pande

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



@DURGAINDIA1



@DURGAINDIAOFFICIAL





DURGA'S LENS: WOMEN AT WORK

PHOTOS BY LIKHITHA SHETTY, PROGRAM FACILITATOR AT DURGA INDIA. IN FRAME IS A BANGLE MAKER (*BALEGARTI* IN KANNADA) IN SG PALYA, WHOSE PICTURES WERE TAKEN AT HER PLACE OF WORK. THE POURAKARMIKAS OFTEN WEAR BANGLES FROM THE HANDS OF THE BANGLE MAKER AT THE TIME OF FESTIVALS TO HONOUR LOCAL CUSTOMS.





MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Vaamaa Baldota, the founder of iDare, was in conversation with Durga, on the occasion of World Mental Health Day. iDare aims to develop an ecosystem which equips people with intersectional, affordable, and accessible information, support, and resources.

Winnie: Hey Vaamaa, I'm so glad to finally get to speak with you. At iDare, the fight against mental health stigma is a core part of the work you have been doing. How have you seen attitudes shift in this regard, since the start of Dare in 2015?

Vaamaa: Hey Winnie! From 2015, until today, there has been a huge shift. Especially post- covid and during covid, there was a very obvious shift in how people viewed mental health. It has a lot to do with mental health awareness; the more people that are talking about it, the more awareness people are getting. However, there is still a lot of stigma attached to mental health; be it societal or even what we have internalised. We still have a lot of students and young professionals who say that they don't need any professional help when they probably do. Before the Covid pandemic, people thought that those who were "crazy" went to therapy, you know? That's the language that was used. Now, people are understanding that having anxiety or depression, or even going to therapy just to navigate through life, is okay. I think now we are also shifting from the idea that only people who are diagnosed with a mental disorder can go for therapy to the idea that ensuring mental well-being is also cause enough to approach a mental health professional. Now, therapy is looked at as an everyday tool to be a better person or a better version of oneself, and to just navigate through life without it being so hard.

Winnie: Yeah! I think its not just about being diagnosed with something, it's about functioning well, and showing up for them and others better. So Vaamaa, I'm sure in your work too, you must have seen women and other minorities being disproportionately affected by stressors, and dealing with mental health conditions more, as compared to the general population. How does iDare incorporate intersectionality into its mental health programmes?

Vaamaa: I'm talking about intersectionality not in terms of just gender and religion, but also in terms of differently abled people. When they are going through a mental disorder, or any sort of trauma, the way they need to be supported is very different to the way that other people need to be supported. When in this mix, you have a woman, who is dealing from the trauma of being a woman in this day and age, and coming from a religion that is a minority religion, it makes a big difference to the way that she would navigate life today. For us, at iDare, it's very important that all of our therapists are trauma informed, queer friendly and that they understand that all of us come from different perspectives and life experiences which define how we see the world. We may not have lived your experience but that doesn't mean that we don't acknowledge you or don't care where you're coming from. When supporting someone, these things have to be kept in mind for us.



So you know, when we start working with someone and hiring therapists, these are a couple of things that we ensure they get right. Our training too, includes all of the above.

Winnie: *That's really incredible! Finding a therapist that works for you is such a challenge amongst people, and I think that sometimes, the cost in itself can be such a limitation. Knowing iDare has people who have already undergone training, is such a relief!*

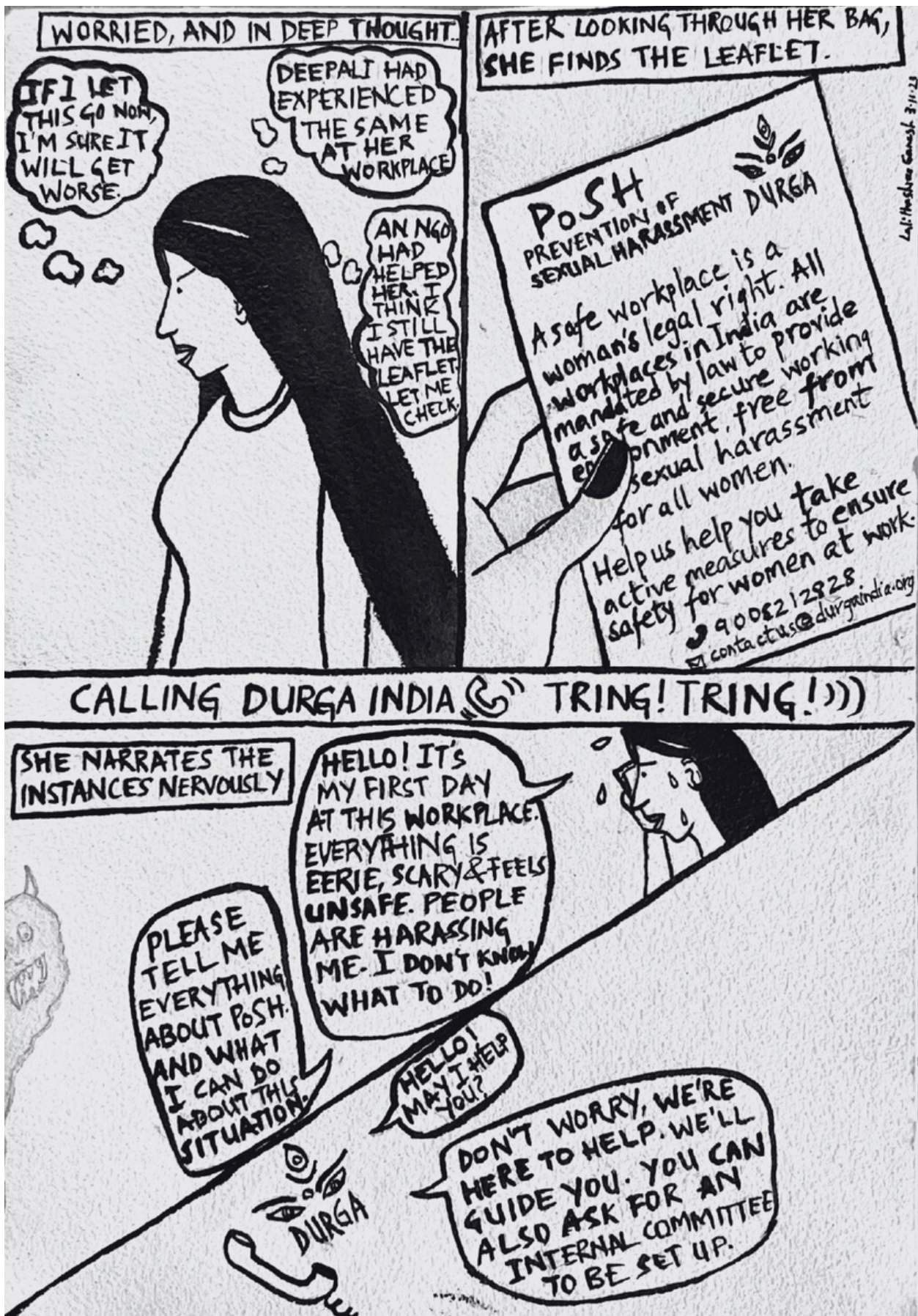
Vaamaa: Yeah, we hear so much of this, you know? But we want to make sure that therapy is accessible and affordable, and our therapy rates are kept at the bare minimum price, where it is 499 for an online session, and 699 for an offline session. Again, this is for someone who can afford therapy. When someone cannot afford therapy, we have a way around it as well. Say they refer us to someone, and the person comes in for a session, then the person who referred us gets a free session. I mean, a lot of the times when people are dealing with domestic violence, they don't even have access to financial resources; and these people end up being mostly women and children. So, we want to make sure that they also have access to mental healthcare.

Winnie: *That's so important. So Vaamaa, the theme of World Mental Health Day, 2023, is "Mental Health in an Unequal World: Bridging Disparities and Inclusion." As an individual, what are the efforts that you are making to make mental health equitable and accessible for people in your life?*

Vaamaa: I know it sounds like a very basic thing, but this goes a long way in ensuring someone's well-being; i.e. being non-judgemental. That is actually something I've learnt through my own mental health journey. When I was diagnosed with depression, I had a really difficult time and started to isolate myself, because I knew no other way to deal with it. When I did, a lot of people around me started to think that I was either too busy with work or that I thought too much of myself, but that wasn't true. I was just going through something very, very difficult. In that moment, to not have support, and on the contrary, being judged, had a really big and bad impact on me. When you are going through something like this, you are probably feeling alone and low, and this just pushed me over the edge. I felt so much more alone and judged, and I felt that I couldn't open up to people because they wouldn't get me. I think that learning really stayed with me, because today, if I know anyone is going through something, I ask, instead of judging. Another big learning for me is that this journey of mental health is very lonely. Most people can't or don't want to be there because they don't know what to do. But, the easiest way to show up for people is just to hold space. Sit there and listen. Ask questions, if they are comfortable. Probably give them a hug. It goes a really long way to make people feel included and accepted in this world.

BURIED TALES

Illustrated by Lalithashree Ganesh.





DURGA'S LENS: WOMEN AT WORK

PHOTOS BY LIKHITHA SHETTY, PROGRAM FACILITATOR AT DURGA INDIA. IN FRAME ARE THE WOMEN POURAKARMIKAS THAT LIKHITHA REGULARLY MEETS DURING HER SESSIONS. SOME OF THEM ARE NOW VOICE CHAMPIONS, INSTIGATING CHANGE IN THE PLACES CLOSEST TO THEM - THEIR HOMES AND PLACES OF WORK.





LET US WALK IN PEACE

Kiley Woods, Communications Coordinator with Take Back the Night Foundation

Children should be able to walk to school without worrying about their safety. Women should be able to get gas at night without being approached by a man. We should all be able to walk down the street without having to cross the road to avoid a possible threat. We should be able to walk down the street at night in the dark without street lamps and not have to turn around to look behind us. We are too old and have progressed too much to be afraid of the dark.

Let us walk in peace. Let us speak in spaces where women's voices are silenced by people in positions of power. Let us engrain our voices in the interwoven silk of society that shies away from difference. Let our survivorship be our difference and let us be proud of that.

Take Back the Night's mission is to end all forms of sexual and gender-based violence on a global scale. From intentional outreach, education, and advocacy, Take Back the Night is the leading national organization in the US doing the work to create a safe space for all. To achieve this, Take Back the Night uses the power of storytelling to heal survivors, education, collaboration, and problem-solving techniques that push the organization and its volunteers to be the voice of the movement.

Durga India and Take Back the Night's collaboration is testimony to a growing solidarity web through which collective action against gender based violence and sexual violence can be taken. Durga, a citizen sector initiative in Bangalore, India is committed to making safe, accessible, gender-just spaces a reality. With deterrence of Sexual Harassment as the core of Durga's work, workshops and modules are designed to be experiential and creative, with theatre and storytelling as the primary tools with which to equip individuals to better address violence, especially sexual violence. With this partnership, we are collectively expanding our global impact as well as forming meaningful connections with international organizations in countries where gender-based violence, sexual violence, and violence against women are prevalent.

With a team of passionate and ambitious volunteers, Take Back the Night is creating a new perspective on a movement that has been going on for decades and Durga is a major part of creating that change.

Promoting gender equity will help to remove the power divide which is a social construct that creates fear and draws painful lines through the fabric of society. This divide exposes vulnerable communities to spaces that will not treat them fairly. Thus blurring them into societies; brittle and busy hands where they may be forgotten, pushed aside, or blamed for their experiences. Durga and Take Back the Night works to challenge this narrative and create a safe space that will remain safe.



This conversation is ongoing, but it is not new. Safety is a feeling, but it is also a state of being that requires an ongoing commitment to survivors, their support systems, and the community as a whole. Commitment to them will inspire commitment to the work that Durga, Take Back the Night, and similar organizations are doing right now.

We can create a safe space. Through intentional action, conversation, education, and the support systems for survivors, change can happen. And it is advocates that are in the middle of this change. Join Take Back the Night in its international movement to end all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Join a movement that does not silence survivor's voices, but raises them in the quiet spaces in society that deny the reality of these violent acts.

We also wanted to take this opportunity to thank our partners: Kantar India Foundation, the CSR arm of Kantar India; Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies; CGI, and Utopia India Pvt Limited for their support to Durga's cause.

KANTAR



CGI



WORD SEARCH

G	L	L	I	H	S	R	E	B
E	O	H	A	E	M	E	E	Q
W	E	L	L	N	E	S	S	Y
H	B	A	R	P	B	B	P	E
E	O	L	R	T	W	A	R	V
A	A	G	N	H	R	I	N	I
L	O	H	O	E	R	E	S	T
T	I	N	H	M	I	N	D	C
H	D	T	O	I	S	E	A	A

1. HEALTH
2. WELLNESS
3. THERAPY
4. ACTIVE
5. MIND

**Please search UP, DOWN, BACK, FRONT AND ACROSS*