



DURGA INDIA'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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DURGA DARES

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This edition has it all - the celebration of International Women's Day among our communities, lots of colourful pictures, raw and powerful moments from the field, and most importantly, submissions and interviews from remarkable women who have been so kind as to sit with us, and recount their experiences as women, for Durga Dares.

This month, we also celebrated Durga's 11th birthday, which was an incredible milestone to achieve as an organisation - and to show our gratitude to the people who made it possible over the years for Durga to stand its ground.

More than ever, this moment reminds us to keep moving forward for a joyful, happy space for women to be created for them to show up uninhibited and carefree, and as one of our contributor's quotes, "dance and walk on a street at midnight!"

Winnie Pande

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

By Akshatha S (Programme Coordinator at Durga)

We've encountered countless remarkable women at Durga over the past decade - each unique yet sharing an unwavering determination to improve the world. From defying norms to managing immense responsibilities, women constantly pave the way for societies to grow. If you're reading this, you're one among the women we've learnt so much from. Keep breaking barriers, defying stereotypes, and forging ahead with courage and grace. Your inspiration fuels our commitment to change - Team Durga

What does International Women's Day mean to me? I think it represents a moment for me to reflect on the progress made towards gender equality and the work that still needs to be done. It's a day to appreciate the accomplishments of women and to renew our commitment to creating opportunities for women in all aspects of life.

This month is a time of celebration and pride. For me, this is an inclusive celebration, whether one is a public figure or not, acknowledging that each woman has contributed in her own way to where we stand today.

I spent the day with our participants - the women pourakarmikas, in Hosakerehalli. They are incredibly resilient women and deserve recognition, support and dignity for the laborious work they do. This year, the theme for IWD was 'Inspire Inclusion'. I was encouraged to understand not only the value of women's inclusion, but how we could be more deliberate in including women in all that we do.

The locations were adorned with flowers and balloons, and the women came dressed in their best clothes, ready to participate in the activities we had prepared for them. They spoke of their dreams and wishes for the future; reflecting on what changes they'd bring about in their homes and communities if they were in positions of power. Through the mirror game, we invited them to engage in discussions around self worth and share qualities and quirks about themselves that they liked - which was a first for many participants in the team. Open dialogue was also encouraged through 'Talk Your Heart Out'/*Manassu bicchi mathadi/Khul ke baat karo*', where participants shared their thoughts on hypothetical scenarios, where they could tell us their wildest fantasies and wishes they wanted for themselves and others, to come true. To me, this day was an empowering experience; filled with vibrant colours, diverse women of all ages, backgrounds, and ethnicities, smiling and holding hands. In the games and activities organised for the participants, we saw joy and a spirit of determination in the atmosphere. The learnings from the participants are so rich every time we engage with them, and I wait to spend more time on the field every time I come back!



DURGA'S LENS: WOMEN AT WORK

IN FRAME ARE OUR PARTICIPANTS FOR IWD AND IN SESSIONS WE'VE TAKEN FOR THEM RECENTLY. WE SEE HAPPY, SMILING FACES; FACES THAT DREAM OF A FUTURE WHERE EQUAL RIGHTS, OPPORTUNITIES AND A SEXUAL HARASSMENT FREE WORKPLACE EXISTS. AND IN THEM, WE SEE CONFIDENCE, HOPE AND JOY; THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME OF OUR INTERVENTIONS.





GHAR

By Divya Madhwani (Intern at Durga)

I live in a house, but it is not my home.

What is home?

Home is where you don't think before speaking

Home is where you feel the safest

Home is where you can cry and laugh out loud

Home is where you don't get judged

So where is my home?

My home?

Or our home?

Home is never mine, it is always 'ours.'

I wrote this thinking of how a home is perceived - it's supposed to be a place where you always feel safe and cozy. If you don't feel that way, it's just a building with walls and a roof.

Home is often portrayed as a sanctuary, a place of comfort and security. However, for many women, this idealised notion is far from reality. The unfortunate truth is that a significant number of women do not feel safe within the confines of their own homes. Whether due to domestic violence, harassment, or societal pressures, the feeling of insecurity pervades their daily lives. Domestic violence, in particular, is a pervasive issue that affects countless women worldwide. The home, which should be a haven, can become a battleground where fear and abuse reign.

According to statistics, one in three women globally has experienced physical or sexual violence, often perpetrated by a partner or family member within the home. These alarming figures underscore the harsh reality faced by many women behind closed doors. The fear of being watched or targeted, even within the confines of their own homes, can have profound psychological effects on women, leading to constant vigilance and anxiety.

Societal norms and expectations can further exacerbate women's feelings of insecurity at home. Gender-based stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes may lead to women feeling undervalued, disempowered, or even trapped within

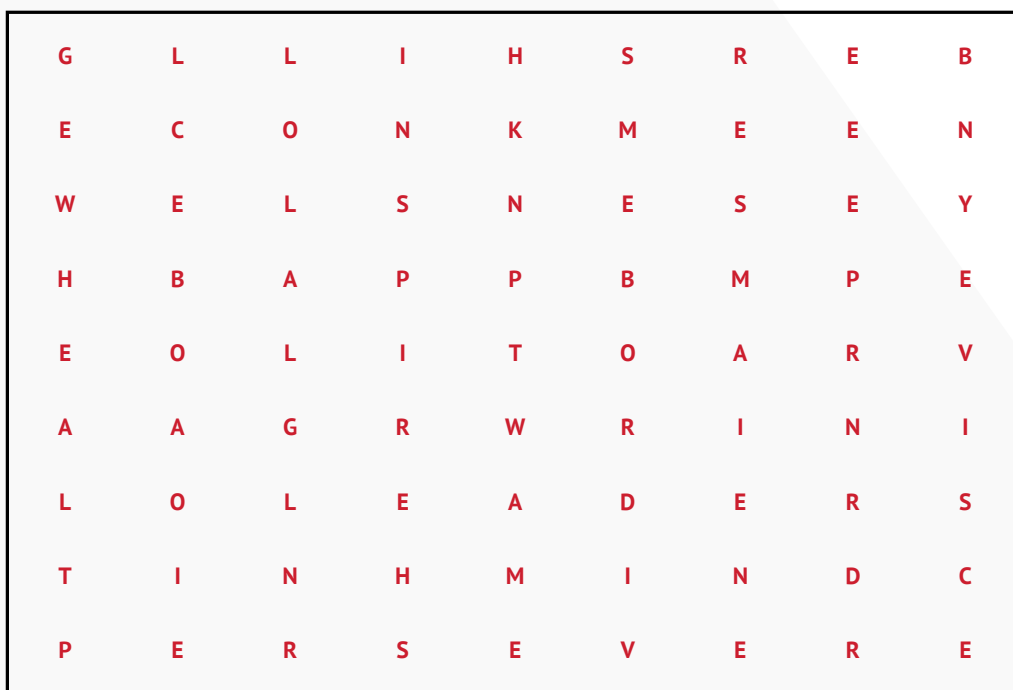


oppressive environments. The pressure to conform to traditional gender roles can limit women's autonomy and contribute to an environment where they do not feel fully safe or respected. Addressing the issue of women's safety at home requires a multifaceted approach. It involves challenging ingrained societal attitudes, implementing effective laws and policies to protect women from violence, and providing comprehensive support services for survivors. It also necessitates fostering a culture of respect, equality, and empowerment, where women feel valued and secure within their own homes and communities.

Ultimately, ensuring women feel safe at home is not just a matter of personal security but a fundamental human right. Every woman deserves to live without fear within the sanctuary of her own four walls. It is imperative that we collectively work towards creating a world where this ideal becomes a reality for all women, where home truly is a place of refuge and solace.

WORD SEARCH

Inspired by the theme of International Women's Day: Inspire Inclusion.
Get ready to spot the words!



1. INSPIRE
2. WOMEN
3. LEADERS
4. PERSEVERE

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

MEET OUR PARTICIPANTS

IN FRAME IS SHARADHA, A WOMAN POURAKARMIKA, WHO IS A PART OF OUR COHORT FROM SRINAGAR, BENGALURU. SHE LOVES RECEIVING FLOWERS, AND BRIGHTENING HER COLLEAGUES' DAYS WITH FLOWERS. IN HER OWN HAIR, SHARADHA WEARS A BLOOMING ROSE. PHOTOGRAPH CAPTURED BY LIKHITHA SHETTY; PROGRAM FACILITATOR AT DURGA.





HER EMPOWERMENT ANTHEM

Mansha Khanna (Intern at Durga)

In a world where shadows once held sway,
Women and girls now find their way,
With fierce courage, they seize the day,
Embracing their power come what may.

Knowledge fuels their every stride,
Skills ignite where dreams reside,
They forge ahead, their spirits inspired,
No longer bound by what once conspired.

Free to soar, their dreams unwired,
Joined by allies, in a shared pursuit,
They break down barriers, root by root,
Creating a world where all can reboot,
In the symphony of equality's flute.

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





AAMU TEESTA

Lungmying Lepcha (Contributor)

Lungmying Lepcha is a 17 year old hailing from the Himalayan state of Sikkim. An aspiring poet, she loves listening to Indie music and reading books which she reviews an eternity later. She's willing to bet that she can occupy you the whole day with her poems and stories. Lepchas are the original inhabitants of Sikkim and call themselves Rong Kup or Rumkup which when broken down, translates to Rong – Lepcha and Kup means son of god; Ithbu Debu Rum, the ultimate god they worship. Lepchas are nature worshippers and honour the nightly Kanchenjunga as their elder brother and the gracious Teesta as their mother.

We had asked you to
Stop hurting our mother
With all the strength of her children
We protect her to our best
Yet the cries went silent through the corridors
Her holy body was interrupted by the
Greed of pride

But she was a mother,
A mother who has all the power to bore
It was until
She could not stand more
So,
She flows
Flowed with all her might
That she swept away her children along with her
She still flowed uncontrollably
With the mind of being free
Yet she couldn't look back
And all we can do is
Let her calm down
Oh wait
And let her flow freely



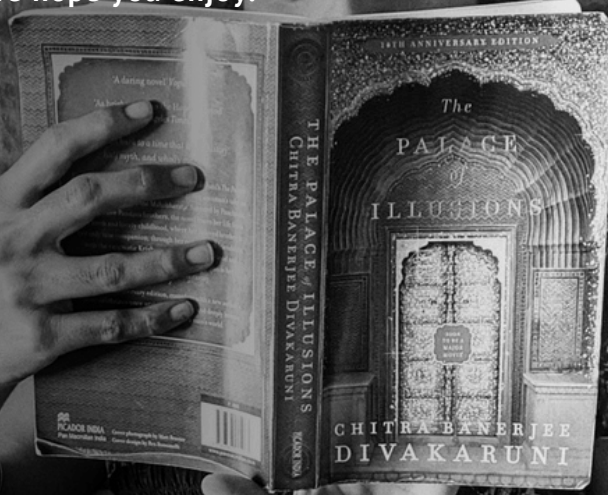
DURGA'S LENS: WOMEN AT WORK

HAPPY SMILING FACES. THE PICTURE ABOVE IS FROM OUR IWD CELEBRATION IN HOSAKEREHALLI; WHILE THE ONE BELOW IS FROM OUR BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION AS TEAM DURGA! 'I'M NOT HERE TO BE POLITE, I'M HERE TO BE EQUAL', I THINK AS WOMEN, WE CAN ALL RESONATE WITH THE DURGA TSHIRT SLOGAN!



WOMEN AT LEISURE

Durga sat down with Surabhi Yadav, in a two part interview, to discuss Project Basanti, and about dreams of a world that places leisure on priority. Part II of the interview is in the next couple of pages, we hope you enjoy.





WOMEN AT LEISURE

Winnie: So Surabhi, Let's also discuss safety and leisure; the interconnectedness of those two things.

Surabhi: Honestly, I think that our contemporary feminist benchmarks are very low for what we want. To me, these benchmarks are not coming through independent thought, instead by the poking of patriarchy. Take this for example; *Patriarchy ne bola ki hum tumhare liye road unsafe karenge, toh humne bola ki hum safety ki ladai ladenge.* (Patriarchy told us that we'll make your roads unsafe, so now we're embroiled in this fight to make our roads safer.) But what if we were to create our own feminist benchmarks, not poked through patriarchy? It's not about fighting back, it's about creating. There's space for both those things to exist, but I'm inviting you to think and imagine with me here. If you were to think on your own of the world you wanted, what would you do? Without thinking of pushback, resistance etc. Again, there's a space for resistance. For creation, however, don't we need to think beyond resistance?

What if we were to create our own feminist benchmarks, not poked through patriarchy? It's not about fighting back, it's about creating.

If I can dance or go on a walk in the street at midnight, that means that street is safe for me! So for leisure to happen, safety is a subset. I can't be at leisure if I'm fearful of something, na. Or for me to be at ease, I need to feel free and safe!

To me, instead of just thinking about safety, we need to also think deeply about leisure. In that pursuit, we will achieve safety, no doubt. I want to urge people to push their benchmarks higher, you know?

Winnie: Thanks for that Surabhi! This is giving me so many points on what to think about, even with my work at Durga. You know, we were actually thinking of creating a model of a safe, physical space in the public with other civil society organisations. Now that you're telling me your thoughts around safety and leisure, I'm also thinking harder on how better our framing for this model of a safe space can be more feminist; focused on creating, rather than coming from reactionary thought.

Surabhi: Yeah! In fact, Patriarchy has just kept us in the 'reaction' state no? It's like Patriarchy and Capitalism has always kept us in survival mode. You're constantly unsafe, there's constant scarcity.



We are unable to move past survival. We're embroiled in the fight for food, clothing, shelter, rights, land, money - which again, is all very crucial. **But when are women going to self actualise? Why are we not making self actualisation a benchmark?** Why is survival up there? Survival is a stage we have to cross. But it can't be the benchmark. If your benchmark is set low, your imagination is set low, your demands are low, your fights are low. So I mean, patriarchy has trapped us now, right? How did we get here?

Take this, for example; when women would cut off their hair or have visible hair on their legs and armpits, all of a sudden in urban India, they are celebrated as courageous or strong. But why is that our benchmark?? It's hair!! What big thing was achieved here? Because Patriarchy and Capitalism have created specific beauty standards, even the slightest deviation from that beauty standard becomes a bold act. It becomes a celebration. Did you see how low you made the benchmark for that woman? Apparently, now you're a hero for shaving your head. What are you saying?

Winnie: Yeah, yeah yeah! Same thing happens when men do the dishes at home, or cook for the family. Suddenly they're applauded for that very basic act; something that their wives and sisters have just accepted, and have done for the last decade or more, of their lives!

Surabhi: Exactly! The benchmarks for equality are very very low! I'm not saying that we don't need the fight for survival stage; in fact, we need people who are fighting the good fight, but what we also need is a diversity of feminist tools in our kit to move beyond these stages. We need a set of people who want to fight for the higher benchmark.

Winnie: You're very correct. I don't want to spend my life in fight or flight mode! But it seems like that's what happens for many of us!

Surabhi: Because when will you create then? I mean, if I must put it this way; when will the executive function of our collective consciousness kick in? When will an individual's executive function kick in? When will we become, and when will we start building upwards? All things to think about as feminists, no?

Winnie: Definitely. Thank you so much Surabhi. Talking to you was enlightening; and you're a breath of fresh air. I loved this!

Surabhi: I'm looking forward to the final outcome, and you're all doing good work! Thank you.