

2018-19

Annual Report



Dhanak Of Humanity

1/1/2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approximately 600 new individuals/couples contacted DHANAK from different places of India and abroad through different sources for seek guidance, counselling and support for their marital union during the year 2018-2019. 336 of them shared their personal details with age proof certificates.

Out of 336 cases; 136 cases were of interfaith background and 189 cases were related to inter-caste alliance. 11 of them were of intra-caste nature.

3 Perspective Building Meetings and Home Solidarity Visits were held with the couples/individuals in Delhi and NCR. 2 meetings were held in Pune and Lucknow.

Annual event SAHAS was organised on 14th February 2019. The event had participation from representatives from different social organisations working on the issues of gender and child rights. A team of artists composed and sung a song on the theme of Dhanak.

DHANAK did advocacy and made many representationsto different administrative bodies.It did extensive networking with many organisation and individuals.

Approximately 2.75 lakh was available for endeavours of Dhanak. Rs.1.37 lakhs were raisedfromtheannualmembership contribution. Rupees 72 thousand were received as donations for corpus fund and rupees 25 thousand from the individuals as donations. Around 41 thousand were received as interest from the corpus funds.

Dhanak received media coverage from BBC, NPR (USA) and other news websites. SAHAS was extensively covered by NDTV but, couldn't get aired due to Pulwana incident in Kashmir.



ENDEAVOURS

A. Counselling and Support

Around 700 couples/individuals contacted DHANAK during the period of reporting for legal help and counselling. 600 cases were new who approached Dhanak for possible help for their marital alliance. Whereas, around 100 are already associated with Dhanak in the capacity of its members and they needed counselling related to adjustment issues within them or with their families.



While most of the couples who contacted were given required information and tips regarding registration, communication with family, legal advice and general adjustment tips and guidance, a large number was given in depth legal and support counselling through telephone, face to face interaction and perspective building meets. 13 couples were helped extensively in process of registration/solemnisation of their marriage or in seeking legal help in Delhi. Majority of them hired an advocate to avoid complications in the process of marriage registration. Dhanak accompanied them during the entire process like an advocate/ counsellor.



marriage.

Family is of utmost importance in our society. Therefore, most aspiring couples try to convince their parents in favour of their marriage of choice or they try to reconcile with respective parents after a clandestine marriage. Dhanak contacted parents of 10 couples before their marriage or by initiating reconciliation process with their parents after the

Around 8 couples were also helped to cope up with their stress and trauma related to failure of their decision to get married to a person of their choice. 5 couples undergoing marital discord were also provided post marital /relationship counselling and support.



Dhanak's biggest support system is its ever increasing membership base. Dhanak member couples have shown solidarity to each other like extended families. Be it appearing as witness, counselling, shelter, social visits, get together on festivals, exchange of greetings or evening being there when the couple needs them the most. There are several instances where members attended marriage ceremony, often requested and invited by the parents to provide moral support.

B. House for Couples

Dhanak is the only social organisation in the entire country that is running a House for Couples by sharing the information about them to the police.



As a result, Dhanak House for couples was attacked late at night by parents of a couple in the month of April 2018. The attackers were under the impression that their missing daughter is staying in Dhanak House. Although, the one they were looking for wasn't a case Dhanak was involved with. Dhanak gave a written complaint to SHO, Mandawali, New Delhi. Dhanak has taken a strong cognizance of this issue and have strengthened its systems and processes further.

Our ever-growing Dhanak family came together at an hour when we needed its support the most! Co-founder & Secretary General Asif Iqbal, was threatened and detained for hours in the police station Sabzi Mandi, Delhi, on the pretext of enquiry regarding the same absconding married Hindu-Muslim couple. Dhanak's members, board members, well-wishers, and family members from all over, came together, and in their various capacities helped out in a situation which could have become much worse. It is important to know that the case was not being dealt by Dhanak, it was in fact referred to the Delhi Commission of Women for possible help.

In view of the Hon'ble Supreme Court's judgement regarding opening of Safe House and Special cells in each district for inter-caste, inter-religious couples in Writ Petition (C) no. 231/2010 Shakti Vahini Vs Union of India & Ors and also considering the support we have extended to the couples, Dhanak feels the role of such Safe Houses and Special Cells are extremely important.

Dhanak corresponded with National Commission of Women, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Department of Women and Child Development, NCT Delhi and

Delhi Commission for Women for the process of recognition of Dhanak House for Couples. They responded that it is not under their preview.

13 Couples and individuals stayed in the Dhanak House for Couples during the year. 11 were from other states and 2 were from Delhi only. One of the 11 couples was a same sex lesbian couple.

Dhanak House for couples was shifted to Chilla Village, near Mayur Vihar, Delhi in the month of March 2019. It was shifted as this it has more space, ventilation and connectivity in comparison to the last rented accommodation in West Vinod Nagar, Delhi

C. Perspective Building

5 perspective building and home solidarity meets were organised on July 2018, August 2018, November 2018, January 2019 & March 2019

First meet was held in the house of an interfaith couple based in Noida. 8 people were present during the meeting. Dhanak core group members were present in the meeting. They discussed the strategies for visibility and growth of Dhanak. A new interfaith couple also came to discuss the process of marriage registration under Special Marriage Act. The couple solemnised a religious marriage with the help of some other Delhi based organisation. The couple had a marriage registration certificate issued by Ghaziabad administration but, they wanted it to be registered under Special Marriage Act as they both were practicing their own religions. They were provided legal counselling and moral support for their marital alliance.



The second meet was held in the house of an interfaith couple based in South Delhi. Around 15 people were present during the meeting. The focus of meeting was “resolving parents and children conflicts” and “identification of domestic violence caused by parents” w.r.t. right to choose. The discussion was largely focussed on a potential marriage. A mother and daughter came to discuss their concerns related to civil marriage. The mother was from conventional Muslim family and was very worried for her daughter’s marriage with a Hindu man. Whereas, the daughter was very clear about using Special Marriage Act, as the only form of marriage. Discussions were also

done on importance of completion of education and a stable job w.r.t. an inter-caste couple. Their marriage was solemnised by another Delhi based organisation working on the issue of right to choose.



The third meet was called in the Coffee House located in Connaught Place, New Delhi. Around 20-25 people were present in the meeting. The objective of the meeting was to form a group of volunteers. So many youngsters came for the first time.

A female in interfaith relationship came for the meeting with her future mother-in-law. They discussed their concerns related to the marriage. Participants returned with enthusiasm after the meeting.

Two meetings were organised in Lucknow with consideration to the quantum of cases approaching Dhanak for help from the state of U.P. The objective of the meeting was to form a solidarity group for the state which is notorious for honour crimes. Around 20 individuals participated in the meeting. The meeting was organised with the help of Chayan member organisation AALI and other couples and individuals based in Lucknow.



Similarly one meeting was organised in Pune with consideration to the quantum of cases from Maharashtra. Again, the objective was to form a solidarity group with the help of 2 Chayan members organisations based in Pune. They are Muslim Satya Shodak Samaj and Right to Love.

D. SOCIAL AWARENESS

i. Rationalisation of faith based practices

Couples and members associated with Dhanak are encouraged to build a perspective on faith or culture based practices prevalent in the society. A Whatsapp discussion is initiated with reference to a news or festivity.

Entry of women in Sabrimala, Shani Singla Pur and Haji Ali helped in picking up a discussion within the group. Wearing of symbols of marriage by women, observing

fasts by women, no to of prayers and fasting during menstrual cycle, no Kanjakto girls attaining puberty etc. are debated deeply with personal examples by member couples. Practices like Karwachauth, Kanjak and Ramzan provides an opportunity to pick up correspondence. The objective of raising such in-rooted and imbibed practices is to highlight the gender parity within the families and to initiate the process of dialogue on such a touchy issue of faith and culture within the families. Similarly, Qurbani (slaughtering of animals), and feeding of young girls during Navratras also helps in building an opinion related to over-feeding on specific days during the year was also picked up during Bakr-Eid and Navratri.

ii. Baat Kijiye – Saath Dijiye...

There is a strong need to provide an alternative view on parenting, support, care and concern. A view which is beyond the prevalent concept based on control, emotional blackmail, patriarchal and castiest mind-set is often obstructive to the growth and development of children. In our context, it is the fundamental right of an adult to live with freedom and dignity. With this thought, Dhanak initiated an online campaign "Baat Kijiye, Saath Dijiye" since July 2018 onwards. It posted a series of posters highlighting the importance of communication between parents and children.



iii. Car Sticker Campaign

Stickers with a message carrying "Say no to Violence - on and off the road" were printed and pasted on the cars by Dhanak



members and their friends. 2 kinds of stickers were printed with consideration to the potential threat to the car and involving of others who are not with mixed marriage background but, they are in support of Dhanak's cause. They were "an organisation of inter-faith/caste couples" and "an organisation working on honour crimes& forced marriage".

Stickers were printed in the month of August 2019. The campaign was planned to use personal cars to spread the message of Dhanak on the roads of Delhi and NCR. Unfortunately, the campaign couldn't pick momentum due to lack of follow-up.

iv. Personal message campaign

This campaign is regular annual feature which is launched to build up a momentum for SAHAS in the month of February. Dhanak members post their photo with a message related to right to choose on their and Dhanak's facebook. Dhanak core group also reaches to their friends and unacquainted individuals for the same. It is an online campaign which helps in building opinion against evils related to right to choose. It was done in the months of January and February 2019.



v. Short Film Competition

A competition with award prize was announced for short films on the topic of honour crimes with the help of posters and social media. Posters were displayed at Institute of Home Economics and Aditi Mahavidyalaya, Akshra Theatre, Muktheadhara Auditorium, Tirveni Kala Sangam, Shree Ram centre, NSD, Lalit Kala Academy, Kamani Auditorium and LGT Institute. Participants were requested to submit films of 3 minutes on the topic with an objective to reach out to attract the youth and post the winning films on Dhanak facebook page later. Around 20-22 entries were received out of which 7 were short listed for a jury. The jury shortlisted "Smile Please" as the winner and the winner was awarded with award money of Rs. 10 thousand during SAHAS.

vi. SAHAS

This time invitations were sent to all the Additional District Magistrates in Delhi, Delhi Commission for Women and to SHO of police station Mandawali in addition to regular invites.

SAHAS 2019 was organised on 14 February 2019 at Raja Ram Mohan Roy Memorial Trust, Vishnu Digambar Marg, Delhi. Around 300 individuals participated in the event.

The event started with a **Solidarity Walk**. The participants, with various slogans and messages in their hands, walked on Vishnu Digambar Marg. They also



raised slogans related to issues of rights and choices. Participants also engaged with the public by giving them red roses with a message and Dhanak's contact details. After this, the participants stood silently with their posters and placards on both sides of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg. This walk, which started from Raja Ram Mohan Roy Memorial Trust ended at the same venue.

Ms. Shabana Siddiqui, **welcomed the participants** to SAHAS 2019 in the capacity of Secretary Dhanak. She introduced the audience to Dhanak's history and various milestones since 2004, including the beginning of SAHAS as an annual event since 2014. She presented an overview of Dhanak and its work related to Chayan, Baat Kijiye –Saath Diyiye campaign and advocacy against honour based crimes

Prof. Apoorvanand shared his views about **SAHAS and importance of such an event**. He shared that love is an emotion that is present in everyone's heart and yet in our society, individuals are against people's choices in matter of love and relationship. He remarked that, their efforts against love will fail as people do not stop falling in love. He called participants in the SAHAS as '*mohabbat ki biraadari*' (fraternity of love).

a. Panel Discussion: Solidarity with victims of Honor Crime

The panel discussion was facilitated by Mr. Sumit Chauhan, a Core Group Member of Dhanak. Panellists were Mr. Yashpal Saxena and Mrs. Saxena, Mr. Ashish Duggal and Ms. Veena Malik.



The objective of was to highlight the issues of honour crime and to make a forum for survivors/victims of honour-based crimes.

Session started with a short documentary on news and data related to honour based crimes in India.

Shri. Yashpal Saxena shared his views and concerns related to the incident of killing of his son for being in love with a person from a different faith. Referring to the unexpected death of his son, he expressed, 'if the accused had a problem, he could have warned him once'. Talking about various challenges his family faced, he mentioned several people visited him but, he has not received any support from the Government. He received support from a lawyer with the help of Radio City. Raising his concern for the girl with whom Ankit was in love with, he said, 'I am a victim, but that girl is a victim too!'. He shared that he has now formed 'Ankit Saxena Memorial Trust'. He hoped to meet others like his family at SAHAS event.

Smt. Veena Malik shared her views based on her experiences of working in the state of Haryana. Describing how patriarchy is deeply rooted in Haryana, she mentioned how women do not have permission to make decisions about their lives. A girl is considered 'good' when she follows her family's instructions, such as, '*neechi nazar kar kechaliye*' (walk while looking at floor). As marriages of choice are increasing among youth, the attacks on them are also

increasing. Considering this, Veena emphasized for need of 'samvaad', i.e., conversations within family members.

b. Short films screening and awarding the winner.

Dhanak announced a short-film competition which received several entries. The contest was judged by a jury consisting of Dr. Neeraj Malik, retired professor at IP College and a human rights activist; Ms Natasha Badhwar, ex-journalist and a writer; Mr. Syed Danyal Sadiq, Dhanak Core Group Member.

4 shortlisted films were screened at the event. The winning entry was a movie called, "Smile Please". It was a poignant, hard hitting film which depicted the flourishing of love between two people with disabilities, belonging to different religions. It depicted how social norms, prejudices and discrimination often took a toll on love and humans. The makers of movie, Varun and Ravi explained that the point behind the movie was to challenge the existing mind sets of people. They further highlighted how people with disabilities faced discrimination at multiple levels. The winning amount of Rs.10,000/- was given to the winners.

c. Panel Discussion on Domestic Violence and the Right to Choose

The panel discussion on the issue of domestic violence and the right to choose was moderated by Nayana Chowdhury, from Breakthrough. The panellists included Shipra Jha, working with the initiative, "Girls, not brides"; Raveena & Kavita, survivors of domestic violence; Bappaditya Mukharjee, associated with Prantakatha in Kolkota.

The issue of child marriage was discussed in great detail by *Shipra*. She shared that child marriage is an attempt to exercise control over the labour and sexuality of women. The panel highlighted the need for parents to allow children to make mistakes and learn from them.

Raveena shared her experience of having survived abuse herself. She spoke about how at every step in the life of a young adult, major life decisions are made by the parents. She described her struggle even after completing her education, she wanted to work but her parents wanted her to get married instead.

The issue of young people experiencing guilt about the choices they made was also addressed in the panel. It was also discussed that "choices" were not merely restricted to choosing a life partner. Other choices related to education, work etc. were also often heavily influenced by social and parental pressure.

Bappaditya, identifies him as a homosexual person and is working towards addressing the stigma around homosexuality. His organization has around 5,000 young volunteers associated with it. He talked about the need for a more inclusive society.

Kavita shared her experience of violence from her family when she informed them about her choice of marrying a partner from different faith. She emphasized that while she recognized

that most parents think good for their children but, children do need to have the choices to move ahead.

The panel discussion was followed by a poem recited by Ms Jasmine Kaur, which was based upon her experiences, the process of growing up and the feeling of being in love.

d. Panel Discussion: Baat Kijiye Saath Dijiyee- Role of parents and relevance of Dhanak campaign

The panel discussion was moderated by Dr. Ghazala Jamil, who is a writer and Faculty in Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. Panellists included 2 parents who supported their children in their decision related to life partner. The panel discussed strategies for promoting better communication between parents and children to ensure collective decision making.



They discussed that often, the fear of facing backlash from the society prevents parents from letting their children to decide for themselves. The panellists emphasized that all religions were quintessentially the same in their teachings and messages. It was highlighted that organizations such as Dhanak, could play an instrumental role in breaking social stereotypes and bringing about shifts in the mind-sets of the people. Panellists acknowledged and appreciated the instrumental support and courage provided by Dhanak in making so many interfaith marriages possible.

This was followed by the felicitation of the parents whose children did mixed marriage.

e. Recognition and Felicitations of couples

Another session of felicitation of couples in interfaith marriages followed this. The process was facilitated by Ms Akanksha Sharma, Dhanak Core Group Member. Many couples were felicitated for their decision for marriage transcending man made boundaries.



A team of youth from Cheeta community from Ajmer, Rajasthan was introduced to all. Cheetas follow Islam and Hinduism both. They were felicitated for upholding secular beliefs and practices.

Volunteers who support Dhanak in endeavours were acknowledged and felicitated through presentation of memento.

f. Performance by Manzil Mystics

Event ended by, musical performance by Manzil Mystics. They also sung the song that they have composed exclusively for Dhanak.



CHAYAN – A Network

Dhanak participated in a rally and meeting called by **Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS)** from Mandi House to Jantar Mantar, Delhi in August 2018. It was related to murder of Dr. Narendra Dabholkar and spread awareness on the issues related to miracle and scientific temper.



Dhanak arranged for a talk by Chairperson, Chief Secretary and State President of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS) at Hauz Khas, Delhi with the help of SRUTI. Members of other social

organisations based in Delhi participated. Team from MANS shared about the nature of work of MANS and the status of pending enquiry in the case of murders of Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, Comrade Govind Pansare and others. They informed that they are pursuing it with the investigative agencies to expedite the enquiry.

Shakti Shalini and Dhanak are working together in the cases where the females have to leave their house due to possible forced marriage. Shakti Shalini has a sound background of working on the issues of gender and equality. 2 females from Delhi and Saharanpur, U.P. were sent by Dhanak to Shakti Shalini for care and protection.

Co-founder of Dhanak, Ranu Kulshrestha and Assistant Program Executive of Dhanak, Komal Babani attended foundation day function of **AALI** in Lucknow in November 2018.

Prantakatha, a Kolkata based organisation working on the issues of right to choose was approached for help in the case of an interfaith couple in the state. The organisation helped in providing legal aid, residence and job for the couple.

Other Chayan member organisations; AALI, **Muslim Satya Shodhak Samaj, Right to Love, NFIW** and Dhanak are working collectively in the cases of couples that are seeking help from Dhanak.

ADVOCACY

The persistence and perseverance of a determined aspiring couple counselled by Dhanak and the efforts of a Chandigarh based advocate yielded a great outcome when Dhanak managed to get the **Chandigarh High Court Judgement for the state of Haryana**. Finally, the notice of marriage will not be sent to the families, Tehsildar, police and newspaper publication for the solemnisation of marriage under the SMA in Gurgaon. This is in view of the safety of couples. High Courts of Delhi and Rajasthan have already passed the same judgments which have helped Dhanak couples in the past. The direction is referred to in **consultation paper dated 31st August 2018 by Law Commission of India**.

Dhanak wrote to the **government of Haryana to issue a notification** in compliance to the directions of Chandigarh High Court. Unfortunately, no notification is issued till date and Dhanak is pursuing it to get is applicable to all over Haryana.

Dhanak **condemned and corresponded to the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police of Alirajpur, Madhya Pradesh** regarding the brutal attack on a tribal couple. The district administration responded with the details of action taken against the accused in the case.

Members and friends of Dhanak condemn thrashing and abusing of a female by police personnel in the month for August her alleged interfaith relationship. All **wrote to the Superintendent of Police and District Magistrate of Meerut, U.P.**

Similarly, Dhanak also **wrote concern and suggestions to SP City and DM Ghaziabad, U.P** in response to a case of mixed marriage in the month of October. SP Ghaziabad took cognizance of our communication and has written to all city police officials advising them to undertake strict legal action, in case similar incidences are reported /brought to their notice.

We wrote and collected letters issued by **Ministry of Home Affairs** with respect to the judgement of Supreme Court of India. Based on the copies of letters issued by the MHA, Dhanak wrote to the Chief Secretaries of all the states and U.Ts to advocate for implementation of issued directions.

We also **corresponded with government of Rajasthan** for issuing notification in compliance to a direction issued by High Court of Rajasthan. It was again regarding not sending notices and other practices during the process of marriage solemnisation under Special Marriage Act. No action is taken by the state government according to the received reply. Dhanak is still pursuing the matter.

We made **Sub Division Magistrate (SDM), Defence Colony, Delhi party to a petition for protection** in a case of forced marriage. High Court of Delhi issued notice to the SDM to submit a report on solemnisation of marriage under Special Marriage Act within a week.

We also enquired about status of **Safe House for couples in Delhi from Commissioner of Police** in reference to Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. We received response stating DCPs are informed about it and they must be enquired about the same.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

i. Consultative Meet

Dhanak organised the Consultative Meet at Jawaharlal Nehru Youth Centre (N.D. Bhawan) in September 2018 with an objective to form a Group of individuals/organisations. Around 30 individuals, parents and survivors of honour crimes participated. It was decided that Group can engage in dialogue with the parents of the couple who wish to marry and have no consent of their parents for the same. The group will also advocate and spread awareness against forced marriage and honour crimes in the society through different means.



ii. Orientation of Journalists

A team of German journalists had an orientation meeting with Dhanak Core Team on the issue of inter-faith marriages in India in the October 2018. A team of 8-9 journalists came for the orientation in Hauz Khas Delhi. They were interested in understanding the delicate societal structure in India and Inter-religious marriages, challenges of the Special Marriage Act, role of religion in marriages and challenges of Inter-faith marriages in their country were shared by Dhanak team.



They were part of a fellowship program "Media Ambassadors India – Germany" aims to attract journalists with an interest in international understanding between India and Germany. The Media Ambassadors India – Germany is a program funded by the Robert Bosch Foundation and is run in cooperation with the Center for Media Competence at the University of Tübingen.

iii. Solidarity to Victim Family

Dhanak joined a solidarity fund raising campaign for Ankit Saxena and became a major contributor! Dhanak members personally handed over a cheque to the victim family during a prayer and langar (community feast) organised by victim's friends on his birth date.



iv. Orientation Session

Around 120 youth from 18 states across the country were given a half day orientation session on the issues of conflict in society on 15th November in Lucknow. Dhanak was invited by **terre des homes**, a child rights organisation working in India since last 42 years. TDH has a network of more than 10,000 youth in the country which is committed towards working for a society that is equal and just for all. As a resource person, the General Secretary of Dhanak helped the youth in reflecting upon the existing inequalities (of caste, class, religion, gender and other identities) in their society and therefore, their role of youth. Right to Choice and Dhanak's work and their role as change makers were the highlights of the session. These sessions were highly interactive and appreciated.



v. Donation for Flood Relief

A donation of Rs.25,000/- was made to Kerala floods relief by Dhanak in December 2018. The amount was collected from Dhanak members and friends with an online appeal made on 18 August 2018 on the occasion of Bakr-Eid. The appeal requested for donation of Qurbani amount to Kerala flood relief. The objective was to build a rationalize aptitude towards the ritual of Qurbani. The appeal helped in initiating a discussion on a religious practice and collection of money for a cause.

NETWORK & LIASION

a. Meeting with Nazariya

Nazariya is a Delhi based social organisation working on the issues LGBTQI. A lesbian couple was sent by it to Dhanak House for Couples in October 2018 as there is no other place for couples in need, to stay. Team of Nazariya, Dhanak and Saheli had a meeting in the office of Nazariya to discuss the issue of livelihood and alternative place of stay for same sex couples. It was decided that a meeting will be organised with other organisations too in a larger platform.

b. Representation to DCW

Dhanak made its representation at DCW suggesting Dhanak House as an alternative place of stay for couples in need. Dhanak met with the Member Secretary, DCW in November 2018 in response to the news of DCW rescuing couples due to their mistreatment by the NGO. Dhanak also shared the letters issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs with reference to the directions of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

c. Meeting with Manzil Mystic

Team of Dhanak had a meeting with Manzil Mystic team in January 2019. The objective of the meeting was to share vital words and issues of mixed marriage for composing a song for SAHAS event. A beautiful song was composed by Manzil Mystic which was sung on 14th February 2019.

d. Documentation of Cases

Mr. Aseem Hasnain and Mrs. Abhilasha Shrivastva (also an inter-religious couple), PhD. Scholar's in United States of America regarding volunteered for documentation of cases being dealt by Dhanak. A meeting in the month of August 2018, they had a formal discussion about Dhanak and its work. Based on the discussion the couple volunteered to document a few cases that can be published. Details of 15 cases were shared with them and they are working on it.

HELP & SUPPORT TO COUPLES

Cases Dealt Extensively by Dhanak

No	Details of couple/ Individual	Legal & other Interventions	Date on which the couple came to Delhi	Residence of	Date of Marriage solemnisation as per religious rituals	Date of Registration or Solemnisation of marriage
1	Female Hindu & Male Sikh	Helped in sending the intimation to police and families	18 th June 2018	Himachal Pradesh & Punjab	18 th June 2018	N/A

2	Female Muslim & Male Hindu	The couple was helped seeking legal protection, getting media coverage, accommodation and job with the help of Pranto Katha, Kolkota and a Dhanak Member Couple in Kolkota	N/A	Hoogly, W.B.	N/A	20.01.2018
3	Female Hindu & Male Muslim	CWP No. 15296/2018 (O & M) dated 20.07.2018 in Chandigarh High Court	N/A	Gurgaon & Faridabad, Haryana	N/A	11 th Feb 2019
4	Female & Male Hindu	Stayed in Dhanak House for 16 days	18 th Oct 2018	Mathura & U.P.	17 th Oct 2018	17 th Oct 2018
5	Female Hindu	WP (Crl) 3452/2018 dated 13.11.2018 She also stayed in Dhanak House for around one day	N/A	Delhi	She took protection against her forced marriage. Help of Shakti Shalini was taken in the case	
6	Female Hindu & Male Muslim	N/A	Resident of Delhi	Delhi & Dehradun	06.09.2018 AryaSamaj Marriage	Pending
7	Female & Male Hindu	N/A	11.01.2019		12.01.2019 AryaSamaj Marriage	15.02.2019
8	Female Muslim & Male Hindu	W.P.(CRL) 406/2019	05.02.2019	Saharanpur U.P.	N/A	27.05.2019
9	Female & Male Muslim	Received legal protection from court with help of AALL. They stayed in Dhanak House for 1 day	23 rd March 2018	Bareilly, U.P.	23.03.2018 Nikah	N/A

10	Female Hindu & Male Muslim	They stayed in Dhanak House for 7 Day		Pune, Maharashtra	N/A	
11	Female & Male Hindu	Dhanak met and spoke with parents	06.02.2018	Agra & Gurgaon	06.02.2018	N/A
12	Female & Male Hindu	Sent to Shakti Shalini by Dhanak. She stayed for 6 days with Shakti Shalini	N/A	Delhi	Female decided to return to her family	
13	Females both Hindu	WP (Crl) 3005/2018 & Crl M.A. Nos. 33382-83/2018 dated 01.10.2018 They stayed in Dhanak House for 50 day	28.09.2018	Bharatpur, Rajasthan	N/A	N/A

Dhanak helped in the reconciliation process of for 3 couples. An inter-caste Hindu couple was put in touch with Dhanak by one of the General Body Members of Dhanak. The couple is too young and solemnised their marriage with the help of a Delhi based NGO. They were going through a rough phase as the female in the marriage was not able adjust and was longing for her parental family. Dhanak did several telephonic conversations with her father but, father didn't agree to meet her. He only agreed to accept her if she walks about from her marriage.

A Muslim female from Delhi and Hindu Male from Aligarh solemnised their marriage under Special Marriage Act in August 2017. They stayed for a week in Dhanak House but, the female decided to go back to her parental house for a month to convince her parents. They were strongly advised against their decision. As expected, she got tutored by her parents and didn't come back. After various attempts of reunion with his wife the desperate husband decided to take Dhanak's help. Members of Dhanak Core Team met with the parents along with one of the Executive Board Members of Dhanak. Parents remained unconvinced after hours of talking in a hotel at Nizamuddin, Delhi. A habeas corpus petition was moved by the husband but, his wife refused to leave her family.

In case of a Hindu inter-caste couple from Mathura, parents of boy came and met with Dhanak after the marriage. They reconciled with the fact and agreed to take the couple with them.

In couple of cases, females managed to bring their parents for their exposure to couples in Dhanak. A Muslim female planning an interfaith marriage, brought her parents to Dhanak separately. Similarly a Hindu female planning an inter-caste marriage brought her parents. Parents in both the cases had some apprehensions but, their exposure to couples in Dhanak helped the two females to take the process of marriage forward. Dhanak team also participated in the marriage and reception, organised with the help of their parents in both the cases.

Members of Dhanak acted as a family in 2 more cases of interfaith couples where the marriage was already solemnised under Special Marriage Act. The families of the 2 females organised Nikah and Saptpati ceremonies in respective cases for social recognition.

A CASE STUDY

Homosexuality or same-sex relationships are taboo subjects in India; there is no social awareness about it; very little discourse; and it had no legal legitimacy until recently. It was in this general ignorant social context that Shruti was born and brought up in a small town in Rajasthan. While growing up she never imagined that she would fall in love with another girl, Arti, her childhood friend. When she did, it came as shock and disbelief, more than anything else. What followed is a story of courage, determination, acceptance, and empowerment.

Shruti had a normal childhood, as any girl growing up in a middle class family in a North Indian town would have. She was expected to study hard, help in household chores, keep her head down, and be a role model for her two younger sisters. Her father worked in the army and was in favour of educating the girls. This made life easier for her, as she loved studying and had a dream of becoming financially independent. Her parents were supportive of this endeavour with the caveat that she would get married at the right age and they would support her studies even after marriage. Shruti was very appreciative of her parents for letting her study and focused all her energies in schooling. She had very few friends and living in a small town her mobility was very limited, which made visiting her friends almost impossible. She was satisfied with her life. But this contentment was short lived as her world would come crashing down soon.

Adolescence brought a new kind of peer pressure on Shruti, of making heterosexual relationships. At college, most of her female friends had boyfriends, and it was the first time that she started thinking about her own sexual preferences. She felt sure about not being attracted towards the opposite sex. These feelings were new and scary and she dismissed them thinking that maybe attraction towards the opposite sex begins and grows after marriage. Her second encounter with these feelings came very soon, when she went to a family function at Arti's house. Though Shruti and Arti were childhood friend, she had never felt anything more than friendship. But seeing Arti talk very intimately with another girl made Shruti jealous, bringing her face-to-face with her own feelings. This time around she not only dismissed those feelings but also actively sought to overcome them. She decided to try out a heterosexual relationship with a boy in her class, who had already declared interest in her. She convinced herself to give this relationship a sincere chance, but it did not help. After this failed episode she was certain that she did not feel anything for the opposite sex, but she still had to come to terms with her true feelings about her feelings towards Arti.

Shruti decided to bottle these feelings up and concentrate on her studies. This worked for the time being while she completed her Class 12th and moved on to college. But circumstances brought Arti back into Shruti's life soon, when Arti's family moved into her immediate neighbourhood. Their families knew each other well and did not think anything when they started to spend more time together. And slowly but surely their feelings for each other grew deeper than anything they both had known before. They started spending more time together, talking to each other over phone through the nights. Even before they acknowledged their feelings to each other, Shruti's father became apprehensive about their growing closeness. He would often tell Shruti's mother to intervene in their growing relationship, but her mother would dismiss such a possibility.

The constant pressure at home egged Shruti to face her feelings for the first time in her life. She realized what she felt for Arti was more than friendship. With no one to ask and discuss this she searched the Internet for some answers. And surely she found that same-sex relationships were not only a thing but queer discourse was also an emerging area around the world. LGBTQ people across the world, including in India, were demanding and celebrating their sexual rights. This reassured her and made the acceptance of her own being much easier. She discussed this with Arti and at that moment both of them accepted and understood their relationship.

But this acceptance also made them encounter two imminent issues. The first was to figure out how their families would be told about this. They loved their families and did not want to hurt them. The second, and more complex, issue was about their legal status, as same-sex relationships were still criminalized in India. They also came to know that 'Naz foundation' had been fighting a legal battle to decriminalize homosexuality in the Supreme Court. They waited for the judgment with baited breath.

On the 6th of September, 2018 their world changed when the Supreme Court quashed Section 377, decriminalizing homosexuality, and making India a better place to live for many like Shruti & Arti. Armed with this news they decided to tell their families about their relationship.

As expected, all hell broke loose when their respective families came to know about their relationship. For the parents this came as a shock. Shruti's mother had never heard of such relationships and thought of it as a momentary insanity that would pass with time. Her father, who had been living in Delhi and more aware than his wife, thought it best that Shruti should be married at the earliest. She was locked up in her house, and forbidden to ever meet Arti again. Her phone was taken from her and she was not allowed to go to her college or coaching. Her mother constantly monitored her movements, and contacting Arti became almost impossible. In spite of this Shruti continued to look for an avenue to break free of this situation. She also tried to reach out to her more liberal relatives for help, but nobody understood her or was willing to help her. Internet was her only friend in this moment. She found details about 'Naz foundation' and contacted them secretly. They put her in touch with the Delhi based 'Lawyers Collective', which had been fighting for LGBTQ rights in India. Lawyers Collective agreed to help and advised them to move to Delhi, but that was no easy task.

Shruti had been in house arrest for a month and the only way she could get out was to agree for a marriage. She had already been coerced into an engagement with a family friend and the only way she could get out was to accept that relationship and agree to the marriage. She did exactly that. She said yes to the marriage in return for her parents' permission for mobility outside home and to continue her education. Her family, immensely relieved, got busy with wedding preparations. Free and unsupervised, Shruti and Arti met secretly to decide on a plan of action. Arti was also under pressure by

her family, but her windowed mother did not put the same kind of restrictions as Shruti had faced. They decided that their only hope was to go to Delhi and rely on the help of people they have never met before. It was a big decision as neither had ever travelled alone and they faced the risk of meeting strangers who they have not met before. But the only other option they had was to commit suicide. So they decided to give Delhi a chance and used all their savings to plan an escape.

They executed their plan, reached Delhi, and waited at the station with all their hopes and fear to meet an associate from the 'Lawyers Collective.' All their apprehensions were put to rest when they met her. It was for the first time in their lives they had met people who completely understood them, did not judge them, and were ready to standby them. The lawyers collective took them to a police station and filed a petition in the High court for protection of their rights as a same-sex couple. In the mean time they were placed in a safe home. The High court delivered justice in their favour in a matter of days and they were provided protection for the period of two months.

After this they were transferred to Dhanak's safe house. At Dhanak they found the much needed camaraderie and counseling, which was important to sustain their relationship. On the one hand, it provided them the caring and supportive environment and on the other, counseling to navigate the challenges that lay ahead. Assured by such counseling and on 'Dhanak' Team's suggestion they contacted their families and updated them about their well-being. They gained the confidence to assert their rights and open up a channel of discussion with their families. This was important for both of them as they loved their families and did not want to hurt them, but at the same time they wanted to be heard and understood. During the counseling sessions at Dhanak they also realized the importance of being financially independent. Dhanak also helped them in finding a job through 'Nazariya,' a queer feminist resource group that helps with livelihood generation activities for same-sex couple. Both Shruti and Arti got a job at a BPO in Delhi.

Both of them continued that job for a couple of months. While they enjoyed the new found freedom and gained the confidence in the process, they also realized that to grow professionally they needed to complete their education. Both of them also missed the close connection they had with their families and wanted them to be part of the celebration of who they were. Based on this they decided to go back to their homes, complete their education, find stable employment where they could grow professionally and convince their families to accept them as they were. At present, they continue in this endeavor and dream of the day when their families will accept them completely, and they will live in a society where one's sexuality does not determine the social, economic and political outcomes of one's life.

DATA RESOURCE CENTRE

DHANAK resource centre is collecting information related to marriage by compiling primary and secondary data related to right to choice in marriage. It is using the Right to Information Act for collection of the required information.

Data related to marriage incentives from 173 districts of 8 states and 2 U.Ts was collected and compiled. Almost all the states incentivise inter-caste marriages. Only 2 states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttrakhand cover inter-religion marriage also. The collected information is given below:

S.No.	State	Year	Districts	No of couples received incentives for inter-caste marriage	Incentive disbursed (Rs.)
1	Goa	2007-2013	2	59	41,75,000
2	Uttrakhand	2003-2013	18	574	87,36,000
3	Himachal Pradesh	2003-2013	8	1,413	5,18,59,000
4	Odisha	2006-2014	4	757	3,41,40,000
5	Delhi	2011-2012	2	7	2,00,000
6	Rajasthan	2007-2013	9	169	82,85,000
7	Andhra Pradesh	2005-2014	1	6,223	55,00,000
8	Chandigarh	2006-2014	1	106	29,60,000
9	Haryana	2002-2104	21	1,078	4,85,70,000
10	Uttar Pradesh	2003-2015	8	5	90,000
TOTAL			173	10,391	16,45,15,000

Data related to number of marriages registered in different states is collected and compiled.

S.no.	State/U.T.	Year	Marriage Registration under Hindu Marriage Act/Districts	Marriage Registration under Special Marriage Act/Districts
1	Puducherry	2003-2013	43419/2	15099/2
2	Uttrakhand	2003 – 2013	44904/16	2624/1
3	Odisha	2004-2014	166/1	No infromation
4	Bihar	2003-2014	84/1	698/2
5	Jharkhand	2002-2012	1291/7	9762/9
6	Tripura	2002-2012	5744/5	2249/7
7	Haryana	2002-2012	3303/4	2485/9
8	Rajasthan	2009-2011	3/1	No infromation
9	Sikkim	2004-2013	No infromation	337/1
10	Delhi	1997-2012	46474/9	2123/9
TOTAL			1,45,388/46	32,892/40

Source : Secondary data collected with use of RTI Act

PUBLICATIONS

Like every year, magazine viz. SAHAS was published and released during SAHAS on 14th February 2019. It is a good reference to aspiring couples and others who wish to understand the complexities of mixed marriages and inter-faith families.

RECOGNITION & AWARD

Dhanak was recognised and felicitated for its work in March 2019 at an event organised in Pune. Renowned social activist Dr. Baba Avate praised Dhanak's work while giving away Babu Miyan Bandwale Award for National Integration and Communal Harmony to Team Dhanak.

Dhanak was represented by Azra, Rajiv & Kashifa and Ranu & Asif.



Resource Mobilisation&Finances

A. Total Proceeds(April 2018–March 2019)

S.No.	Source	Amount(Rs.)
1	Annual Membership	92,900
2	Donations (Corpus & Others)	2,44,875
4	Bank Interest	787,94
A	Total	4,16,569
B	Balance at bank as on 01.04.2018 (including corpus funds)	9,92,192
C	(A+B)	14,08,761

B. Expenditure Profile

Broad details of expenditure during the financial year 2018-19:

S.No.	Head	Amount (Rs.)
1	Program Expenses (Conference, Seminar, Perspective Building, Data Collection)	2,39,690
2	Dhanak House for Couples	82,617
3	Core cost/Administration	8,007
	Donation Chief Minister Relief Fund Kerala	25,000
Total		3,55,315

ADMINISTRATION&PERSONNEL

DHANAK TEAM

Ms. Komal Babani was appointed as APE on 1st August 2018 after a process of interview held on 21st July 2018. Other office bearers are:

1. Mr. Asif Iqbal	Co-founder & General Secretary
2. Ms. Shabana Siddiqui	Honorary Secretary
3. Ms. Ranu Kulshrestha	Co-Founder
4. Ms. ShwetaVerma	Honorary Core Group Member
5. Mr. Mohd. Suaib	Honorary Core Group Member
6. Ms. Akanksha Sharma	Honorary Core Group Member
7. Mr. Sumit Chauhan	Honorary Core Group Member
8. Mr. Syed Danyal Sadiq	Honorary Core Group Member
9. Ms. Shailaja Rao	General Body Member & Advisor

The General Secretary is involved full-time with Dhanak's endeavours and administration in the capacity of an honorary worker. The Assistant Program Executive works as full timer. Other individuals volunteered their time and expertise according to the requirements and their availability.

Executive Board

1. Dr. Ms. Bharti Sharma	President
2. Ms. Purnima Gupta	Vice President
3. Mr. Satyam Shrivastava	Treasurer
4. Prof. Mr. Apporvanand	Member
5. Ms. Sheeba Aslam Fehmi	Member
6. Dr. Ms. Ghazala Jamil	Member
7. Mr. Asif Iqbal	Ex-officio Member
8. Ms. Shabana Siddiqui	Ex-officio Member

DHANAK in News

1. National Public Radio (USA) aired an interview with Dhanak Co-founders on 23rd August 2018.

<https://www.npr.org/2018/11/22/661830695/when-indias-interfaith-couples-encounter-threats-love-commandos-come-to-their-ai?fbclid=IwAR2pqPYFL0PyUhbHmjQxl31MqselwGjiGcnGsRRsHaWTW6LcryK6A1VYSI>

2. वल्लैटाइन डे को वलवाह अंतर्जातीय भी आज समाज हमारल : है नहीं सहज लेकर

दल्ली विश्वविद्यालय के प्रोफेसर अपूर्वानंद ने कहा कि आजकल समाज में कई लोग दिन रात नफरत और जहर फैला रहे हैं.हैं करते पैदा रुकावट में करने प्यार लोग ऐसे .

On 14 February, 2019 8:04 pm IST

<https://hindi.theprint.in/india/our-society-still-is-not-comfortable-with-inter-caste-marriage/45334/>

3. Muslim girl left her home to marry a Hindu boy (BBC Hindi)

On 14 February 2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edTK7O-Rsts&list=PLlIx2jIPGiEgBF2sggPpvnyXMtogvyP9t>

4. The Hindu girl who challenged Haryana govt to marry a Muslim on August 08, 2018. (On 8 august 2018)

<http://www.rediff.com/news/special/the-hindu-girl-who-challenged-haryana-govt-to-marry-a-muslim/20180808.htm>

5. जब हिंदू लड़के के प्यार में घर छोड़ा (On 14 February 2019)

<https://www.bbc.com/hindi/india-47208588>

6. Dhanak couples were covered on 30th March 2019 by a Marathi newspaper with news heading "प्रेमाच्यावेलीवरबहरलेलीमाणूसपणचीनाती"

असिफ इक्बाल आणि राणू कुलश्रेष्ठ ही दोन नावे भारतातील धार्मिक भिन्नता दाखवणारी. प्रेमांमुळे हे दोघे एकत्र आले. त्यालाही आता अठरा वर्षे होऊन गेली. कमालीच्या अस्थिर आणि टोकदार वातावरणात दोन वेगळ्या धर्माची माणसं एकत्र येऊन लग्न करतात, हे तेव्हाही पचनी पडणारं नव्हतं आणि आजही नाही. लग्न या सहजीवनाच्या व्यवस्थेत जात आणि धर्माचे डोकावणं थांबलेलं नसलं तरी असिफ आणि राणू या दोघांमुळे हजार जोडपी आज प्रेमाच्या नात्यात बांधली गेली आहेत.

◀ चिंतामणी पत्की
Chintamani.Patki@timesgroup.com

जा तीच्या, धर्माच्या अस्मिता टोकदार होत असताना दोन भिन्न समाजाची माणसं एकत्र येणं, त्यांचं मैत्र बहरणं आणि एकमेकांशी आपुलकीचं नातं टिकवणं अवघड झाल्याच्या काळात तरुण-तरुणी एकत्र येतात, त्यांचं प्रेम बहरतं आणि ते लग्न करतात. संस्कृती वेगळी असली तरी 'माणूस' आणि 'प्रेम' या शब्दांचा खरा अर्थ गवसलेली माणसं हे धारिष्ट्य दाखवू शकतात. असिफ आणि त्यांचे काही सहकारी पाहिलं की हे मनोमन पटतं. असिफ आणि त्यांच्या काही सहकाऱ्यांची मध्यांती भेट झाली. निमित्त होते, मुस्लिम सत्यशोधक मंडळाच्या ४९ व्या वर्षांपनिदिनाचे. मंडळाचे माजी अध्यक्ष 'स्वातंत्र्यसैनिक नाबूमिया बँडवाले राष्ट्रीय एकात्मता पुरस्कार' दिल्लीच्या 'धनक फॉर ह्यूमॅनिटी' या संस्थेसाठी असिफ इक्बाल, राणू कुलश्रेष्ठ यांना प्रदान करण्यात आला. धनक ही संस्था आंतरधर्मीय विवाहांसाठी प्रोत्साहन व संरक्षण देण्याचे काम करते. धार्मिक असहिष्णुतेविरोधात ही संघटना लढते.

'मी आणि राणू मूळचे उत्तर प्रदेशमधील. दिल्लीत शिकत होती तेव्हा आमची ओळख झाली. ओळखीचे रूपांतर मैत्रीत आणि पुढे प्रेमात झाले. लग्न करायचे तर कसे, हा प्रश्न निर्माण झाल्यानंतर केवळ विचार करण्यात दोन वर्षे गेली. आम्हाला लग्न तर करायचे होते; पण ऐकण्यास कोणी तयार नव्हते. लग्न कायदेशीरदृष्ट्या टिकेल की नाही हे आव्हान होते. २००० मध्ये आम्ही लग्न केले. मुलगी मुलाच्या जातीपेक्षा वरच्या जातीची असेल किंवा इतर धर्मातील असेल तर तिचे स्वागतच होते. माझ्या घरी काहीसा विरोध झाला; पण आमचा संसार सुरू झाला. राणूच्या पालकांनी मान्यता द्यायला काही महिने गेले. अशा कामासाठी सासरे आता माझ्याबरोबर असतात. बरेचदा ते सोबत येतात. हा बदल सर्व काही सांगून जाणारा आहे...' असिफ आणि राणूची ही गोष्ट असिफ सांगत होता.

'लग्नानंतर अनेक प्रकरणं पाहिली, अनेक बातम्या वाचल्या ज्यातून असे दिसले की लोकांना निवडून निवडून मारले जात आहे. एखाद्या शिक्षकाने असे लग्न केले असेल तर पालक मुलांची शाळा बदलतात. या बातम्या वाचून आम्ही अस्वस्थ व्हायचे. मित्रांच्या चर्चेतून एकेदिवशी संस्थेची कल्पना पुढे आली आणि



(मागच्या रांगेत डावीकडे) 'धनक'चे प्रमुख असिफ इक्बाल, त्यांच्या बाजूला राजीव गुप्ता. (पुढच्या रांगेत डावीकडून) राजीवची पत्नी कशिफा अंजुम आणि बाजूला संस्थेची कार्यकर्ता अझरा परवीन.

प्रेमाच्या वेलीवर बहरलेली माणूसपणाची नाती

'धनक'चा जन्म झाला. २००४-०५ च्या दरम्यान 'धनक' सुरू झाली. आंतरधार्मिक, आंतरजातीय विवाह करण्यासाठी तरुणांना आघाराची गरज असते. समाज किंवा प्रशासन मदत करत नाही, कुटुंबाबरोबर किंवा समाजाबरोबर संवाद कसा साधायचा, असे प्रश्न असतात. कामाला सुरुवात झाली आणि नानाविध प्रकरणे समोर येऊ लागली. एकत्र राहणाऱ्या जोडप्यांची संख्या हजारावर गेली असली तरी अनेकांचे संसार तुटताना पाहिले आहेत. मदत कुणाला करायची, याचे आमचे काही निकष आहेत. जोडपे नात्याबद्दल किती गोपीर आहे, हे आम्ही तपासतो. त्यांची माहिती जाणून घेतल्यानंतर आणि त्यांच्याबद्दल विश्वास वाटला तरच मदत दिली जाते. लग्नाचा विषय हा केवळ धर्म आणि जातीपुरता नाही. लग्न अडचण नसून जात, धर्म व जोडीदार निवडीचे स्वातंत्र्य नसणे ही अडचण आहे. अनेकदा प्रकरणे हिसेच्या पातळीवर जाताना पाहिली आहेत. आमचे काम समंजस आणि प्रेमी युगुलांना एकत्र आणणे आहे. पूर्वी हा मुद्दा केवळ कुटुंबाचा होता. आता तो राजकीय झाला आहे. एखाद्याच्या लग्नावरून धार्मिक राजकारणाला ऊत येतो. हे सामान्यांच्या फायद्याचे नक्कीच नाही,' असिफ कळकळीने बोलत होता.

राजीव गुप्ता आणि कशिफा अंजुम यांची गोष्ट अशीच आहे. त्यांच्या लग्नाला पाच वर्षे झाली आहेत. त्या आधी ते दहा वर्षांपासून एकमेकाला ओळखत होते. लग्न करण्याचा विचार घरच्या मंडळींना सांगितल्यानंतर समाजात असे होत नाही, असे त्यांना सांगण्यात आल्याने दोघांनीही विचार सोडून दिला; पण आपण वेगळे राहू शकत नाही, याची जाणीव होताच दोघांनी लग्नाचा विचार सुरू केला. दरम्यान, ते धनक संस्थेच्या संपर्कात आले. आंतरधर्मीय विवाह होतात का, आणि ते टिकतात का, आपण बरोबर करतो आहोत का, हे त्या दोघांना तपासायचे होते. आपल्यासारखे बरेच जण आहेत, हे लक्षात आल्यानंतर त्यांनी लग्नाचा निर्णय घेतला आणि आता ते दोघेही व्यवसाय सांभाळून संस्थेसाठी काम करतात. 'आम्हाला घरच्यांनी तोडायचा प्रयत्न

केला. लोक काय म्हणतील, पुढे काय होईल ही भीती होतीच; पण आम्ही एकमेकांना समजून घेणारे आणि आदर देणारे असल्याने नाते बहरले. आजचे तरुण अशा प्रकारे प्रेमाच्या बंधनात अडकले तर हिंदू आणि मुस्लिम या नावावर चालणारे राजकारण संपून जाईल. एकही राजकीय नेता, अशा प्रकरणात पाठिंबा देत नाही. कोणताही समाज बदलायला तयार नाही. आता तरुणांनीच काय ते ठरवायचे आहे,' अशा शब्दांत राजीव आपली मतं मांडत होता. त्याची पत्नी कशिफा म्हणाली, 'एक क्षण आम्हाला असं वाटलं की लग्नाचा विचार सोडून द्यावा. आमच्या कुटुंबात कुणीही हिंदू व्यक्तीशी लग्न केले नव्हते. हे जग कुणालाच माहोत नव्हतं. मुस्लिम मुलींना शिकवले जात नाही. त्यामुळे त्या स्वतंत्र विचार करू शकत नाहीत. कोणी आवडत असेल, तर ते सांगण्याचे स्वातंत्र्यही त्यांना नाही. माझ्या घरच्यांसाठीही हा धक्का होता; पण आमचे प्रकरण हिसेच्या पातळीवर गेले नाही. सर्व धर्म आणि जातीमध्ये कट्टर लोक आहेत. लोक कामाच्या ठिकाणी एकत्र राहतात, तर आयुष्यभरासाठी एकत्र का येऊ शकत नाहीत? ते दोघे जाणते आहेत का, हा प्रश्न सर्वांत महत्त्वाचा असतो. कारण लग्न भावनेच्या भरात येऊन करण्याची गोष्ट नाही.

अझरा परवीनचे लग्न सुमीत चौहानशी झाले आहे. कॉलेजमध्ये शिकत असताना ते एकमेकांच्या प्रेमात पडले आणि त्यांनी लग्नाचा विचार केला. 'विरोध झालाच. मुस्लिम समाजाबद्दल अनेक गैरसमज समाजात आहेत. त्यातून विशिष्ट प्रतिमा मनावर ठसल्या जातात. लग्नाला सुमीतचे कुटुंब हजर होते. लग्नानंतर चार महिन्यांनी माझ्या घरी सांगितले. एक वर्षानंतर आमचे बोलणे सुरू झाले. लग्नानंतर अनेक मित्र-मैत्रिणींनी आमच्याशी मैत्री तोडली. संघर्षानंतर आता आम्ही आयुष्य आनंदाने जगत आहोत. अडचणी तर येतच असतात,' असे अझरा अत्यंत आत्मविश्वासाने सांगते. कमालीच्या द्वेषाच्या टोकदार वातावरणात प्रेमाच्या वेलीवर बहरलेली माणूसपणाची ही नाती उद्याचा भात आहेत, हा विचार ही तरुणाई खऱ्या अर्थाने जगत आहेत आणि जागवत आहेत.

Hues of Dhanak

