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## Creating a buzz

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Posters, films, songs and drums will comprise the One Billion Rising campaign this month in Maharashtra to reach out to the mulgi and mulga, urging them to act against gender violence

“Is this why we educate our children? So they can defy their parents and not be under their control anymore, thundered filmmaker Pushpa Rawat’s father when asked why he refused to let her wed the man of her choice. *‘Nirnay’*, Rawat’s documentary on the lives of young women, draws on her personal experiences as it talks about how parents have a “this far and no further approach” to girls’ freedom.

The film, along with others on the same theme, is being screened at the Department

of Communication Media for Children, SNDT Women’s University, Pune, as part of a film festival, organised under the One Billion Rising (OBR) global campaign that focuses on violence against women.

*‘Nirnay’* resonates with many of its young viewers who relate how parents often get stuck in the patriarchal mould when it comes to the major life decisions. “Mental coercion is also violence of a kind, though we rarely think of it in that way. Parents are good at convincing you to do what they want,” quip Shreya and Rasika, SNDT students, who admit that it is difficult to even articulate such ideas given the rigid, patriarchal society we live in. “It’s campaigns like OBR that compel us to reflect on such issues; they make us think,” say the young women.

Posters, ribbons, films, rallies and meets – the OBR campaign is reaching out to the Marathi ‘mulgi’ (girl) and ‘mulga’ (boy) in different ways, urging them “to rise and dance and strike as one against gender violence”.

According to Sanyogita Dhamdhare of Centre for Advocacy and Research, which is coordinating activities for the upcoming V-Day rising on February 14, the city of Pune – as well as Maharashtra – has always been at the forefront of campaigns on women’s empowerment -- from the opening of the first Indian school for women in 1848 by Savitribai Phule, the first female Indian teacher in an all-girls institution, to boasting of India’s first nursing graduate from Seva Sadan, Ramabai Ranade. Other ground-breaking campaigns from here include the anti-sex selection campaign and the Lakshmi Mukti land reforms by the Shetkari Sangathna in the Eighties.

The OBR campaign is yet another effort for which a host of organisations have joined hands. “There is a lot more discourse on gender issues in the public space than when I had first visited the country in 1984,” remarks Laurie Patton, Dean of Arts & Sciences, Duke University, USA.



From rural reform to transforming the urban-ites – ‘Catch them young’ seems to be the mantra of Anand Pawar of SAMYAK, a communication and resource centre on gender, masculinities, health and development. Traversing the length and breadth of Maharashtra, SAMYAK has been visiting different colleges to mobilise the youth on gender violence. “We get a great response at every college. What is even more heartening is that young men demonstrate an avid interest in what we are doing. In fact, so moved was the management at one college, they announced the formation of a sexual harassment committee,” shares Pawar.

Campaigns like the OBR are like turning points, “They create a buzz; ripples that pierce the wall of silence, pushing the message into obscure, hard to reach little villages and town, where patriarchy is supreme and which otherwise would stay on the outside.” For the campaign, SAMYAK has specially designed posters and developed a video song in Marathi, being distributed widely through online and offline contacts, college youth and civil society organisations.

‘*Saat chy aat gharat*’, meaning ‘Inside the home before 7 PM’, has been a statement that has long defined the life of the average

Marathi mulgi. Women were meant to be home after dark and are restrained from stepping out at night. “But come V-Day, the city centre in Pune will witness a revolution after seven and women will break this taboo for good,” says Pawar. Gathering momentum are plans for a large and colourful rally that will begin at seven in the evening. Themed ‘*Saat nantar ghara baher*’ or ‘Out of the home after 7 pm’, the rally which will see the participation of members from different women’s organisations from within the city and outside and “just anyone who feels for women” will gather on busy city streets and celebrate the idea that women can fearlessly go where they choose, when they choose to.

But can V-Day, the day on which men and women will ‘Rise and Dance and Strike’ as one against gender violence, be complete without ‘The Vagina Monologues’? The momentous 100th performance of the play, “and that too in Marathi”, beams Pawar, will set the stage for the rest of the activities and events that day.

Be it the flash mob planned by the young women at SNTD University or the many speeches, marches and talks that punctuate various other spots across the city, the idea is to create a buzz. A buzz that will culminate in a drum roll proclaiming “Beat the drums against violence against women”.

Dhol, a Maharashtrian drum, is typically played by men during the Ganesh festival or any other ceremonial event, but breaking the tradition, an all-girls ‘dhol’ band will lead the crowds. (*Women's Feature Service*)

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