

## Human Rights Should Focus on Women's Empowerment

On December 10, 2017, Human Rights Day, Mr. Ajay Pandey, CEO, Sehgal Foundation, hosted a discussion on *Alfaz-e-Mewat*, a monthly radio program on the critical issues surrounding human rights, especially in the rural sector. The dialog included imminent speakers who have dedicated their lives to human rights issues: Mr. Piyush Modia, a senior IPS officer; Ms. Anju Pandey, a UN senior officer and leading voice on violence against women; Professor Abdulrahim P. Vijapur from Aligarh Muslim University, who specializes in International Human Rights Law; and Mr. Pradeep Rai, a senior advocate in Supreme Court of India who specializes in human rights.

Anju Pandey started the discussion by raising pertinent concerns regarding infringement of rural women's human rights. Anju said that women should be at the center of human rights law and its evolving regulatory framework. Professor Vijapur invoked verses from various religious texts stating the natural principle of equality in society and shared his views on the teachings of Quran, which reinforces the rights of women. Pradeep Rai highlighted the importance of developing an overarching framework to have a complete picture of human rights and instill confidence in people to have a positive outlook addressing the challenges. Building on Anju's gender-specific approach to human rights, he proposed looking at the issue further by integrating men, women, children, elderly, disabled, etc. Piyush Modia reaffirmed that the Human Rights Commission in India is in a transitional and evolutionary phase. He emphasized that law enforcement is also experiencing this transition and enforcing self-improvisation to meet people's expectations. Delving into the societal aspects of human rights, Mr. Modia said that the lesson of equality should begin at the family level, wherein male members actively participate in household activities with the women in the house. If human rights could blend in family values, its impact could be wide and deep in the society.

Mr. Ajay Pandey asked Professor Vijapur to suggest an approach for the Human Rights Commission to have an impact at the rural community level where it is more needed. The professor underscored the importance of making society literate on human rights issues and empowering the society to hold elected representatives accountable with a process to strengthen the democratic institutional arrangement. Ms. Anju Pandey elaborated on widening the scope of human rights especially in the case of women working in agriculture, and widening the definition of "farmer," as women workers are often excluded and equality is often dismissed. Women farmers have been struggling to gain access to their right to education and good health, Ms. Pandey argued. She emphasized the importance of the social *and* economic empowerment of women in the agricultural sector.

Mr. Pandey opened the discussion to listeners and took questions from people from various villages in Nuh district. Questions centered around women's rights in a rural context, human rights for the elderly, and infringement of human rights during

police encounters. The speakers reinforced their concerns about violations of human rights in society, and concluded that people's participation is vital to streamline inconsistencies and fill gaps in developing a solid human rights framework. Mr. Pandey concluded the program on a positive note, suggesting the potential for positive human rights experiences in daily life.

*(Compiled by Sumit Saxena, CEO's office, S M Sehgal Foundation, from the audio recording of the special show on Human Rights Day, December 10, 2017 at community radio Alfaz-e-Mewat FM 107.8)*