editor's letter

October was a significant month for Indian women. More people rejoiced on the day Priyadarshini Mattoo's rapist was finally convicted than they did on Eid or Diwali. And now, the passing of The Protection of Women From Domestic Violence Act 2005, may change the future of women who live abused, lesser lives. For the first time ever, live-in partnerships have been brought within the ambit – evidence of the open-mindedness creeping into our political leadership. For the first time ever, a law promises protection against slander, name-calling, ridicule and humiliation. Which means if your partner calls you 'immoral' because you are wearing a sleeveless blouse, you could send him to jail.

Aren't there laws against dowry, rape, Sati, female foeticide too, you may well ask? In a society where crime far outweighs punishment, it is difficult to believe that a new piece of legislation can bring a revolution. Cynicism is fine, but it is equally important for us to notice how the courts are changing in character and becoming sensitive towards women's issues. Look around; the skein of this country and that of its people is changing. Given the mood of the nation tilted heavily towards the need for legal reform and the new outlook of the judicial system, the timing of the Domestic Violence law is perfect. Now, instead of lodging an FIR, you can directly contact the magistrate through a protection officer. The court will issue a notice to the accused in three days, which will set the ball rolling for police investigation. Legal proceedings must start within three months. Promising?

Treat the Domestic Violence Act for what it is: a solid piece of legislation to shield yourself against verbal, physical and economic abuse and to outlaw moral policing

But for the promise to turn into reality, women must understand their reciprocal responsibility. One half of India is worried that this, like the dowry law, will become another tool of misuse by gold-diggers and angry women. You could misuse it to avenge bitter upheavals in your married life. You could manoeuvre it as a threat and lose a loving, caring partner. Or you could treat it as a solid piece of legislation to shield yourself against verbal, physical and economic abuse and to outlaw moral policing.

Alive, female, Indian. It has become a powerful idea.

Shefalee

Shefalee Vasudev,
Editor