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'Dowry cases have gone up'

Consumerism, caste and class contribute to the practice

Staff Reporter

BANGALORE: Day Two of the prelude to Daughters of Fire: the India Court of Women on Dowry and Related Forms of Violence against Women was held at the Christ University here on Monday. Spread over six Roundtables, it saw response from 600 participants from different States.

“Economic and sociological aspects of dowry are affecting everyone and despite the strength of the movement, dowry has increased by thousand-fold in the last three decades,” said Gauri Chowdhry of Action India, New Delhi, before the roundtables began.

Roundtable One reviewed dowry, family and marriage in the context of post-colonial societies and growing economic and cultural fundamentalism.

The members of the panel were Nandini Rao from Jagori in New Delhi, Ms. Gauri Chowdhry, Rajeshwari H.S. from Manasa in Bangalore.

Ms. Rao’s concept note on this subject emphasised the prevalence of the dowry system and also the role of television serials in perpetrating this practice.

The second Roundtable brought to the fore the media’s reconstruction of violence, identity, representation and autonomy. The panellists were from Bangalore and Kerala.

The Roundtable explored the problematic linkage with media, while women from many States shared their experience. The highlight of the session was the way the sex worker community shared its experiences to address a problem of mindset in the media.

In the third Roundtable, a review of legislation and alternative ways to justice in the context of responses to dowry and related forms of violence was done. The main speaker was Aarti Mundkur from Alternative Law Forum (ALF). “The more aggressive the law, the more difficult it is to get justice. We have specific laws that are helping women yet we are caught in the double bind of law,” she said.

The fourth Roundtable discussed Globalisation and Violence against Women, and reviewed government policies in the context of the changing nature of the State. It was coordinated by Rukmini Rao of Gramya in Andhra Pradesh.

Roundtable Five was about Femicide: The role of Science and Medical Technology and had Sabu George and other women doctors and activists as speakers. The last Roundtable was called “Conference of the Birds”.

The growth of a severely consumerist culture and the issues of caste and class were among the reasons that almost all speakers of the roundtables listed for the dowry system’s existence.