

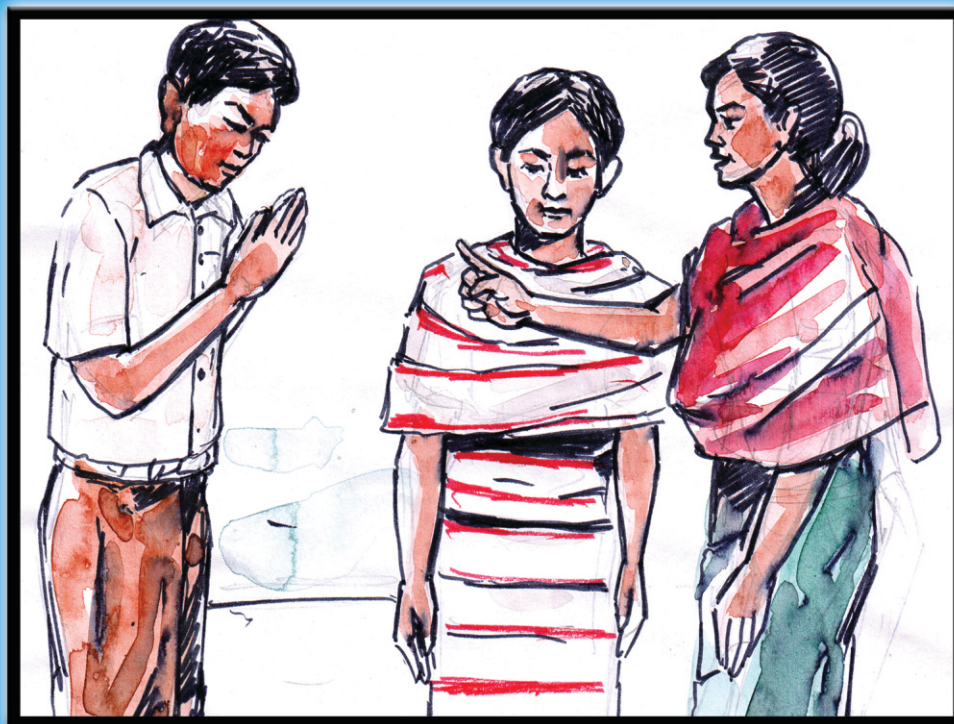


Booklet – 4



# Question of Dignity

**The Sexual Harassment of Women  
at workplace  
(Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013**



A Joint Venture of  
National Literacy Mission Authority,  
Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India.

&

Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice,  
Govt. of India on Legal Literacy  
Under Access to Justice (NEJ&K) Project

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The Saakshar Bharat Mission was started on September 2009 in India. Under this programme, 410 districts have been included where the female literacy is low. The main focuses of Saakshar Bharat Programme are rural women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the minorities. In this programme besides basic literacy, equivalency programme, skill development programme and continuing education are also emphasised.

To make literacy more interlinked with daily life and interesting to the learners/ beneficiaries, the Interpersonal Media Campaign has been initiated. In this campaign, along with the main subjects of emphasis, legal literacy has also been given due importance.

With the aim of creating awareness of legal literacy in an easy manner among the people, the Legal Literacy materials have been developed in Hindi by National Literacy Mission Authority (NLMA), Govt. of India. These materials have been translated into English by State Resource Centre, NEHU, Shillong with the help of Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India under the Access to Justice Project for North-East and Jammu & Kashmir (A2J NEJ&K).

The State Resource Centre, NEHU, Shillong is grateful to all the supporting organizations and departments. It is hoped that this material on legal literacy will prove to be useful in bringing legal awareness among the common people.

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**C E R T I F I C A T E**

This is to certify that the Law Department, Government of Meghalaya has vetted the Legal Literacy Materials consisting of 11 booklets and 11 folders in English Language. These material are found to be satisfactory and would be of immense use in disseminating legal awareness to the grassroots level in the State.

Date: 28.02.2017

*Sangma*

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## Question of Dignity

It has been only the sixth year of Hechila's marriage and she has been widowed. The entire responsibility of upbringing her two children have fallen on her shoulders. She did not even get a chance to mourn for the demise of her husband. Previously it was the onus of attending to her relatives and now it is the question of upbringing her children. Dealing with all these, the time has come when Hechila has to take a decision that she should get engaged in a job.

After all, where will she be getting the money to pay for the house rent, education of her children and food and clothing?



While these questions were running through her mind, an idea dawned in her mind. Hechila knows the work of appliqué very well. She started thinking that during this tough and trying time of hers, it will be her skill that will be of great help. Hechila expressed her thoughts to her neighbour, Aunt Khumla. After hearing what Hechila has been thinking, Khumla said that she will try to arrange for some job for her (Hechila) after consulting with her husband.

After a few days, Khumla asked Hechila to display some of the samples of her work to the nearby boutique. If they like and accept her work, she may get a chance to work on their orders. There was a ray of hope for Hechila. She had with her wallets, mobile cover, purse, etc. which were previously made by her. She opened her old trunk and started searching for those items. While going through the items, she came



across her wedding dress in the trunk which made her cry a lot. Then she consoled herself and looked at the positive side. After all, her children, the token of her husband are with her. She then took out the appliqué samples from the trunk and proceeded towards the kitchen for her chores.

Hechila quickly completed her daily chores early in the morning.



Thereafter, she proceeded towards the address given by Aunt Khumla. She was filled with apprehensions and mixed thoughts. She began thinking, "What will I do if they don't accept my works; I don't

know anything apart from it. If they refuse these works of mine, I will start preparing tiffins. However for preparing the tiffins, where will I get additional money to purchase foodgrains, vegetables and pulses? Additionally, I will also have to buy tiffin carriers." When all these thoughts were running thick and fast through her mind, she reached the boutique. She stepped into the boutique with a lot of fear, nervousness and apprehension.

It is for the first time in her life that she is seeing the interior of such a beautiful boutique. She was awestruck at the collection of the various mekhalas, ladies tops and shawls. Looking at all these she started thinking, "Will I ever be able to make such items?" At that instant, she was suddenly intercepted by the sight of a woman coming towards her. She was Sangtila, the owner of the boutique. Sangtila asked Hechila, "How may I help you?"

Hechila narrated her sad story and sequence of events with tearful eyes to Sangtila and displayed the samples to her.



The samples were really beautiful. Looking at them Sangtila said, "Don't think that I am doing a favour for you. You have fineness in your hands. Don't worry, I will provide a job for you." Hearing this, Hechila quietly

thanked God. She was in disbelief that her prayers were answered so soon.

Sangtila handed over to Hechila a mekhala, design samples, beads, threads and many other such materials. She also gave her a deadline when Hechila is supposed to complete the work and bring it to the boutique. Thereafter, everyday in the afternoon,

H e c h i l a started her work of appliqué. As a result, the outcome was such



that, Hechila completed her work before the given date. Hechila was eagerly waiting for her first salary. On the said deadline, she reached the boutique and showed her work to Sangtila. Sangtila was quite happy at

Hechila's work and asked Chuba, an employee of the boutique, to pay her the requisite amount of money.

This time Hechila took along a shawl with her. The bigger the work, the bigger is the money. This went on for quite a while. In the meanwhile, Hechila admitted her daughter in a school. Slowly she started saving some amount of money after meeting all her expenses. Appliqué was a hobby of Hechila. She was happy that her skill has helped her in the time of her need.

There were many instances when Hechila collected her salary from Chuba when Sangtila was not around in the boutique. There were a number of times when Hechila felt that Chuba stared at her in an inappropriate manner, but she ignored his stares. Soon there were times when Chuba handed over her salary in such a way that his hands touched hers. Hechila felt



uncomfortable at all these happenings but abstained from saying anything. She consoled herself by thinking that these are mere accidents.

Chuba knew about the condition of Hechila's family. He knew that she was a helpless lady. Now, Chuba started calling Hechila in the boutique when Sangtila was not around. There were many times when he stood extremely close to her or tried to obstruct her way by standing at the doorway when Hechila moved out of the boutique. Hechila had no other options since she had to draw her salary through Chuba only. Hechila started getting depressed. She started despising the actions of Chuba. At times, she cried and wept at home alone.

At one instance, when Hechila visited the boutique with her works, only a few workers were present. Taking advantage of the situation, Chuba expressed his desire to

Hechila to have physical relationship with her. Hechila was shocked at this indecent proposal of Chuba. She ran home



without even taking her money. She was shivering with the fear that some kind of crime was about to take place. She turned pale. It was for the first time that such kind of statement was made to her.

While Hechila was on her way to her home, she coincidentally met her neighbour, Aunt Khumla. Hechila turned emotional when she saw Aunt Khumla. On being asked by Aunt Khumla the reason of Hechila being emotional, Hechila narrated the entire

incident that she had faced. She had fear in her mind as to what will happen in the near future. The next time she goes to collect her dues, what will Chuba say and do? Being fed up of these, she wanted to leave the job. Aunt Khumla told her not to be scared about this matter. If she leaves this job what other alternative does she have? What guarantees her that there will be no people like Chuba in other jobs? Aunt Khumla further said that she came across an article in the newspaper that such kind of unwanted and unwarranted behaviours are punishable offences as per the law, which Chuba deserves. Both of them then decided that they will narrate the incident to Sangtila so that the other ladies in the boutique will be spared from the same harassment from Chuba.

Sangtila's husband held a high designation in the Department of Police and

hence, she was aware of such laws. Chuba got scared at the warning given by Sangtila. He was deeply worried about his wife and children as to who will be looking after them if he will be put behind bars. He started begging for forgiveness to Sangtila and said, "Henceforth, I will not commit such an offence in the future".



Sangtila wanted to give Chuba a second chance, since this was the first time that he was found guilty of such offence. However, to make him realise the gravity of his offence, she wanted him to meet her husband the next day. Having no other alternative, Chuba agreed to do so.

The next day, Chuba was presented before Sangtila's husband. Her husband attended to the matter very seriously. He told Chuba that in today's world, terrible and



dreadful crime against women starts from such small incidents. The matter worsens by the day. Today women have

come out of their homes and started working. Men should try to understand their conditions. Men have no right to make friendship against their wishes. For a woman, her dignity is of the highest importance, which even men should try to protect.



Sangtila warned Chuba, "This is your first offence, so I will give you a chance to correct and improve yourself. Henceforth, your behaviour towards Hechila should be a respectable one or else you will be behind the bars." Chuba, with regretful tears in his eyes, asked for forgiveness from Sangtila and Hechila.

All this while, Hechila had been listening to all these discussions. She was surprised that the government had introduced so many laws for preserving the dignity of a woman and she was not aware of any of it. Knowing all these, a new kind of strength kindled within herself. She is now confident that she, along with her children, can live a life of honour and dignity in this unknown world. Hechila bowed to God in reverence once again and thanked the Almighty for his never ending grace.

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## Provisions against Sexual Harassment

- ◆ The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, came into force on February 2013.
- ◆ This law is also applicable to women working at homes (maid-servants).
- ◆ As per the law, the accused should be punished within 90 days and failure to do so by the office will attract penalty.
- ◆ If harassment at workplace has not stopped or the accused are not punished, then the punishment will keep on becoming harsher. It may also happen that the office may be shut down.
- ◆ The accused shall be penalised up to ₹ 50,000.

- ◆ Touching/groping, displaying of obscene pictures, using obscene and lewd languages, demanding or requesting for physical relationships are included in sexual harassment. Any unwanted and unwarranted acts or behaviour are also included in sexual harassment.
  - ◆ It is important to notify in the workplace that harassment of women is a punishable offence.
  - ◆ It is important to constitute a committee in all workplaces where women can complain about any act of sexual harassment.
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