

# People's Panchayat on Resisting Stigma and Discrimination

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8 April 2004  
New Delhi



**actionplus** 

A COALITION FOR RIGHTS, EDUCATION AND CARE IN HIV/AIDS

## actionplus

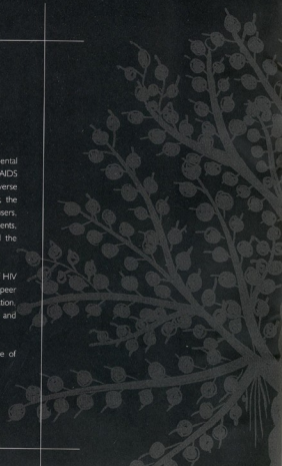
A COALITION FOR RIGHTS, EDUCATION AND CARE IN HIV/AIDS

Action Plus is a network of 15 non-governmental organizations working to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in India. Member organizations work with diverse constituencies, including the rural and urban poor, the middle class, truckers, people in prostitution, drug users, blood donors, men having sex with men, adolescents, community groups, health providers, military and the police.

Member organizations aim to prevent the spread of HIV through a range of interventions, such as advocacy, peer education, counseling, training, community mobilization, care and support, providing information on sex and sexuality, and creating educational materials.

Action Plus was started in 1997 (under the name of Networks). We are:

- an effective learning forum
- a policy advocacy forum
- a capacity building forum
- a regional resource pool on HIV/AIDS



The People's Panchayat on Resisting Stigma and Discrimination holds on a system of justice that is still prevalent in many states and tribes in India. The system of justice, which has its roots in the lush of an old tree in the village, draws sustenance from the people it serves. In spite, the system allows common people a voice, to it to protest, make a report, or even reject the deliberations or judgments made at the forum. The People's Panchayat on Resisting Stigma and Discrimination is based on the spirit:

On 8 April 2004, the People's Panchayat focused on the theme: *Resisting Stigma and Discrimination*. From the workshop, several resolutions and people living with HIV/AIDS, two important findings draw out the issues:

## People's Panchayat on Resisting Stigma and Discrimination

8 April 2004, New Delhi

In this workshop, the reality of the violence of stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV/AIDS, because they have sexual partners, because they are sexual minorities whose sexual preferences are judged as abnormal, or because they are people living with HIV/AIDS. These voices spoke not just of facing the violence of stigma and discrimination, but also of resistance and survival. They offered ordinary everyday zones of heroic battles against violence, marginal, and a judgemental society.

The violence of a judgemental attitude and of forced circumstances has pushed individuals to adopt survival strategies that ensure vulnerability to life-threatening situations. At the same time, there is a diversification of

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# The People's Panchayat

The People's Panchayat on Resisting Stigma and Discrimination builds on a system of justice that is still prevalent in many castes and tribes in India. This system of justice, which has its roots in the base of an old wise tree in the village, draws sustenance from the people it serves. In spirit, this system allows common people a voice, be it to protest, resist, accept, or even reject the deliberations or judgements made at this forum. The People's Panchayat on Resisting Stigma and Discrimination is based on this spirit.

On 8 April 2004, the People's Panchayat listened to nine testimonies - from sex workers, sexual minorities and people living with HIV/AIDS. Two experts helped draw out the issues and concerns of these stigmatized communities within a framework of human rights and social justice. The five pan<sup>1</sup> (or judges) delivered their observations on the Panchayat.

In their testimonies, the nine speakers voiced the reality of thousands of people who face stigma and discrimination because of their gender, because they trade sexual services, because they are sexual minorities whose sexual preferences are judged as 'abnormal', or because they are people living with HIV/AIDS. These voices spoke not just of facing the violence of stigma and discrimination, but also of resistance and survival. They offered ordinary everyday stories of heroic battles against violence, injustice, and a judgemental society.

The violence of a judgemental attitude and of forced circumstances has pushed individuals to adopt survival strategies that increase vulnerability to life-threatening situations. At the same time, there is a devaluation of

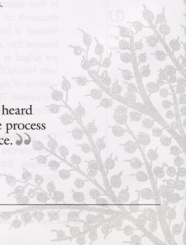
1. Panch is the Hindi word for five - a panchayat is a system of governance based on the notion of five authorities. Each village in India has its own panchayat.

livelihoods and life systems of entire communities of people who practice alternate sexuality and an absolute erosion of all notions of pride and dignity of people living with HIV/AIDS.

The People's Panchayat created a platform to advocate for and share these issues and concerns from the perspective of the survivors and resisters. In doing so, it provided an opportunity to understand and unravel the hidden realities of people infected and affected by HIV and their battles against stigma and discrimination.

This report is an attempt to share, reflect on and build a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of stigma and discrimination in different contexts. Action Plus hopes that it will contribute to recognizing and building on the strengths and survivor strategies of affected persons towards challenging and transforming discriminatory social and legal policies and evolving a notion of rights rooted in realities.

“Where every voice is heard and is important in the process of attaining justice.”



**Colin Rogers** is currently the director of BBC World Service Trust in India and has been working in films and television for more than two decades. As a producer, director and writer, Rogers' work has gained much acclaim. He was awarded the Fellowship of the Royal Television Society in 1995 on account of his outstanding contribution to television. His latest project, *Jasoos Vijay*, a television serial based on an HIV-positive detective, has generated much public appreciation.

**Mohan Rao** is a medical doctor who has specialized in public health and teaches at the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His areas of work include health, population policy, and the politics of health. He is the author of *Malthusian Arithmetics: From Population Control to Reproductive Health*. He has edited *Disinvesting in Health: The World Bank's Prescriptions for Health* and *The Unheard Scream: Reproductive Health in Women's Lives in India*. He has been associated with the People's Health Movement and Jan Swasthya Abhiyan.

**Syeda Hameed** is a women's rights activist, historian and the founder member of Muslim Women's Forum, Women's

Initiative for Peace in South Asia, South Asians for Human Rights, and the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation. She was a member of the National Commission for Women, and has written and translated a number of books and reports including *My Voice Shall Be Heard: Status of Muslim Women, 2003*, and *The Contemporary Relevance of Sufism*.

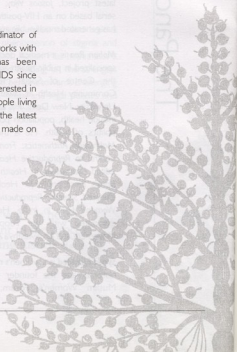
**Justice Usha Mehra** recently retired from the Delhi High Court. She has been a judge at the Delhi High Court since 1990.

**Harsh Mandar** is a social worker and writer who works on issues of communal harmony, tribal, dalit and disability rights, the right to information, custodial justice, homeless people and bonded labour. His book, *Unheard Voices: Stories of Unforgotten Lives* has attracted considerable critical appreciation. His other publications include *Cry My Beloved Country, Reflections on the Gujarat Carnage 2002 and its Aftermath* and *The Ripped Chest*. Mandar, who was formerly in the IAS (Indian Administrative Service) in Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh, was awarded the 1995 National Sadbhavna Award and M & A Thomas National Human Rights Award, 2002.

## The Experts

**Anand Grover** is the founder member of Lawyers Collective and is currently the project director of the Lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit. He is a prominent lawyer who has been actively involved in legal and ethical issues in the field of HIV/AIDS in India. In 1998, Grover took up the first HIV case that went to court in India.

**Manalisa Mishra** is the coordinator of Positive Lives, an NGO that works with HIV-positive people. She has been working in the field of HIV/AIDS since 1995, and she is especially interested in the issues and concerns of people living with HIV/AIDS. *Lovedance* is the latest in a series of films that she has made on this subject.



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## RANI

*Rani is from the western state of Gujarat and works in an organization called SAHAS. She talks about the discrimination that she and her children faced at the hands of society at large, and her home, school and medical set-up in particular, once she was diagnosed as HIV-positive.*

I am Rani from Gujarat. Nowadays HIV-positive people are discriminated against and I am here to talk about that. Before that, I would like to talk about myself and how I got identified.

Three years back, I was very ill. I had typhoid and had been admitted to a hospital. At the same time, my husband died and I just could not bear that shock. As it is, I was ill and I had heard of my husband's death. I was very upset and stopped eating and drinking. At that time the medicines also were not affecting my body and at last the doctor asked me to undergo an AIDS test, I went through the test and it turned out to be positive. On the one hand I was ill, on top of that I had just heard about my husband's death. And the other shock was that I was positive.

I couldn't understand what to do, what not to do. Where should I go? Who should I talk to? I was unable to speak to my mother and father because I had a love marriage. My in-laws had thrown me out of the house. They said, "We don't know from where you have brought this illness." That's why I had to leave that place. But I was not silent. I filed a case against my in-laws. I got some property, and from that money I bought a flat. Currently I am living there with my child.

It's not that only women undergo torture and discrimination. It happens to men also. If parents come to know that their son is positive, they throw him out of the house also. They tell him, "Either ways you are going to die in a few days, so what is the point in giving you any property?" He is not given his share of property. He is thrown out of the house. Men are also discriminated against. In schools, children are not taught. If a teacher or principal finds out that a child is positive, they throw

him out. People lose their jobs.

There was one member in our organization who told the doctor about his HIV-positive status. The doctor did not keep this news confidential and told the man's employer. The employer then humiliated this man in front of 150 other people and then sacked him. He lost his livelihood and was also thrown out of that place. A man dies of HIV much later, but when he loses his livelihood, when he can't earn, then what will he eat to survive? Before dying of HIV, he dies because he loses his livelihood. So there is discrimination here. In society, in your neighborhood, if people find out about your positive status, then nobody will play with your children, nobody will talk to you.

About doctors. We believe doctors are another form of God. But we face the most discrimination at the hands of doctors. I am not saying all doctors are alike, but there are many doctors like this. Let me give you my own example. When I was ill the second time, I told the doctor about my HIV status. At 1:30 in the night, the doctor threw me out of the hospital. When I went to the civil hospital, I was asked questions to which I had no answers.

What should I tell them? I was unable to say anything. Despite being a government hospital, the same thing happens here. We are kept in a TB or cancer ward, and a board is hung over our bed saying that we are HIV-positive. This is discrimination. Doctors don't give us proper treatment. If we tell them that we have this problem, they say that you are HIV-positive, you will have many problems, you stay at home. We don't get treatment for the ailments that we suffer from. Doctors are always discriminating against us.

One doctor started me on ARVs without telling me how long I had to continue with this medicine and how I had to take it. I thought I would take it for a few days and then stop it. One month's medicine costs roughly Rs. 5,500 and the doctor's fees were another Rs. 500. Then there were some other tests, I am not sure exactly which, but they were also very expensive. Eight months passed and the

doctor was still not stopping the medicines. I said, "Now I don't have anything left. I have already spent all that I have." Then, the doctor told me that I could not stop these medicines. I was left with no alternative. I had already spent all my husband's property on the medicines. I really had no options left. In the end, I stopped taking the medicines. Then I went to SAHAS. There I got great strength and a new will to live. I started living with new hope. SAHAS gives a lot of strength to people who have lost all hope in life.

Now about media. Media people often print such stuff about us that we have to face great problems from our families, friends, and society. One of our members died, and the media printed stuff about his family, where his children study etc. That man was dead and gone, but his family had to face enormous difficulties after his death. I feel that instead of bringing about awareness, media people cause more problems for us.

That leaves the government. The government is also discriminating against us. It is giving free ARVs in six states but not in other states. Don't positive people in these states have a right to live? If the government itself is doing this, what can we say about the rest of society.

Earlier I was merely living. Now I have a goal, an aim. I want to do something for HIV-positive people. I need to live for that. I would say that just because we are HIV-positive we are not asking for anything different. We want to live together with all other people.

We don't want anything different. We don't want people to look at us with sympathy or think of us as poor things. We don't want sympathy or anything else. We just want their love. If society accepts us, then we can live openly. When we live openly, our lives would extend by another five years and we would be able to lead better lives. Thank you.



## GAURI

Gauri is employed in a private company in the city of Pune in western India. Here Gauri shares her experiences of discrimination at the hands of her family and the medical set-up.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am going to talk in Marathi. Please forgive me for that.

Marriage is an experience of great joy. Every girl dreams of a happy family life after marriage. That was my dream too. Initially, after marriage, my husband and in-laws behaved very well. They showered me with love. At that time I had never even thought of HIV. Then I became pregnant. I was overjoyed at the thought of becoming a mother.

I went to a nursing home for my check-up. There the doctor suggested that I get tested for HIV. I told all this to my husband. He refused. Other family members also refused. In spite of their opposition, I underwent the test with help from my mother. The report turned out positive. I got a huge shock. The doctor suggested that my husband should also get tested. After a lot of persuasion, I could convince him to get tested. His report came and it turned out that he was also positive.

The doctors said that our hospital is very small and to ensure that other people do not have any problems, I must go to another hospital for further treatment. I was referred to Prayas, a non-government organization. My husband didn't want our child as the child could also be positive. I told the doctors at Prayas, "I love my baby. I want my baby." I wanted to give birth to the child, but I agreed to an abortion. Setting aside my own wishes, I agreed to an abortion.

The counselor at Prayas told me that the decision should be mine. She said that I must do what I wanted to do. On the day of the abortion, as I was being wheeled into the operation theatre, the doctor asked me to remove all my gold jewelry and give it to someone I trusted. For any woman, the closest and most trustworthy

person is her husband. I went to keep my jewelry with my husband. On getting the jewelry, my husband tried to run away. Despite my difficult circumstances, that man had no feelings for me, but still valued gold jewelry.

That was it. I decided that I had taken a lot, and within a moment decided that I did not want to go through with the abortion. I wanted my child. I remembered Betty Mahmoodi's story *Not Without My Daughter*, a story that I had read. She has to go through a lot to save her daughter. If she could do that, so would I.

My in-laws and relatives opposed me. But this life is mine and I have my own identity. I decided to stand on my own two feet. I wanted my child. I decided to bring up the child myself. My mother and father supported me. I told the doctors at Prayas that I wanted the child and was ready to receive treatment. I started treatment as prescribed by the doctors.

The medicines were expensive. I needed to work. I did not pay any fees to the doctors at Prayas for a long while. I received a lot of support from them. I took all the medicines regularly. I got no monetary or psychological support from my husband or in-laws. To reduce chances of my child getting infected, we decided not to give breast milk. With constant help, support and encouragement from the doctors and counselors at Prayas, as also my mother and brother, I could do all that I had thought of.

Since then, I have been staying with my mother and brother. At the right time, I gave birth to my child. After that my medicines were stopped, and my daughter was given medicines in an adequate proportion. My daughter was healthy, as my mother and I had taken adequate precautions. My daughter did not face any major illnesses.

After my child was born, the child specialist who was examining my daughter asked me such terrible questions that I cannot tell you about them. The questions were such that any woman would feel insulted. The same doctor had treated me earlier, but he had strange ideas about HIV-positive people. On seeing this I felt bad. To give birth to a child is a very joyful experience. But it is even better to see your

child growing. I am lucky to have had this experience, yet at the same time, I have also lost something.

On finding out that I was HIV-positive, my brother's in-laws told my sister-in-law to leave our house. The most painful thing is that she was also pregnant at that time, but they forced her to get an abortion. Due to me, my brother's family was also destroyed. I feel sad about this. My family has been destroyed, but I feel that there was no point in living with a person who did not love his wife or daughter.

I decided to get a divorce from my husband. While I was living with my mother and brother, my husband had not even come once to see his daughter. I filed for divorce. Through this, I had no support from my relatives. On the contrary, they would accuse me. I requested them to come and meet the doctors at Prayas who would explain things to them, but nobody agreed. The result was that I stopped visiting relatives and friends because I did not want to be the topic of discussion wherever I went.

Based on my experiences I want to tell you something. I have left my daughter behind and come this long way only to speak to you. I feel people of their own free will should get tested for HIV before marriage, along with their partners. Had my husband and I undergone a test before marriage, two families - that of my brother and my own - would not have been destroyed. The second thing is that even if a mother is HIV-positive, it is possible that the child may not be HIV-positive. For this, it is important that one follows instructions of doctors strictly and that one make an attempt.

An HIV-negative child can also make the lives of positive parents very happy. I have tested my child. She is HIV-negative. I am also undergoing regular treatment and my health is good. I am working and standing on my own feet. Though at one point I was dejected and could have very easily decided to take my life, today I am living with great confidence and am happy with my daughter.

Life is very beautiful. Everyone has the right to enjoy it.

## SHABANA

*Shabana is from the small town of Nippani in the south Indian state of Karnataka. She works with SANGRAM and is the general secretary of Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad (VAMP), a collective of women in prostitution. Here, she shares the discrimination that she has faced in society from the police and from the health system. She also points out the importance of collectivization to resist stigma and discrimination.*

Namaskar. Salaam. I don't know what to say in English. I would like to ask you a question. Do you know who I am? What I am? Why am I here?

Okay, let me tell you. My name is Shabana Kazi. I come from Nippani. I was 12 years old when I first got into sex work and I am still in sex work. While doing sex work, we have to bear atrocities of the police, society and even doctors. We would bear it because we were afraid.

Firstly I would like to tell you how the police behave with us. At night the police would come to us and have sex without condoms. They would force us to have sex with them and go off in the morning. Then in the morning some other police constable would come and say, "Shabana, there is a case against you. Come to court with us." They would accuse us of things that we had never done. "You were standing on the road, your breasts were not covered with your pallu<sup>2</sup>, you were flirting with men on the streets. That's why there is a case against you."

Actually, at that time we were at home. We had not done any of these things, yet they would make a case against us. Because they had the pen, and the paper was also theirs. Power was in their hands. We wouldn't speak. Because we were sex workers, we did not have a right to speak. This is how society has taken away our rights.

Then when we were taken to court, the judge would ask us if we had done all these things. "Do you accept these charges?" he would ask. We would say yes, pay the fine and come back home. We were afraid that if we did not say yes, they

would put us in the lock-up and would force us to have sex with them. They would not use condoms and they would torture us. So we would accept the charges. This is how the police and government would harass us and discriminate against us. But then we thought that we must do something about this. So we started working with SANGRAM.

Working at SANGRAM means spreading information about HIV, taking people who are infected with HIV to the hospital or a doctor, caring for them, giving condoms, giving information etc. We tell people that a woman's life is important, whether she is an educated housewife or a sex worker. In fact, even a man. Any human life is a unique gift. You don't get to live twice. I really liked this work so I started doing it.

While doing this work, all of us sisters felt that why shouldn't we have an organization of our own? So we thought we would open an organization. We went to SANGRAM and asked them for help in starting our organization. SANGRAM helped us a lot. We opened our organization. It got registered also. Only sex workers started working there. They are the general secretary, workers, cash in-charge etc. They do all the work in the organization. The name of our organization is VAMP, Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad.

Then all of us sisters thought that instead of having meetings at the SANGRAM office, we should have our own office. So we made an office at Nippani, in this house, which for the last 80 years has been used for sex work. We also bought that place, because whenever any sex worker would fall ill, she would be thrown out of her house by the *gharwali*<sup>3</sup>. Then she would have nowhere to go and would seek shelter in the local municipal school. She would lie there through sun and rain, often without a roof over her head. And she would die there. We couldn't bear to see that any more. So we thought none of our sisters would have to go through that any more. Nowadays even educated people come to us in autos, bringing HIV-positive people, and they will say, "We are giving this person to VAMP, SANGRAM and now you must take care of him." So we made an office there.



We started having our meetings there. All the women from seven zillas<sup>4</sup> would come for the meeting. They would talk about what was happening in their areas and tell us if they had any problems. We would discuss and solve their problems. All the neighbouring people and corporators told us that we could not have our meetings here. They would say that sex workers are coming here in style with pins on their hair and are using the main road and not the *bhangi* *ba*<sup>5</sup>. "We won't let you continue with your meetings here."

And they started harassing us. They harassed us so much that they even started beating us. When about 1000 men from the village come to beat you up, then even if you are two, three or even 40 women, there is not much that you can do. We were very scared. Then we went to the police station. We told the police that this is happening and we need your help. The police said, "We have lots of work, you go and ask for forgiveness at the feet of the person you have quarreled with. They will forgive you." This is how the government works for us. I don't know how it works for you. I don't care. But I am telling you how it works for us.

I realized that the police would do nothing for us. And at the police station they also said, "You are not a citizen". Don't I look like a woman to you? Then how is it that the policeman could not see that I was a woman? At that time I did not even know the meaning of the word 'citizen'. He also gave me such dirty abuses in Hindi. I am ashamed to repeat these in front of you. In spite of being a CPI<sup>6</sup>, Khot used such abuses. This is how the police harass us.

Then we called SANGRAM and said, "Call the women from all the seven zillas." We took out rallies in Belgaum and Nippani. We talked to big officers and big leaders. The leaders assured us that they would do something for us, and it is true that they did help us. I stay in Nippani now. We have regular meetings at that same office. All our women stand on their own feet. You may be wondering that if Shabana is here talking to us, she may be educated. I am completely illiterate. I am here alone, but all my sisters are also capable of coming here and talking in front of you.

Now society no longer needs to tell us how we should work and live, what we should do. We can take our own decisions and won't accept anybody's decision. All my sisters have only one message for you. Just as other women stay in society, similarly we are also women. You have to accept that.

Next come doctors. Earlier we didn't know about Nirodh. Doctors also didn't treat us properly. Government doctors wouldn't let us come in front of them. But after we came together they started treating us properly. Now it has changed. Now, even the police have started coming and asking us if we have any problems or if anyone has been raped.

Now we teach laws to the police. We tell them they can catch us only if they see us on the streets trying to get customers. When we are with customers in our homes, they can't catch us. There is no such provision in the law. We have this power now. This is because we have come together and are united. We have our own organization. That is all I want to say. Thank you.

“Just as other women stay in society, similarly we are also women. You have to accept that.”

## PAMMI

*Pammi works with the Naz Foundation in Delhi. He presents his experiences as a gay man and talks of the stigma attached to his sexual preference.*

Namaskar, friends. My name is Pammi Sharma. I am a gay man, i.e. a man who is attracted to other men. Homosexuality is looked down upon, and I face a lot of discrimination because I am a gay man.

Since childhood, I was attracted to other boys. Besides, my appearance, behaviour, style was all very different from other boys. So much so that other boys would make fun of me. I would be called names that perhaps cannot be used for other common people. Some people would even call me *hijra*<sup>7</sup>. I would get very disturbed on hearing these comments.

This idea of being different from others was constantly thrust into my consciousness. I felt that perhaps I was unwell and not fit for anything. I started seeing myself as different from others. My confidence and self-respect began to waver. I had to hear similar comments first in school, then in college. Gradually in order to keep my self-respect intact, I started maintaining a distance from other people who would abuse me or try to stay away from me.

But somewhere deep inside you, there is always a search for a partner, a companion, someone to share your life with. While I was still troubled and struggling with these thoughts, my father passed away. My brothers then refused to bear the responsibility for my education. This further devastated me. But I did not let myself break under this pressure. I started working in a private company and also continued my education. In the life of a gay person, one trouble follows another.

I had not yet come to terms with all of this, when my family started talking about my marriage. A marriage which, being gay, I could not think of. I started worrying.

What if I was unable to fulfill all the responsibilities of a marriage? How would society look at me then? How would it affect other members of my family? I was scared that if I was unable to do anything after marriage, there would be indignities to suffer and a lot of questions to answer to society. After a while, I did get married. I was also able to build a sexual relationship with my wife but that was not a true success.

But I was not truly satisfied, in my heart and mind. Because I was a homosexual and had never been attracted to a woman. After some time, my family came to know about my sexuality, that I was gay. At first they were very upset. A lot of words were exchanged. But in the end they were supportive, as they felt I was one of them.

However my mother felt that at a later date, I could face problems from my brothers. She decided to partition the house, so that we could all live separately. Everyone had separate houses. I was living with my wife and, by then, I had also become the father of a daughter. There were more and more problems.

At about the same time, I fell in love. We started a relationship. Again I had to take a decision. Should I choose my wife or lover? I was so worried that I feared I would fall apart. But I controlled myself. I decide that I would tell my wife about my sexual preference. At the appropriate time, I told my wife about my homosexuality. She was stunned. She cried and cried and I also cried.

For a while she didn't say anything. But after that she said, "It's your personal life. You can do what you want. But you have been very good to me and I have not had any problems with you. So I would like to stay with you." We decided that our family life would continue as before. I now share everything with my wife. Very few people receive such support from their families, and especially from their wives. My wife is a very ordinary girl and did not even know what homosexuality was or what it means.

I was also spending a lot of time looking for a job. After all I was a father and responsible for my family. At that time I found out about Naz. I went to Naz and met the people there. I started working there. I understood from them what it is to be gay and I gained my self-respect. I felt free.

I found my sexual identity and now I can openly talk about my life. All this is because of the organization I work for. I thank Naz for all of this. After coming to Naz, I realized my true value. I realized that I had a distinct personality, my own sense of self-respect, which should be nurtured. But it is not always easy.

There is a lot of harassment that we face. Because of Section 377<sup>B</sup> of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the police harass me a lot. I look different and dress different from other men, and the police catch me, question me, and tell me that I am doing something wrong. They tell me that I am dirty. This causes a lot of impact on my work. The area where I work is one where a lot of gay men come to spend time and talk to one another. Since there is no one else to talk to them or listen to them, they come here to share their feelings.

But here the police trouble them. Under IPC 377, they beat them up. In fact they beat us also. They consider us dirty. Since we are from Naz, the police accuse us of spreading homosexuality. We go to distribute condoms so that people may practice safe sex. But they think we are spreading homosexuality. That's not our aim. Our aim is that irrespective of sexual preference, people should practice safe sex.

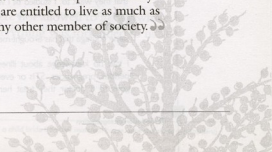
Law is one of the aspects that we would like to forget, not worry about. As homosexuals we want to live openly, freely. But no, we can't live openly. We don't have an identity of our own. We have to live within the boundaries of law. But human feelings and emotions are not determined by laws. Therefore I would request all of you, the media, whoever is present today, that there shouldn't be such laws. Being a homosexual does not mean that one is not a part of society. We are entitled to live as much as any other member of society.

B. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code states that carnal intercourse "against the order of nature" is a crime. It is often used by the police to threaten NGO workers who distribute condoms and impart safe sex education to men who have sex with men.

One small message for homosexuals: if you are a homosexual, I would urge you to recognize and understand your sexuality. Do not try to hide it. If you live openly, you will be able to live with dignity and respect. There are many people like me who need support in their struggles. But society, the law and goondas<sup>9</sup> do not allow you.

Goondas trouble us a lot. They check our bags, take away our watches, gold chains, and besides all this, force us to have free sex. Despite all this, we do not lose sight of our aim. We aim to give information to more and more people and enable them to recognize themselves and live with self-respect and dignity.

“Being a homosexual does not mean  
that one is not a part of society.  
We are entitled to live as much as  
any other member of society.”



## SANGEETA

Sangeeta comes from Satna in Madhya Pradesh, central India. Sangeeta shares her experience and the changes that she has undergone after joining Kishori Mitra Pariyojana, a programme launched by UNFPA.

My name is Sangeeta Dwivedi. I live in Satna district in Madhya Pradesh. I want to tell you some of my experiences.

Earlier, I would feel that as girls, we were kept locked up. *Purdah*<sup>10</sup> was maintained. We were not allowed to go anywhere. Everything was forbidden to us. It's only after I met people from the Annapurna Education Society that I started feeling better with the information that they were giving me.

They used to come to our village. I was scared and would wonder why they were giving us all this information. They would give information about discrimination and the problems that women face. During the training they would teach us how to talk to people, how to face society, and how to become a capable person. I realized that this learning was helping me change my own life. There is a saying in our village that when a son is born, there is happiness, and when a daughter is born, there are calamities and problems.

There are many ways that we face discrimination. Boys and girls are treated separately. Boys eat before the girls. Boys can go wherever they want and study all that they want to. I studied till I was in Class V and was completely dominated by everyone. There was no way I could have travelled or gone anywhere. But now I have the courage to come out of my village and travel to Delhi. I believe it is the same courage that has brought me to come and speak to all of you.

I had no knowledge about illnesses or any other issues. I didn't know about periods, pregnancies, STIs or even that young girls can get pregnant. When a girl goes to a doctor they treat her very badly. They blame her being a girl for

everything, especially if she is a young girl who is pregnant. I had no idea where to go. It is only the information from the organization that has helped me.

Child marriage is a huge problem in our area. I was married when I was very young. I learnt that there were problems in marrying at a young age, or even that having children at a young age could result in the death of both mother and/or child. I used to think that children were God's gift. But now I have delayed my marriage<sup>11</sup>. My parents were not happy about it. I did speak to them and tell them I didn't want to go and just cook, clean and look after my in-laws. That even if I didn't study further, I wanted to work and stand on my own feet. The madam from my organization helped me a lot, which is why I am here today.

“We were not allowed to go anywhere.  
Everything was forbidden to us.”



## RAMANNA

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*Ramanna is a volunteer with YRG Care in the south Indian city of Chennai. He shares the discrimination that he experienced in his working life and also tells us how he rebuilt his life assisting people living with HIV.*

I am from Andhra Pradesh. In 1987, I was working in Mumbai. I used to get fever and I used to vomit blood. I was taking treatment. Then I was transferred to Delhi in 1988. I was working there for two years. I was continuing my treatment as well. I left my job as I was very unwell and I went back home to Tirupati. One of my uncles took me to a doctor in Chennai and I started taking treatment there.

I joined a private company and started working there. After six months they found my work very good and they sent me to Singapore. For one and a half years, I worked there and again I fell ill. I was getting fever and vomiting blood. I came back to my native place and started taking treatment in Tirupati.

In 1981, my marriage was fixed with a relative's daughter. Three months before my wedding, I went to an uncle's house in Chennai. Again I fell ill, fever and vomiting blood. I was taken to MR Hospital. There they sent me to Dr. Sunithi Solomon in General Hospital. I met madam, she took my blood for testing and said that I was HIV-positive. She said that I am unwell because of HIV and I have to take treatment for it. She said that I can do work and other things. I don't have to worry just because I have HIV.

I started living alone. I stopped living with my parents and other people. I took a place in Chennai. I told the family of the bride to cancel the wedding. I told them I was HIV-positive. They agreed and cancelled the wedding. But they told my entire family, and all of them came to know about my HIV status.

Again, I was really ill. For one and a half months, I was admitted to the General Hospital. After that, I became better. Again, madam told me that I can work like

any other person, and that I am like any other normal person.

Along with some of the savings that I had, and one of my friends, we had started a factory to produce export garments. It was doing very well. My partner came to know that I am HIV-positive. He told me that I had hidden it from him, and that I had cheated him. He also told me that there are 50 workers in the factory, and that there is a threat to all of them from me. They threw me out of that place. I lost all my investment. And also I was very weak at that point of time. I did not have the energy to fight even for my investment.

I had lost all my investment. I was really unwell. I went to the government hospital, Tambaram Sanatorium. I was there for 15 days. There was nobody to give tablets. You had to walk however unwell you are. There was no one to take care of you. There were times when there was no food.

One day I came back to YRG Care and met madam. She said, "You don't go anywhere. I will take care of you." I was treated there for some time and I became all right. I was given a job there.

Now I work in YRG Care. I meet at least 40 HIV-positive people everyday. They come with lots of misinformation. Doctors tell them that you will die in one week, ten days. They all come and ask me. I tell them that no, we don't die because of HIV. I am living here for the last 10 years. We need to take care of various infections. You have to keep yourself fit. You can live like any other person. Do not believe in this misinformation. I explain to them about HIV, about leading a healthy lifestyle, and also help them get rid of this fear of death.

I am HIV-positive for the last 10 years. I feel very good about myself. I feel very good that I am helping other HIV-positive people. I feel good that I am giving them confidence. In spite of being HIV-positive for the last 12 years, I am not on ARVs till now. I am still maintaining my CD4 count. I am leading a very happy life.

## SHEVANTA

*Shevanta works with SANGRAM and lives in Miraj, Maharashtra. She shares her near death experience with HIV and the support that she received from her organization.*

My name is Shevanta, Shevanta Rainnaur. I live in Miraj and work there. I am a woman who has been in sex work for the last 30 years. Before I started working with SANGRAM, I did not know anything about HIV. I didn't know anything about speaking to police, inspector, doctors etc. I was told all about these things when I came to SANGRAM. After getting all this information, I started working at SANGRAM.

After a while, I fell ill. I could not eat. I started getting fever and I would feel giddy. After this happened I decided on my own that I would get tested for HIV. So I went to the doctor to get a HIV test done. When the report came, I was told that I was positive. I was very scared and disturbed. I took the report and went to meet madam at the organization. Madam gave me a lot of support. I took leave from my work and went to my village to meet my mother.

After going home, I fell even more sick. I did not know what to do. When I fell sick, my mother or my brother, I am not sure who, contacted the organization, and told them that I was very ill. The doctor from the organization and two of the women came to meet me and gave me medicines and advised me to rest. I got a lot of support.

On their advice, I went to a doctor in Karnataka who refused to even touch me. I was very disturbed. My mother was forcing me to go to the doctor, so I went. I didn't speak to anybody, not my mother or my brother. I felt extremely bad because they spoke to me like this. After visiting the doctor, I fell even more ill.

The name of our organization is Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad. Two women from the organization came to meet me again. They explained things to me and

convinced me. Then they brought me back to Sangli. I was very happy to be back. I had a lot of support here.

Then madam told me that you must go to Pune for treatment. Take your sister along, and one of us will come along with you. I went to Pune along with my sister and another woman from our organization who was also HIV-positive. They took very good care of me, my food, medicines etc. Despite being HIV-positive herself, she took care of me. That was a big support for me. I felt very happy.

I went to meet the doctor. The doctor told me about ARVs. ARVs are very expensive. I would not be able to afford it. But madam said that I must take ARVs. "You must live." Madam was a great support for me. I am now on ARVs. I would request the government to give ARVs free of cost.

I am standing on my own feet and I am in good health. I want to share all the information that I have on HIV with others. I have put aside the fact that I am a HIV-positive person. I have all the confidence to look after myself, and others also. I am very happy that by coming to this meeting we could all share our happiness, our pain and sorrows. This is a great satisfaction. The discrimination that we face from doctors and others in society must stop.

“I have put aside the fact that I am a HIV-positive person. I have all the confidence to look after myself, and others also.”

## CHANDNI

*Chandni is from Bangalore, south India. She shares her personal experiences and the harassment that she has faced from the government, the police and goons because of her gender non-conformity.*

I am Chandni. I am a hijra from Bangalore. I come from a small family in a small village near Mysore. I was the only son, very much loved in the family.

In childhood, I would be confused about my behaviour, about myself. I had no male friends. I would only play with girls. Other boys would push me away. Many a time, other small boys would throw stones at me. I wanted to be like a girl and I had feelings like a girl, and I was like a girl.

There was a village drama and I wanted to act in a girl's role. But my parents said, "No, you have to act as a boy. We will support you, give you whatever is required but you have to act as a boy." They said that if I act as a girl, they will commit suicide. I had a hijra friend in the village and I went off with her to Bangalore. Then from there we moved to Bombay.

In Bombay I became a chela, a daughter in the hijra community. We had three options in Bombay. Either we could do begging work, or go for sex work, or go for blessings. I was doing sex work and also some begging. But whatever money I earned was taken away by the elders in the community. I ran away from there and went back to Bangalore.

I started doing sex work in a forest area. We used to face lots of harassment from the goondas<sup>12</sup>. They would beat us up, extort money from us, have free sex, forced sex. They would also force us to have oral and anal sex with them. Also there were other problems like the police. They used to extort money and have free sex. They would also threaten to slap cases against us. Once I was arrested and I was in jail for nine days. I was tortured; they used to put chilli powder in our

anus, push iron rods into our anus. It was a horrible experience.

Some gondas would come to us as customers and say that they were in love with us. We believed them. Then they would use us for money. There is one case where one of our sisters was murdered. She was burnt by her husband, her parnthi<sup>13</sup>. We took out a rally in Bangalore against it.

In Bangalore, it is very difficult for us to get a rented house. I fell in love with a man and we tried to move to a rented house. Within one day they came to know about me and they threw us out of the house. They did not even bother to give us water. We were chased away by the people there. They hit us with cricket bats. They said that all you do is sex work and you should not live in this area.

Then I went for castration. I had lots of problems because of urine blockage. I was thinking, "What's the point in living like a *hijra*?" People don't treat you like human beings. Every one treats you like an animal. They treat their dogs better than us. I was thinking I would commit suicide.

Families also push us away. Any function that happens in the family, marriage, death, they don't invite us. My grandmother was dying. My parents pushed me away. They said that for the sake of the family's honour, I should go away. I said I would remove the *sari* and wear shirt and pant and stay there. But they did not allow me. So I was not able to be there when my grandmother who had brought me up passed away. And my father doesn't talk to me. He has not spoken to me for the last 10 years. Whenever I go home, he leaves the house and goes out. Till I am there he does not come back.

I am a *Yellamma jogtin*<sup>14</sup>. There is lots of respect for us in the temple. Inside the temple, people come and visit us before they visit the goddess. All the respect is limited to the temple. Once you get out it's very different.

Like other people, we also need ration cards, voting cards, passports. It's very

13. Men who have sex with men and take on the male role in a relationship, are active partners and penetrators in a sexual relationship

14. Person who has been dedicated to the goddess Yellamma

difficult. We do get ration cards, election cards, but anytime anybody can challenge our gender. It's very difficult to get a passport. We need a doctor's certificate and doctors don't give us a certificate. They either give a certificate as a male or female. There is no space for us in the Indian law to change our sex. It's very difficult. I am alone. I want to adopt a child and people ask me who I am. The moment I say *hijra*, they refuse to give me a child. Then they ask what work I do. When I say sex work, they say what's the guarantee that you will not push your child into sex work?

I am working in Sangama as a peer educator. Now I can get a house very easily. The moment I say I am a social worker, people are willing to give me a house in an official area. I have lots of confidence. I know that we won't get everything today, but I am confident that I can fight. I can fight, and one day we can get all the things that other people are getting. Sangama gave me that confidence.

Sangama is a sexual minority organization. It works for poor sexual minorities, those who don't speak English, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, *kothis*<sup>15</sup>, *hijras* etc. We are an organization fighting for our rights. We speak to people, give them awareness, build their confidence. We help people not to feel isolated and help them to join the other people. One of the most important things we do is to intervene in crisis situations, police violence etc. If there is a police arrest, we get a lawyer and get them bailed out. Later, we support them legally. Lesbians particularly face a lot of problems. The parents beat them up and house-arrest them. In those times, we go there and get them out of the houses.

We do outreach work, go to the people, give awareness about HIV. We insist that people should use condoms. We spread information that HIV does not spread through touch and various other things. Also the need to care for a HIV-positive person. We do community development and training.

We helped in the formation of a group called *Vividha*. *Vividha* is an autonomous, non-funded organization of sexuality minorities. All the people there work as

volunteers. Vividha, Sangama and the community - we are all fighting now and we are a movement in Bangalore. We organize hijra festivals, rallies, meetings against Section 377. We organize programmes against police violence on sex workers. We also organize film screenings and cultural programmes.

We have laws that discriminate. Whether one is a man or a woman or a hijra, we are all human beings. We are all equal, whether one is homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual. But the law doesn't see it like that. The law discriminates. The laws actually call some people criminals, and leave some people. This is injustice. What do we do when the law itself is spreading injustice? We do not want laws that discriminate against us. We do not want this legal system that discriminates against us.

“What do we do when the law  
itself is spreading injustice? We do not want  
laws that discriminate against us.”



## MADHU

*Madhu lives in Delhi and works as a care worker at the Naz Care Home. Here she gives a message of hope to all those who are infected with HIV.*

**Namaskar:** My name is Madhu and I am a resident of Delhi. I am married and 34 years of age. It's been six years since I lost my husband. I am HIV-positive. It's been almost four years since I know that I am HIV-positive. But I had been keeping unwell for quite some time. I think I must have been infected at least eight-nine years back.

When I came to know that I was HIV-positive, two months after my husband's death, I was thrown out of my house. I came to stay with my parents. Even at that time, I would face a lot of problems. I would keep unwell and was getting myself treated at hospitals. But nobody could diagnose exactly what the problem was.

In 2001, I came to know that I was positive. At that point I was so ill that I had completely lost all hope. There was no hope that I would live. Even the doctors had said that I would only live for 15-20 days. But when I heard this from the doctors I felt that this was all a lie. I wanted to prove them wrong. I wanted to stand on my own feet and show that I could live. It is that strength and confidence that has enabled me to come here and speak to all of you. I get this strength and confidence every time my son comes and stands in front of me.

Looking at him gives me this feeling of strength. When I was ill in 2001, I came to know that there was an organization called Naz, which works with HIV. I became a part of the organization. My treatment started here. Along with that, I started working here. There are lots of kids here at the organization. I work as a care worker. A lot of my time is spent caring for kids.

At Naz I also get a lot of support, love and affection from my co-workers. That

support ensured that I forgot about my disease. Even today I don't really think of myself as HIV-positive.

I think of it as a common disease, which could affect anyone. I am not afraid of death. After all, who can escape death? Everyone has to die. Even if a person is good, anything can happen to him, he can also die. After coming to this organization, I have found more confidence in working.

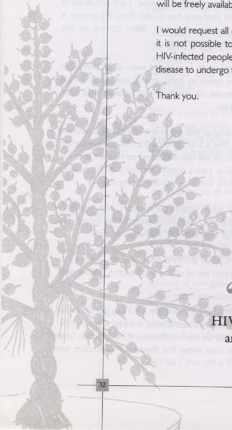
In 2001 when I was ill, I was bedridden once. I could not even sit or stand. But doctors treated me, and I also had the desire to stand up and walk again. I think that it's important that HIV-positive people do not think that because they have HIV, they cannot live, and that they will die.

We hear around us all other people telling us that if you are HIV-infected, you will not live for long and you cannot work. This is a lie. Why can't a HIV-positive person live? If he has support from others, then he will definitely stand on his own feet. He will stop thinking of himself as HIV-positive. I am a positive woman but I continue to live. I have no one in this world except my son. I have to live for my son.

Therefore I would like to tell all my other brothers and sisters who are HIV-infected that they must come out in the open and show society that, though we are HIV-infected, we are standing on our own feet. We are living in society.

I want to tell people who always think of us as HIV-positive that no, we are not HIV-positive. We can also lead normal lives like all of you and become independent and earn and bring up our children.

I feel that our government should also recognize that there are many people in this country who are fighting against HIV. There are lots of small children who are HIV-infected. I feel that I have seen a lot that life has to offer, but these children have not yet lived their lives. They do not even know that they are HIV-positive, yet they are leading happy lives.



I have seen at Naz that there are people who want to go for ARVs, but they do not have money to undergo this treatment. How can they go in for ARVs? They are waiting for the day when the government will reduce the prices of ARVs, and it will be freely available at government hospitals and other organizations.

I would request all of you to urge the government to at least reduce ARV prices if it is not possible to make them freely available. This would make it possible for HIV-infected people and families where four-five members are fighting against this disease to undergo treatment and live a healthy life and a life of dignity.

Thank you.

“We hear around us all other people telling us that if you are HIV-infected, you will not live for long and you cannot work. This is a lie.”

Following the testimonies, the two experts were invited to unravel the key issues underlying the nine testimonies.

**Anand Grover** observed that all the testimonies were universal stories, and stories of great hope. These stories have elements that are common to many people, and could easily be the stories of many more people in Indian society. At the same time, they are also stories of people who have fought and survived despite facing the most trying circumstances.

The stigma and discrimination referred to by all the testifiers is deep-rooted in Indian society, he noted. India is a multi-fractured society that is most prominently divided along caste, religion and other lines; HIV exposes these fractures in Indian society.

Commenting on the prevailing legal system, he pointed out that many laws including Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, ITPA<sup>16</sup> and the Narcotics Act were introduced by the British and are

no longer relevant in the current context. However, there is a steady refusal to acknowledge reality and bring in relevant changes.

In conclusion, Grover highlighted that these stories are filled with hope, either due to the personal courage of the testifiers or due to their ability to access supportive organizations. Given that this is not a choice for more than 90% of the people, supportive government intervention, policies and programmes are critical.

**Monalisa Mishra** reiterated that our society is driven by discriminatory attitudes, which manifest themselves in popular stereotypes and myths. In the case of HIV/AIDS, individual instances of discrimination build up to cause a ripple effect on society.

Mishra noted that HIV practitioners

16. Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1986, states that sexual exploitation, or the abuse of persons for commercial purposes, is illegal.

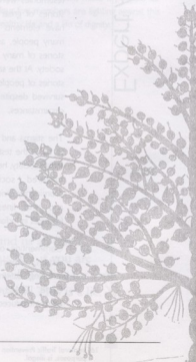
themselves are responsible for perpetuating discrimination. An analysis of HIV/AIDS messages over the last decade clearly shows instances where stereotypes were perpetuated.

Citing Indian and other sub-continental examples of HIV communication, she demonstrated how messages that aim to spread awareness are often inherently discriminatory towards constituencies such as sexuality minorities, sex workers etc. She drew attention to the futility of some measures that aim to measure attitudinal changes. These surveys only capture superficial changes such as awareness about HIV, but do not seek to understand or measure change in attitude towards the disease.

Though various NGOs have made efforts to use the power of the media, very few attempts have been successful. The media's potential as opinion maker has not been tapped to the fullest in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. This could be due to a lack of understanding of the problem and the exact role of media by

NGOs or media persons. In conclusion, she lauded the testimonies as stories of incredible hope and courage.

EXPLORATIONS



Thanking the testifiers for sharing their stories, **Syeda Hameed** said the stories spoke in one voice of the widespread callousness of society. Pinpointing hypocrisy as responsible for causing such stigma and discrimination, Hameed held society responsible for killing HIV-positive people even before the disease could claim them. Since many people feel that HIV does not touch or affect them, she highlighted the need to reach out to greater sections of society.

Hameed drew attention to the power of collectivization that had been explicitly mentioned in the testimonies. Marginalized groups need to recognize their own power and make use of this for their own benefit.

In his judgement, **Harsh Mandar** stated that only part of the problems surrounding HIV are natural or biological - most problems are manufactured by people and the State. The State manufactures stigma as a way to rob vulnerable people of their essential humanity. A person who is already facing difficulty finds himself under more and more trying circumstances. Mandar compared the

situation of HIV-positive persons with those who have leprosy. In such cases, stigma also manifests itself when the basic rights of citizens get questioned and challenged. He called this a guerilla war and a proxy war waged by the state.

In this context, Mandar recommended that NGOs increase their focus on dealing with issues of stigma, vulnerability, marginalization and illegalization. There is a need to build solidarities with those who are most stigmatized and vulnerable.

Commending the strength and pride shown by the testifiers, **Colin Rogers** applauded the human spirit, which continues to beat this disease. People who are fighting HIV/AIDS often find strength within themselves; others must not patronize them through pity.

He said that the State must take the lead in tackling discrimination and give this struggle political support. Discriminatory laws need to be reviewed if the State is to protect all citizens. Stigma and discrimination are not just Indian phenomenon;

they are found in Western and other countries all over the world. It is only through clear state policies and interventions that some countries have managed to tackle discrimination.

Stigma, prejudice and discrimination often stem from a fear of the unknown and lack of knowledge. Rogers own experience with the popular TV series, *Vijay Jasoos*, has shown that media can play a vital role in changing attitudes. People need to view HIV/AIDS as a problem that affects the entire society and not certain segments alone. The struggle against HIV/AIDS is a shared responsibility of humankind, not just a struggle of people who are HIV-infected and affected.

Stressing that the State and the law cannot help fight stigma, **Usha Mehra** congratulated the testifiers for having withstood the onslaught of stigma. The lesson to be learnt from all the testimonies was the power of collectivization, and the role of family, friends and NGOs in combating stigma and discrimination.

Although the law can give judgements, she felt that society must work to make

“The struggle against HIV/AIDS is a shared responsibility of humankind, not just a struggle of people who are HIV-infected and affected.”

these judgements successful. Laws such as ITPA are needed in the context of minors who are trafficked. Even though some people may face harassment because of this law, it cannot be repealed.

Mehra highlighted the need to create awareness through communication and to remove misconceptions about HIV. She emphasized the role that doctors could play in this context. She however felt that the State is responsible in subsidizing medicines for HIV, so as to ensure that all those who are infected are able to access treatment.

She hoped that just as people suffering from tuberculosis once faced stigma but no longer do so, similarly HIV/AIDS would also some day become free of stigma due to the work of NGOs.

In his judgement, **Mohan Rao** set the context for the increasing marginalization of the marginalized, accompanied primarily by the sharpening of singular identities. He spoke of identity politics and increasingly violent forms of intolerance in the Indian context.

Rao outlined how India has the third lowest spending on public health in the world. This gradual decrease in government spending on public health has over the years corresponded with an upsurge in communicable diseases such as malaria, TB etc. At the same time, direct taxes, largely paid by the rich, are contributing less to government revenues. This means that most expenditure is borne by the poor. In the 1990s, healthcare costs have emerged as the leading cause of indebtedness in the country. Increasing unemployment and under-employment are pushing women and girls into low-paying agricultural labour and prostitution.

In this context of the withdrawing state, increasing privatization & NGO-ization, increasing unemployment and underemployment, and the increasing

politics of hate, there is greater violence on dalits, women, Christians and Muslims. Stigma and discrimination against HIV-positive persons is located within this growing climate of intolerance.



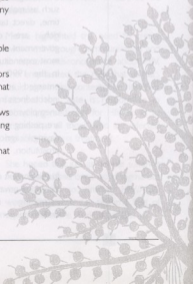
## Concluding Remarks

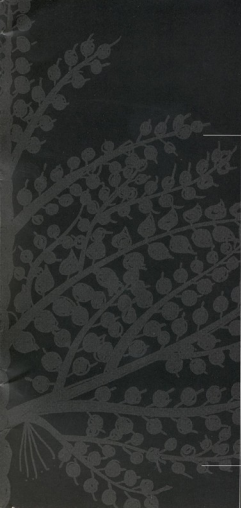
The People's Panchayat concluded with a statement from **Action Plus**, presented by **Meena Seshu** of SANGRAM.

Seshu noted that the People's Panchayat had shown that HIV is not finishing us, but that positive people are able to manage their illness, and fight back against it. Although HIV is typically thought of as a horrendous disease, the testimonies demonstrated that this epidemic can be fought by ordinary people. All the testimonies reflected resistance and the spirit of survival.

Seshu highlighted the following messages that had been powerfully presented by many of the testifiers:


- We do not want to be treated as people who have no hope in life.
- We want to tell the government, doctors and society that is trying to finish us off that they must stop doing it.
- We want to tell the government that laws such as ITPA are actually discriminating against us.
- We want to tell the Government that Section 377 is actually finishing us off.





**Action Plus is composed of:**

- Centre for Development Initiatives, Mumbai (CDI)
- Christian Medical College, Vellore (CMC)
- Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action, New Delhi (CREA)
- International Services Association, India (INSA)
- India Rural Reconstruction and Disaster Response Service, Chennai (PREPARE)
- Nalamdana, Chennai
- National Addiction Research Centre, Mumbai (NARC)
- The Naz Foundation (India) Trust, New Delhi (NAZ)
- Point of View, Mumbai (POV)
- Prayas, Pune
- Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha, Sangli (SANGRAM)
- The Service of Society Medical and Educational Foundation, Nasik (SOS)
- Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues, New Delhi (TARSHI)
- Tata Institute for Social Sciences, Mumbai (TISS)
- YR Gaitonde Medical, Educational and Research Foundation, Chennai (YRG CARE)

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A COALITION FOR RIGHTS, EDUCATION AND CARE IN HIV/AIDS

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