



08 November 2015 | E-Paper

BIHAR ELECTION RESULTS

NDA 11 GA 5 OTHERS 0

[Home](#) » [Leisure](#)

Last Modified: Sat, Nov 07 2015. 12 20 PM IST

The feminist man

Harish Sadani tries to achieve equal rights for women by including men in the fight rather than alienating them

89

11

3

Enter your email

Newsletter

Dustin Silgado



Sadani (second from left) with his students at Shivaji Park, Mumbai. Photo: Aniruddha Chowdhury/Mint

Sadani's family had moved to Mumbai from Karachi during Partition, and though they are Sindhis, he grew up speaking Marathi and considers himself a Mumbaikar. He saw his father, who had only been educated till class IX, behaving differently from other men, helping with housework and in the kitchen. He mimicked him and was encouraged to do so by his paternal aunts, who played a major role in raising him.

"I was struck by how the woman's role in a home was considered beneath a man's," Sadani says. "But I was inspired by the example of my father and realized that not all men need to be the same."

A lover of cinema, Sadani became a fan of [Smita Patil](#), the late actor and noted feminist, and would write her letters asking questions about the strong female characters she played.

"Smita Patil actually wrote back to me seven or eight times with detailed answers. She told me that she received tons of fan mail, but my questions forced her to think."

Inspired by one of the characters Patil played, Sadani completed a master's in social work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. During the course, he began working with a reputed women's rights organization, but was taken aback by their approach to dealing with instances of domestic violence. "They would organize *dharnas* (protests) outside the man's house and then try to blacken his face. But I realized that just attacking the man would not improve the situation. One needed to work with him to make sure he would not repeat his behaviour."

In 1991, Sadani responded to a newspaper advertisement by journalist C.Y. Gopinath inviting men who were opposed to domestic violence to a meeting. When he saw that more than 200 other men had also replied to the call, Sadani was motivated to start an organization that would work with men to achieve gender equality rather than treat them as villains.

Thus was born Mava (Men Against Violence and Abuse), an organization that aims to establish equal rights for women, but unlike most women's rights groups, targets men. The principle is quite simple: In a male-dominated world, there is no way to secure equal rights for all sexes unless men understand the failings of their behaviour and want to change it.

"You have to dispel the notion that feminism targets men," Sadani says. Mava portrays patriarchy as a common enemy of women and men, explaining that the same societal structures that deny women several rights also cast on men an unhealthy pressure to perform and achieve, and not show any vulnerability. "You have to convince men that they will also gain from gender equality," Sadani says.

Since its inception in early 1993, Mava has tried to work with men of all ages and economic classes. Sadani and his team of 20 volunteers organize one-on-one counselling for men by

publishes an annual Diwali magazine called *Purush Spandana*, which contains stories and articles written by men on the subject of gender.

In the past decade, the main focus has been helping young men aged 18-21 gain a better understanding of gender equality. Mava organizes youth programmes under the name of Yuva Maitri in seven districts of Maharashtra, including Mumbai and Pune. The group ties up with National Service Scheme cells in colleges and conducts orientation programmes about their work. Students can sign up to become Mava leaders, and, every year, four-five students from different colleges are selected to attend a five-day residential, gender-sensitization camp.

At these camps, Mava's volunteers, who come from backgrounds ranging from social work and psychology to education, talk to the male students about gender, stereotypes and sexuality, among other topics. These boys then go back to their colleges and conduct regular interactive sessions with other students, perform street plays and host film screenings on the subject of gender equality. More than 600 youth leaders are now working with Mava and a Yuva Maitri helpline that responds to questions on issues such as sex, gender and marriage.

Sitting on the wall enclosing the walking path that circumscribes Mumbai's iconic Shivaji Park, young Mava communicators excitedly list the changes in their lives since they became part of the organization's youth programme. Twenty-one-year-old Ravi Jaiswal now talks to his mother about her periods. He lives in a middle-class family in Mumbai, where sons and brothers contort their faces in various expressions of disgust at the mere mention of the word "period".

Sarath Warriar, a second-year mass media student at Ruia College, says he has become aware of the subtle differences in the way his sister and he are treated at home, and has changed his attitude towards her. "Also, I no longer tease girls in college, and my friends and I have made a pact not to use certain swear words, as we have understood why they make girls uncomfortable," he says. Akhilesh Bhat, a second-year commerce student at Siddhartha College, says he helps with household chores and speaks up when the men in his family try to stop his mother from going to the temple during her periods.

When Jaiswal, Warriar and Bhat talk about becoming gender sensitive, what is interesting is that they do not paint themselves as selfless crusaders fighting for the poor damsels around them. In fact, they are eager to explain how understanding the true meaning of gender equality has helped them, as men. All of them have found they are now able to talk to girls more easily.

only half of it is invited to participate?" Watson asked, referring to the predominance of women in the gender equality movement. The speech, which went on to talk about how gender stereotypes imprison men too, got over seven million views on YouTube.

Sadani says he is encouraged that a message he holds dear is now part of mainstream conversation. "Initially, some women activists did say that our group was diluting their cause," Sadani admits. It is understandable that Mava's characterization of men as victims of social structures may seem overly sympathetic to some. To women's groups, in particular, it may feel like a devaluation of the struggle women go through. "We have made it clear that the main objective is to secure equal rights for women, and accept that the struggles women face because of patriarchy are far worse than what a man may encounter," says Sadani.

"Men began to become active in fighting for women's rights during the 1980s, when there was an anti-rape movement in the country," says Vibhuti Patel, head of department of economics at the SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, who has been part of various women's rights organizations since the 1970s. "But women's groups did not want to admit them. Their attitude was that every man is a born rapist."

One of the biggest changes in the past five years has been the recognition by women's groups that working with men is important. "We have had esteemed women activists write forewords in our magazine and take part in other Mava activities," Sadani says. "Now, even most women's groups have at least one programme dedicated to working with men for gender equality."

"Activists like me actually prefer a group like Mava to talk to boys rather than a women's group as they can connect with them and that is an important role to fill," says Patel.

"Groups such as Mava actually help young girls because they sensitize young men to gender equality," says Shilpa Phadke, sociologist and author of *Why Loiter?* "Often, while working with young girls we find that they are more oppressed by their brothers than their fathers, and that is the age-group of boys Mava is working with."

There has also been an increase in the number of gender equality organizations that focus on men, with groups such as the Equal Community Foundation (ECF), the Forum to Engage Men and Samyak doing work similar to Mava's.

The ECF, run by Will Muir and Rujuta Teredesai, has devised a curriculum that is being taught to boys, aged 14-17, from low-income communities in Maharashtra as part of its Action for Equality programme. It has managed to form an important bridge with women's groups, who Muir says are sometimes threatened by groups working with men, and shares its curriculum with 20 women's rights groups in West Bengal.

Sadani, now 45, single and living with his mother, aunt and sister's son, says he battles gender stereotypes in his daily life and is therefore able to connect with young men attempting to do the same.

HOW TO GIVE

MAIN SPONSORS

DAWN (Direct Action for Women Now) Worldwide, a US-based charity run by Lisa Iyer; Maharashtra Foundation; and the US consulate in Mumbai.

BIGGEST NEEDS

Tie-ups with firms to hold gender-sensitization workshops for working professionals; and inclusion of a course on sex, sexuality and gender in the official state curriculum.

A DONATION OF Rs.10,000 CAN

Help fund residential gender-sensitization camps held for students. The camps cost around Rs.1 lakh for five days.

VOLUNTEERS CAN HELP

By getting any educational or other organization to agree to host a gender workshop that Mava volunteers will conduct.

CONTACT

www.mavaindia.org

Dustin Silgado

TOPICS: **HARISH SADANI** **MEN AGAINST VIOLENCE & ABUSE** **FEMINIST**

GENDER STEREOTYPES **GIVING ISUUE 2015**

First Published: Sat, Nov 07 2015. 12 34 AM IST

MORE FROM LIVEMINT

What women want in the workplace

Why we need affirmative action in the private sector

The return of Nikhil Bhagat

FROM THE WEB

Sponsored Links by Taboola

A Chance to WIN a Holiday Worth \$5,000! T&Cs Apply.

Aussie Home Loans

Pro Golf Coach Reveals Secrets to a Better Game

Hank Haney University

Is This Replacing Makeup?

Tan Physics

We Saved Ourselves \$32,500 On Our Mortgage Simply By...

finder.com.au

Brilliant Trick To Save Up To 70% On Electric Bill

Sunzy Solar

Unrecognizable! Cute Child Star to Ugly Adult

SportFluff

12 Rumored Gay Actors Who Play Straight Characters

StarFluff

7 Secrets Wealthy People Know About Currency Trading

Learntotrade

LATEST NEWS



Bihar elections live results:
Initial trends put NDA ahead
of Grand Alliance



**Maharashtra to seek Rs4,330
cr from centre for drought
relief**



**Honda recalling 25,300 cars
in US due to air bag issue**



**WHO declares end of Ebola
outbreak in Sierra Leone**



**Myanmar prepares for first
free vote in 25 years**



**Efforts to roll out GST from
next fiscal: Jayant Sinha**

HOME | COMPANIES | OPINION | INDUSTRY | POLITICS | CONSUMER | LOUNGE |

MULTIMEDIA | MONEY | SITEMAP

[Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Mint Code](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Mint Apps](#) | [About HT Media](#) | [Jobs](#) |

[Syndication](#) | [Mint on Sunday](#) | [RSS](#)

Copyright © 2015 HT Media Ltd. All Rights Reserved