



Next Steps....
Taking the Special Cell Process Ahead

The Special Cell
for Women and Children

Tata Institute of Social Sciences

Across the world patchwork is a women's art and skill, a record of their hopes and dreams. Patchwork enchants us for how it hums with diverse connections, possibilities, readiness, experimentation, for the myriad dreams that emerge from a finite set of weaves, threads, colours. Patchwork speaks of joyous assembly, of bringing together all our different voices and knowingness to one place, to see what transpires anew.

Cover: Image of an embroidery and mirror glass patchwork from a Kutchi Bag (Gujarat, first half of 20th Century)
From Textile Arts of India by Kokyo Hatanaka (Chronicle 1996)

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Ahead



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for

Special Cell
for Women and Children

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Glossary and Abbreviations



Aanganwadi Worker:	Women employed in ICDS centres to look after mother's and children's health, education, nutrition and hygiene..
ANM:	Auxiliary Nurse-Midwife
CBO:	Community Based Organization
GoI:	Government of India
GoM:	Government of Maharashtra
ICDS:	Integrated Child Development Services was launched with UNICEF support in 1975; it is the world's largest integrated child development program. The program provides health, nutrition and hygiene education to mothers, non formal pre-school education, and supplementary feeding for children and mothers.

MDS:	Mahila Dakshita Samiti
Mahila Thana:	Women's Police Station
NGO:	Non Governmental Organization
Panchayat:	Local self government body elected from and by communities.
PO:	Protection Officer
PWDVA:	Protection of Women Against Domestic Violence Act
TISS:	Tata Institute of Social Sciences
UNDP:	United Nations Development Program
UNIFEM:	United Nations Emergency Fund for Women





The Special Cell for Women and Children (hereafter Special Cell) was established in 1984 as a strategic collaboration between the Mumbai Police and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai to provide professional social work services to women and children facing violence. Special Cell aims to rebuild women's self-esteem, self worth and dignity; to offer immediate services in cases of family violence in the form of police assistance in registering complaints, legal aid, placement in institutions, and/or referral to other specialized social service agencies. In the last two decades Special Cell has provided services to a large community of women, and has been a research and training site for social work students, the police and a range of other stakeholders. Eventually, Special Cell is a social service that aims to restore the rights and dignity of survivors of violence through access to formal and non-formal mechanisms of justice. Special Cell's distinctiveness lies in how its process and ideologies bring together the state and its citizens in a partnership of trust and collaboration.

“We use authority

We use the *danda* (stick)

We use fear

We are wary

We look at people's actions, at their external worlds

You take time

You explain things

You work with people's emotions, their internal worlds

Your work is long term

Your work stays”

A senior police official talking to Anjali Dave of Special Cell describes the unique alliance that exists between Special Cell and the Police despite the differences in their approaches. This alliance between seemingly different actors has allowed them to come together and affirm their support of women survivors of violence; it has given the police the opportunity to re-look at the preventive aspects of their work and assess the efficiency of their tools and processes. Eventually, believes Dave, for social change there has to be education, a slow and involving process.

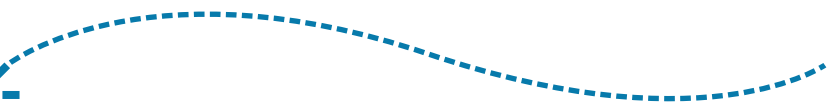
Since the passage of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2006) women's access to justice from violence has gained further legitimacy in the eyes of the law. Special Cell, therefore, becomes a workable model for states to adopt in honouring the changing legal environment. The formation of Special Cells in different districts illustrates the ways in which the process can link and work with women and families, the criminal justice system, the bureaucracy, civil society, academia and NGOs.

This publication spells out how the vision of Special Cell may be taken forward. What began as an experiment in Bombay fanned out across Maharashtra to Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, and now takes roots in two new states - Madhya Pradesh and Haryana - with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The ongoing evolution of these two new programs is detailed here. There are some general strategic guidelines for how the Special Cell process could be re-invented in new contexts; however, it is not structured as a how-to manual, for every new venture will have to unfold within its own unique socio-political and cultural realities. So, this publication serves as an invitation to experiment with this idea and explore its potential.



1. Giving visibility to violence against women, and legitimizing the violated women's concerns and needs within a pro-woman perspective.
2. Working with the individual and the larger system simultaneously within the context of trained social work practice.
3. Developing a strategic alliance with the police system for a more coordinated, coherent, and in-depth response to violence; and integrating social services for violated women within the system.
4. Engaging the woman in problem solving through process-oriented work to empower her.
5. Providing social services within the criminal justice system focusing on socio-legal aspects of the issue of violence against women.

And, achieving the above within the framework of the ethics and values of the profession of social work, and through services provided by trained full time social workers.



Strategic Locations: Special Cell and the Criminal Justice System



The Special Cell is strategically located within the police system in a given state. The legitimate power and authority of the police system enables Special Cell to say 'no to violence' at the individual and societal levels. At an operational level this means that trained social workers of Special Cell are based in police stations/offices and work with their counterparts in the police to provide services and support to women clients. Special Cell's location within the police system enables a crucial collaboration between civil society (women's groups, social service groups, lawyers/legal aid, employers, families etc.) and the criminal justice system. The synergy resulting from the differential strengths and contributions of the police system and the Special Cell enables a coordinated, multi-agency response to the issue of violence against women. Such a collaboration attempts to emphasize the criminal nature of violence against women rather than as 'tradition', a 'family matter' or a husband's 'right'. At the same time, Special Cell also seeks civil remedies to the problem of domestic violence, such as restoration of rights to property and access to the marital home.

Special Cell is now a program of the Government of Maharashtra implemented by TISS as a Field Action Project. Such collaboration and complementarity enrich the systemic response to domestic violence in the following ways:

- The police system addresses the legal aspects; the Special Cell works on the psycho-social-legal aspects of violence
- The police system addresses the problem in its 'here-and-now'; the Special Cell engages in problem solving within the context and history of the violated woman

- The police system accepts the violence as a reality and uses state power to repress/protect; Special Cell focuses on bringing about change in the woman's position and situation with the aim of empowering her to claim her rights.

(Adapted from: Mission Statement and Monitoring Indicators for Special Cell for Women and Children Within the Maharashtra State Police System, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 2004; pp 6-7)

Special Cell's Approach, Values and Framework of Practice



The Special Cell's priority is the woman survivor, irrespective of her class, religion, ethnicity or caste. The Cell recognizes the human rights of women and enables her to recognize and claim these. Her strengths and capacity to make decisions for herself are central to the problem-solving process at Special Cell. Special Cell's work draws from the values, principles and interventions of social work practice. Human beings are central to social work methods and interventions, based on the belief in the capacity of human beings (both survivor and aggressor) to change. Social work practice is built on the premise that a planned problem-solving process can bring about social change as human beings are resourceful and have the potential to transform their own lives. Such a perspective recognizes complex intersecting social and individual realities with varying stakeholder positions. Special Cell's work is committed to the most vulnerable and marginalized in our society, and a commitment to women victims of violence recognizes their marginalization in society. These values are based on principles such as:

- Self-determination, where a woman is encouraged to make informed decisions about her own life
- Individualization, where a woman is respected in her own right as a person and not on the basis of her relationships
- Acceptance of a woman in totality with a non-judgmental attitude, irrespective of her particular choices and behaviours
- Participation of a woman in the problem solving process
- Confidentiality and privacy

Feminist analysis and values have also been central in shaping Special Cell's perspectives and practice. Violence against women is viewed in the historical context of gender relations in a patriarchal society, one that generally deprives women of equal opportunities and the resources to claim their rights in relation to men's privileges and opportunities. The Special Cell is committed to helping women secure their rights to gain the opportunities and resources to gain control over their own lives. Such a pro-woman perspective recognizes that within a patriarchal society the misuse of power by men makes a woman vulnerable to violence. Yet, as a survivor she has the potential to engage in a process of self-empowerment and change her life situation. Moreover, Special Cell acts on the premise that violence against women is not a personal or family matter, that it is instead a matter to be addressed in the public domain. If the personal is political then individual women's experiences of violence are embedded within a larger matrix of socio-economic-cultural-political factors which tend to discriminate on the basis of gender.

(Adapted from: Mission Statement and Monitoring Indicators for Special Cell for Women and Children Within the Maharashtra State Police System, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 2004; pp7-10)



Violated Women and Children

Negotiating for non violence with stakeholders

Promoting the rights of women with systems and stakeholders

Building the violated woman's self confidence and self esteem

Empowering violated women

Building support systems for the violated woman

Enabling the violated woman to access services, resources, assets due to her

Community Groups

Creating an environment of acceptance of the human rights of women

Building awareness in community groups on the violated woman's problems and perspectives

Training community groups on issues pertaining to violence against women

Other Organizations

Creating an environment of acceptance of the human rights of women, especially violated women

Building awareness in organizations on the problems and perspectives of violated women

Police System

(Police personnel, police patils, Mahila Takrar Nivaran Kendras, Mahila Dakshata Samitis)

Building alliances with the Police and other systems in the interests of violated women and children

Building awareness in the police and other systems on the violated woman's problems and perspectives

Training police and other systems on issues pertaining to violence against women

Harnessing police authority to help violated women

July 1984

Special Cell begins in office of the Commissioner of Police, Mumbai



1986

Special Cell becomes member of the ACP's (Crime) Dowry Committee



1987

Special Cell initiates Project Help at Sion Hospital to assist victims of bride burnings to record their dying declarations



1988

Special Cell established in Dadar in Mumbai city



2006

Special Cell / TISS approached by UNDP /Government of India to replicate the process in Madhya Pradesh and Haryana.



2007

Special Cells opened in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh and in Ambala and Jind in Haryana





1994

Special Cell set up at Kandivali Police Station to cater to the Mumbai suburban area

2001

UNIFEM, TISS, and the Government of Maharashtra / Police sign a memorandum that makes Special Cell a joint program of all three partners and with an agenda to expand the work of the cell across the state



2002

Special Cells in Rajasthan and in Andhra Pradesh



2002-2003

Special Cells are set up in Navi Mumbai, Pune, Yavatmal, Aurangabad, Nashik, Wardha, and Nanded.



2005

Department of Women and Child Development / Government of Maharashtra takes over Special Cell





Special Cell's interventions are primarily directed at the individual level with a focus on immediate crisis intervention, as usually a woman seeks help at the time of a crisis, when the violence reaches a level that makes it either unbearable or threatens her life or that of her loved ones. Once the crisis has been addressed, if the woman desires, Special Cell's interventions focus on her longer-term development. In many situations Special Cell involves husbands/partners and families in problem solving towards this end, if it is appropriate and if the woman wishes so. Therefore Special Cell aims to create an environment that facilitates sharing and joint problem solving. In addition to working with women survivors and their families, Special Cell also addresses violence at the macro-level of systems with interventions such as:

- Building awareness among police personnel, members of women's vigilance groups, professional groups, women's groups, caste panchayats, youth, children's and community groups.
 - Advocacy for law and policy change on the issue of violence against women
 - Contributions to social work education on violence against women and gender analysis by integrating practical experiences into the teaching-learning process
 - Documentation, research and dissemination on issues of violence against women.

(Adapted from: Mission Statement and Monitoring Indicators for Special Cell for Women and Children Within the Maharashtra State Police System, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 2004; pp7)

A woman who has undergone emotional or physical violence within relationships that are supposed to be intimate and trustworthy, suffers an erosion of her self worth. She tends to feel helpless, might be mentally and physically overwhelmed, fearful, and confused. Despite these effects of violence, there are women who eventually decide they cannot endure it any longer. In doing so she is also challenging her social conditioning which encourages her to 'adjust' or accept the violence as normal or routine within marriage.

The focus of all activities and strategies of the Special Cell has been the woman who has experienced violence. Recognizing her pain, and the reality of violence, social workers at the Special Cell are trained to support and bolster a woman's sense of self as she takes the first step towards ending the violence.

Situations of violence commonly faced by women clients at Special Cell Maharashtra

Physical, sexual and emotional abuse and violence	59.6 %
Conflicts over money, property finances and dowry	18.7 %
Desertion, cheating and breach of trust	14.6 %
Husband's substance abuse problems	7.2 %

(Data for January-December 2006 from Special Cell Maharashtra)

Assistance sought by women clients

Negotiations to stop violence	17.6 %
Police interventions	8.3 %
Emotional support and counseling	47.6 %
Legal assistance	11.7 %
Negotiations and support to resolve financial conflicts	7.8%

(Data for January-December 2006 from Special Cell Maharashtra)

The Special Cell acts on the premise that violence against women is not a private matter, and is not just the responsibility of the woman to address. As per a client's expectations of non-violence, or divorce or separation, the Special Cell enables her to challenge her partner and her family, and make them part of the problem solving process.

The experience of the Special Cell has shown that women's most common expectation is for the violence to end, and for the marital relationship to continue. She usually wants to attempt this option before she takes a more permanent step of divorce. If she finds that the husband or in-laws cannot comply with this expectation, she returns to initiate divorce proceedings.

Strengthening Access to Justice: Special Cell & UNDP



Access to justice mechanisms can ensure that the most disadvantaged and marginalized amongst us have opportunities to challenge the discriminations they face, reduce the risk of violent conflict, protect their rights and remedy the deprivations and violence they have faced. Moreover, diverse and robust justice mechanisms from the ground up ensure better governance, laws and policies. Without access to justice and remedies citizens cannot protect themselves from abuses of power, the abuses that keep them in situations of poverty and discrimination. The work of Special Cell falls within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) mandate in India to strengthen access to justice. Therefore, with the support of the Government of India & UNDP Joint Program Special Cell's expansion into Madhya Pradesh and Haryana address the following aspects of programming under the Strengthened Access to Justice Initiative (SAJI):

- **Criminal Justice System (police, prison & prosecution):** Special Cell's interventions are primarily located in and through the police station. Special Cell conducts police training sessions that serve to build the capacity and sensitivity of police personnel to women's realities in the context of the family and domestic violence, enhance the responsiveness of the police to deal with cases of violence, and eventually enable women's and communities' trust in the system. By working alongside Special Cell counselors the police are exposed to a woman-sensitive approach and techniques in dealing with domestic violence. Special Cell also engages with non-formal justice systems such as caste panchayats which many citizens may access before they approach more formal justice systems.

- **Legal empowerment:** Special Cell enables women to access to benefits of the law available to them. By demystifying the process and letter of the law and placing options before women clients, Special Cell gives women a sense of their rights and entitlements. Support mechanisms such as rehabilitation, retrieval of personal belongings, making requests for monetary and other forms of support within an emotionally protective environment allow women to navigate their way through the legal system in a more empowered way.
- **Legal aid:** Through training and capacity building Special Cell's work empowers their NGO and academic partners to improve their outreach to communities on issues of violence against women.

Special Cell's interventions holistically address different levels of the justice system rather than treating them in isolation; at one level, there is an effort to improve the quality of service delivery by the police, and on another to empower survivors of violence to claim their rights. UNDP's primary objective through the SAJI process is to enable states to take ownership of programs such as Special Cell and integrate them into their justice delivery mechanisms. Therefore UNDP would help Special Cell gain access to higher levels of the administration and bureaucracy to advocate for space for these processes.





The Rajasthan Special Cell experience is another piece of the patchwork, as it were. The 'Mahila Salah Evam Suraksha Kendra' is the outcome of a strategic alliance between a coalition of nine women's organizations in Rajasthan and the Rajasthan police; based on the TISS-Maharashtra Police Special Cell strategy, the Kendra was envisaged as a space for women to seek alternatives to violent domestic conflict within mainstream justice mechanisms. Operating since 2002 and housed in Jaipur's Gandhi Nagar Mahila Thana the Kendra is staffed by social workers, counselors, lawyers and is supported by three police constables. As in other Special Cells women who approach the Kendra are asked to write out their applications for support, an important first step for this often the first time the individual woman begins to articulate her situation and her feelings. Based on this she is provided options by her social workers for mediations with the partner/marital family, police intervention, legal aid, or as is most common, emotional and psychological support to strengthen herself through a tenuous time. Through the network of NGOs and organizations across the state the Kendra is able to provide short-term rehabilitation and relocation options to its clients, psychiatric services, educational facilities for adolescent girls and soft loans for income generation activities.

A review of cases undertaken by the Kendra indicates that the seeds of Special Cell, once sown, can grow into entirely unique experiences. Going beyond cases of domestic violence the Kendra has taken on cases of different forms of violence against women and children, and through this has consistently pushed the local system to respond accordingly as well. Cases of child sexual abuse, marital rape and sexual harassment at the

workplace, none of which are adequately addressed by existing laws (with the exception of sexual harassment at the workplace, for which there are guidelines passed by the Supreme Court of India in 1997), have come to the Mahila Kendra and its social workers have attempted to address these situations through a combination of legal means, negotiations with families and by providing specialized counseling and rehabilitation services to its clients wherever available. In providing a more holistic approach to justice and justice mechanisms counselors at the Kendra work with their clients at a number of levels. In the case of Manju and Sherli, for example, two nurses who faced sexual harassment at their place of work, the Kendra supported them by submitting a memorandum to the Chief Minister, and pressed for the institution of the inquiry committee as mandated by the Guidelines against Sexual Harassment at the Workplace. The accused was finally found guilty. In cases of child sexual abuse the Kendra workers have negotiated with panchayats and communities to take on proactive role in providing support and relief to victims and their families, as well as to create public opinion on issues of violence against women and children.

The Kendra has also worked at building a strong relationship with the police system at all levels. Their good working relationships with rural police thanas around the Jaipur area have helped them locate and contact concerned parties. The Kendra has also tried to conduct police trainings and address overall police attitudes and responses to issues of violence against women.



The Government of Maharashtra-Police and the Department of Women and Child Development understood the needs of violated women, and then made efforts to institutionalize a response to it. I believe this indicates their acceptance of the enormity of the problem. As Special Cells were established within the Maharashtra police system it sparked the interest of both women's groups and state officials in *other* states, in understanding this unusual strategic alliance between the state and an academic institute committed to women's issues and developing interventions on violence against women. This led to the establishment of Special Cell in Rajasthan. This was followed by the same in Madhya Pradesh & Haryana.

Different stakeholders were fueled by curiosity and interest, they began discussing strategies, the relevance and impact of this work, each probing from within their frameworks/ideologies, all in turn enriching the work of the Special Cells. This buzzing generated energy, a hope of finding inroads to challenge violence, listening and learning from violated women's voices. This was a real quest for answers, pathways and strategies to work through violence, towards women's human dignity and self-fulfillment. The struggles and efforts of the Special Cell emphasized the importance of a formal systemic response violence against women. The intensive process-work required to support violated women through both informal and formal systems of justice, social services itself being one, have been acknowledged by the creation of the role of the Protection Officer in the new Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act.

Thus the loud protests and the sustained and steady work of women's groups have resulted in both visibilizing and validating the challenge to attitudes and systems that condone violence against women.

By Special Cell for Women and Children, December 2007





The following themes are intended to serve as general guidelines for the expansion of Special Cell, and can also shape specific local-level strategies and actions. The current phase of replicating Special Cells in Madhya Pradesh and Haryana with the support of UNDP is underway at the time of writing. These and past field experiences are now the basis upon which further interventions are planned.

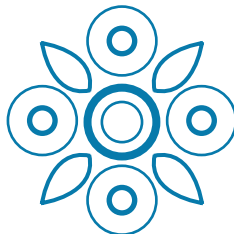
The success of Special Cell depends on the creation of an environment that accepts the need for institutional responsiveness to violence against women, and the human rights of women to be free from violence in private and public spaces. A first step towards the setting up of a Special Cell would be a thorough assessment of the existing systems that operate within the police system's response to domestic violence - Mahila Thanas, Family Counseling Centres, Women's Help Desks, Crimes Against Women Cell (Nodal Cells) - to indicate how these systems can be strengthened, allied with, supported or improved upon through the wider Special Cell process. An assessment of all the services and systems on the ground and the (history of the) relationships between the police, women's CBOs, the community and the state will give direction to the specific strategies towards the establishment of Special Cells in a given location.

Eventually, the themes and strategies identified here would need to be coordinated by a national level resource body which would plan, implement, support and monitor the expansion of Special Cells in new locations.

- The readiness of the state machinery to initiate processes towards the implementation of Special Cell, and a commitment at the senior-most levels of the police are essential. Visionaries, leaders and sensitive thinkers within the state and police system need to be identified as votaries of the attitudinal change that the Special Cell process demands. In Bombay for example, it was the commitment and sensitivity of Julio Ribeiro, then the Police Commissioner of Mumbai, at the highest level of the police system that ensured the initial establishment of the first Special Cell.
- The presence, scope and confidence of the women's movement in the state, and services provided by them can provide the gender perspective that will form the foundation of the Special Cell process. This can ensure that the needs and interests of women survivors and their children remain centre stage. For example, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have a robust tradition of women's organizing and this has not only allowed for the smooth establishment of Special Cells, but also provides a vital link between the state and civil society. This has been particularly emphasized by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women as a strategy to enable women's access to justice in contexts of violence (2003). A grounding in a women's human rights perspective also serves as an ideological barometer and ensures certain standards of practice. Women's organizations could be drawn into training of social workers to deal with women's traumas, to strengthen them and to suggest a range of resolution systems and practice. On the other hand there is a limited grassroots movement in Haryana, and the greatest responsibility for

the establishment of a Special Cell lies with government departments, the police and an academic partnership with the Department of Social Work at Kurukshetra University.

- There needs to be trust in both directions - from the police and from the state in families, women and communities, and social workers, and vice versa; both sides need to be committed to working with the other. Advocacy and partnership-building towards this is therefore required, depending on the history of their inter-relationships.
- The combination of a strong ideological foundation, and the spirit of problem solving and collaboration between women and the state underlies the success of Special Cell. An enabling environment is one that grounds itself in a perspective of zero tolerance, accepts the inviolability of women's human rights and the state's responsibility in addressing violence against women. These perspectives shape and guide the operating guidelines and principles of social work practice within Special Cell.



Structural Relationships

Based on the history of relationships between the state, the police, communities, local government, CBOs and service providers, each Special Cell will evolve its own distinctive relationship with them. According to the Strategic Planning Process undertaken by TISS in 2006 (Mahtani 2006) there are four possible ways in which Special Cells can be established within the system:

- As a state-sponsored autonomous body, similar to the Mahila Samakhya model
- As a part of a department of the government
- As a government scheme to be implemented by non-governmental organizations/ academic institutions
- As an independent women's organization

How each state links to its Special Cells has implications for its continued support of, commitment to, and funding of the process. Therefore prior to the implementation of the Special Cell process all stakeholders need to agree on its structure, location, ownership, and funding.

Protection Officers

In keeping with provisions made in the recent Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 (PWDVA) the expansion of Special Cell could incorporate a trained cadre of Protection Officers (POs). The PO embodies the validity and visibility of the work of Special Cell, the women's movement and state-affiliated service providers through the mechanisms of the law. According to the PWDVA the PO assists

Magistrates in his/her duties and functions under the Act, provides the woman client with support, enables her to access services such as medical aid, shelter etc. (PWDVA 2005 Chapter III: 4-5), thereby being a link between women clients and service providers and the justice system. Moreover, the Act allows for the creation of cadres of POs from the ground up, offering the possibility for a network of support systems for women. The supportive role of the PO is based on the social work model and embodies elements of that form of support and assistance.

Academic Partnerships & Leadership

An academic institution such as TISS provides a wealth of resources to support and enable the success of Special Cells. The institution has been a source of training, research, staff, and the ideological and intellectual tradition that guides Special Cell. TISS continues to establish Special Cells in collaboration with the state/police, but its future role could evolve in newer directions. In Haryana TISS has found a like-minded partner in Kurukshetra University (however at this time there is no formal relationship between the two institutions) and could guide them towards taking on training/research/advocacy, and to link the different arms of the state. In Madhya Pradesh however TISS has established a partnership with NGOs rather than an educational institution. TISS itself could become a bridge between institutions in other states, serve as a resource centre and guide, or as a more involved working partner where required. While TISS may take on initial negotiations to establish a new Special Cell in one state, in another it could serve as a resource for training, or merely be a 'sleeping' partner in a third. The eventual role of an academic institution such as TISS would depend on how it works together with the state mechanisms to develop the competencies needed for the successful implementation of the Cell.



Special Cell has two centres of operation in Dhar - Bhadnawar, a tribal and rural area, and Dhar town, an urban location. Special Cell works through the police-run *Parivar Paramarsh Kendra* (Family Counseling Centre, or FCC). The FCC is staffed by volunteer social workers and police officers and their approach has been conventional: the FCC would traditionally counsel women in situations of violence to return to their marital homes and family, to 'adjust' to the violence. Working in these two locations since April 2007 Special Cell has three priorities: to raise the quality of services available to women victims through the FCC; and through this to build a strong partnership with the police as strategic partners; and third, to make the community aware of the rights of women and the services available through the FCC.

There are already a range of police initiatives for women in Madhya Pradesh: Mahila Thanas (Women's Police Stations), Telephone Help Lines (now mostly defunct as funds have dried up), Mahila Desks (Women's Desks in Police Stations), and FCCs. Special Cell aims to bolster their work. According to Mr. Veerendra Mishra, a Sub Divisional Police Officer in Madhya Pradesh who has supported Special Cell's work in the state, "it was important that Special Cell not replicate existing services, and their work is now slowly improving the quality of the service the FCCs are offering to women."

An important feature of the socio-political landscape of Dhar is its large tribal population. Unlike caste Hindus the Bhils and Bhilalas of Dhar do not have a tradition of dowry, but there is instead a bride price (known locally as '*nathra*') that a groom must pay to marry a woman. If the couple were to

separate, the girl's family must return the bride price, and if a woman were to re-marry her new husband would pay the first husband the bride price. This exchange of women for money serves to reinforce the general exploitation they face in society. Domestic violence is equally a reality of tribal populations, but as according to Anita Pagare, Special Cell counselor from Nashik, "Adivasi (tribal) communities have faced so much violence and discrimination, they are no strangers to it. However because of this history of oppression, and women's status generally being the lowest, domestic violence is practically a non-issue. There is such a long tragic history of violence in Adivasi communities that violence against women is sometimes not as 'important' or 'relevant' as other forms of violence towards them as a people." Additionally, tribal communities often resort to their own local conflict resolution systems and strategies, so a case of family violence is usually referred to a local panchayat first to decide what must be done in that situation. What this means for Special Cell is that the tribal population of Dhar is less likely to avail of the services of the police-run Family Counseling Centres, and that women's needs and realities tend to be ignored. Special Cell counselors now make an attempt to reach out to tribal populations and offer women a space that their own local justice systems may not be able to afford them. One way in which communities can be effectively reached is through the service providers in close contact with them, so Special Cell workers have begun to liaise with and train aanganwadi workers. They introduce discussions on violence and women's rights and give them information about the services available through the FCC that could then be passed on to women in their communities.

Special Cell's work in Dhar also focuses on establishing a good working relationship with the police. According to Sangeeta a Special Cell worker

in Dhar: “we are not separate from the police and their work at the FCC, we are not 'just a NGO'. We constantly reiterate that we are a part of the police service for women victims of violence.” Being as it is in its infancy, this process is slow. Special Cell’s objective is to get the police on their side, to train them in Special Cell values, and to raise the quality of the services they provide to women in situations of domestic violence. According to Trupti Panchal, Coordinator of Special Cell, it takes time to integrate the Special Cell approach into the existing police system. However, the entry of Special Cell has definitely charged the atmosphere and is beginning to revive the FCC and the police system. Discussions on gender, women’s rights and violence are now more common, an important step in giving the police response a more woman-sensitive feel. Mr. Mishra also adds that Special Cell’s most important contribution could come from improving the skills of existing FCC counselors.

Special Cell's work challenges conventional attitudes about gender and domestic violence, and through this the very *locus standi* of the FCC. While the FCC itself is an important service that recognizes the reality and problem of domestic violence, deeper systemic attitudes endemic to its functioning only serve to reinforce traditional hetero-patriarchal values. The FCC ends up being a mechanism to get conflicted partners back together again rather than emphasize the woman survivor's emotional and psychological needs. Therefore attitudinal change in the people who staff the FCC and the system around it is a critical function of Special Cell’s mandate. Special Cell is also introducing their process and methods to their NGO partner, Mahila Chetna Manch, to enable the organization to guide the police system. As the Rajasthan experience has shown civil society partners can significantly assist the Special Cell/FCC in its work.



Special Cell has begun its work in Haryana in the districts of Jind and Ambala. As with many parts of the country Special Cell in Haryana faces a particularly challenging task in addressing domestic violence within the context of North Indian cultural patterns of marriage, family and women's roles. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes prevail, and women are under the control of family and 'tradition'. Local caste panchayats are powerful in Jind and Ambala and women have to ask for permission to participate in discussions on community and family matters. Marital conflicts and violence are often addressed by these panchayats but usually in favour of family and marital integrity, rather than the rights of a victim of violence. Haryana's poor sex ratios are further evidence of women's secondary status in that society. Addressing these attitudes within the community and in the police force in particular is a focus of Special Cell's efforts.

However, the senior levels of the police in Haryana have shown a readiness to adopt the Special Cell approach and are being extremely proactive in its implementation. Similarly, the response of the Home Department and the Department of Women and Child Development have been positive and they welcome this initiative. Being in direct contact with decision-makers and the state machinery has eased the groundwork in setting up the Cells.

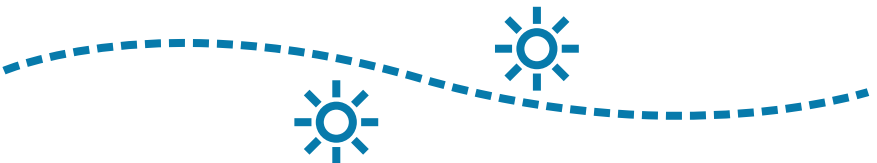
Balwant Singh, a Special Cell counselor who has worked in the Rajasthan program feels that the police have been open to Special Cell's approach and have begun to refer cases of domestic violence to them. "We are lucky to have such a positive response from the state and senior police officials, but the main challenge for us is the traditional and orthodox attitudes that

govern gender relations and marriage and families here. Women have no voice at all, it is a patriarchal society where the rights of menfolk are established. Women are not encouraged to talk about domestic violence and if they do it is either ignored or silenced. Jind is a particularly rural district and old attitudes still rule. We are trying to break the silence around domestic violence by meeting with communities and their leaders..... but it is not easy!”

The Department of Social Work in Kurukshetra University is an important civil society partner in Haryana and are also being trained to eventually support the police and Special Cell. Unlike other states, there is a limited pool of women's organizations or NGOs who could effectively partner with the police and the state. Therefore Special Cell workers here reach out through the ICDS and aanganwadi workers who are in direct contact with communities.

The Haryana initiative is an unusual breakthrough in terms of the readiness of the state to adopt the Special Cell process, and UNDP's role has also been significant in providing this opportunity to both sides .This allows a focus to remain on the work rather than on having to struggle with the system.

And thus.... the experiments continue....



It was, a first, important that you
See us
So we spoke of Vision.

And now
 you must Hear us
As we are not the same,
 nor do we have similar
 stories, beliefs, needs.

But, we have
Standpoints
From which we Know,
 So
Do not tell us what is True
or ask for Proof.

We are a web of interconnected
Meanings,
Diverse but interdependent,
 and Spirited
To resist being silenced and invisible.

- Anonymous -





In Maharashtra

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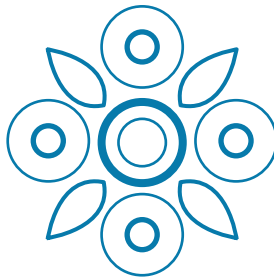
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Special Cell would like to thank

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Police Departments in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh

All our social workers and police partners in Special Cells across the country

Tata Institute of Social Sciences