

Inter-country custody battles affect children

Intense custody battles in courts between estranged spouses of different nationalities cause children "severe mental stress", necessitating a law on inter-country child custody cases, Chief Justice of India J.S. Khehar said at a seminar organised by the International Law Association on Saturday.

Eight killed in Haryana road accident

Eight members of a family were killed when their vehicle collided head-on with a truck in Haryana's Jhajjar district on Friday night, the police said on Saturday. The accident took place near Mataur village, around 75 km from Delhi. Both vehicles seemed to be going at high speed, the police said.

Mahadalit women denied temple entry in Bihar

Tension gripped a village in Bihar's Bhagalpur district after dozens of Mahadalit women were denied entry into a 200-year-old Kail temple, the police said on Saturday. The women said the temple door was locked. They have decided to lodge a complaint with the administration.

Russian prisoner goes on hunger strike

An Russian national, lodged in Tihar's Tihar jail, has gone on hunger strike. Sergei went on July 1 from a cell for living in India for years without a passport. Following the strike, he was taken to a hospital. The jail authorities said he was refusing to eat and threatened to harm himself. He was force-fed.

Rolling out success, one khakra at a time

Chaakri, a snack-making unit set up by a not-for-profit organisation, ensures a source of income for women in arid Raigad

VARDA SHARMA
SUDHAGAD

For 31-year-old Baby Gupta of Parli village, life with an alcoholic, unemployed husband was one long struggle. She and her two young sons had to depend on her father-in-law, who often belittled them for the hard work. Finding a job was not an option as her family had not encouraged her education.

But when her husband died in 2009, Ms. Gupta decided to find a job — much against her in-laws' wishes.

She approached the Shramik Naari Sangh (Sa-Ni-Sa), a charitable society with a vocational centre at Rajnagar, not far from Parli in western Maharashtra. Ms. Gupta joined the society's Mahila Gruh Udyog, which manufactures *khakras* — a thicker Gujarati cousin of the *popad* — under the brand name *Chaakri*, which means service.

Speedy road to success

"I had never heard of *khakras*, much less knew how they looked or tasted," says Ms. Gupta. However, she quickly learnt how to roll out the crisp snack and soon became one of the unit's top performers. Today, she makes *khakras* from as much as 18 kg to 20 kg of dough every day. "I have learnt to make different varieties," she says with a smile. "And I teach the juniors too."

Most of Ms. Gupta's fellow workers at the unit have a similar story of domestic conflict and deprivation. They come from around 20 hamlets in the underdeveloped Sudhagad taluk of the arid Raigad district, west of Pune. With little employment for the men, these women have taken on the task of keeping the home fires burning.

The Shrimad Rajchandra Aatma Research Centre started Sa Ni Sa in 2004, says Simi Thapar, a trustee. It aimed at providing



Team work: Women cutting greens for the different varieties of *khakra* at the unit of Sa Ni Sa. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

employment opportunities for the women of Parli. But monetising their skills was a challenge.

"Unlike women in rural areas in the rest of the country, those in Sudhagad lacked a specialised local skill," says Shrutu Sherth, who heads the Chaakri unit. "We felt that the one thing every Indian woman has mastered is the art of rolling *rotis* (flat breads). We decided to tap this and started the *khakra* project in 2005."

Quality assurance

Jyotsnaben Shah, who began training tribal women in the process, and oversees the quality and audit functions, says the unit started in a small kitchen with two or three women making a single variety of *khakra*. Today, 60 women, aged between 18 and 45, make around 10 varieties of the savoury. "We stringently follow

quality assurance processes," says Ms. Shah. "Laboratory testing is done to ensure quality and that the product range is compliant with the statutory food grade packaging norms and licensing requirements. The Chaakri unit has an FSSAI licence."

Bosky Bavisi, who heads Sa Ni Sa's sales operations and is also a trustee, is proud that the *khakras* now have a global presence. "We are available in 95 to 100 stores in the U.S. in California, Illinois, Nevada and Texas. Very soon our products will be launched in some premium stores in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. The *khakras* are also available in some of the leading stores in Dubai and [will be available] very soon in Singapore."

Perhaps more important than those international markets is how the work has

transformed the lives of women in the area.

Identity, independence

Sanchita Sachin Jhambulkar, 32, a resident of Gotharade village, who has been working with Chaakri for the past eight years, says, "Before I started working here, it used to be difficult to make ends meet. My husband works at construction sites, and his income is erratic. I wanted my son to get an education, unlike his parents." Ms. Jhambulkar's 12-year-old son studies in Class VI.

Megha Jadhav (23), was able to resume her studies, thanks to Chaakri. She dropped out of school to support her family after her father was struck by paralysis. Financial independence after joining the unit meant she could resume her studies via distance education. "Chaakri encouraged me to study again, and funded

couraged us to expand the product range and set up the vocational training centre in the unit itself."

Today, women at Udaan make a wide range of handmade products from paper bags to garlands, door strings, shoulder bags and mobile pouches to yoga mats, jewellery and room fresheners.

In 2014, Sa Ni Sa bought a bus to provide transport to and from work for the women. They are also served breakfast every day. "Our vision is to provide employment to 800-900 women and open centres in various surrounding hamlets," says Ms. Sherth.

Caring community

Chaitanyaben Rambhia, who supervises the training and helps with administrative work and staff welfare, says, "It is fulfilling to see the girls progress, not just socio-economically but also in terms of their confidence and self-reliance."

For the women in the units, life revolves around home and the workplace. "Many of them have never travelled beyond their villages. Picnics are organised for them twice a year to places such as Mumbai, Pune and Alibaug, which the staff look forward to eagerly," says Ms. Sherth.

Sa Ni Sa also conducts free, medical camps for women and their families every quarter. It also organises workshops on issues such as teamwork, motivation, self-expression and awareness of government schemes.

Above all, there is the sense of community. "We are given surprise gifts," says 23-year-old Surekha Ghate, who has been working with Udaan for the past eight years. And birthdays are a big deal. "I had never heard of birthday celebrations before," says Ms. Rambhia. "It is such an emotional moment when we cut cakes."

Drugs, in the dark half of the web

MARRI BARRU
HYDRABAD

An online marketplace for narcotic drugs?

That is what the Telangana Prohibition and Excise officials found when they questioned three persons caught with narcotic drugs. The Internet was the route they used to peddle their wares.

Calvin Mascarenhas, one of those arrested, showed them on a laptop computer how one could reach into the Dark Web — part of the world wide web — using a special browser.

When he showed them scores of websites on the Dark Web that are ready to supply any narcotic substance, it dawned on the police that this was a new modus operandi for drug peddlers. But how do drug receivers pay the suppliers?

The receivers said they use Bitcoin, a form of digital currency, to pay the suppliers, baffling the investigators even more. All gangs they had busted so far had been getting narcotics from places such as Goa, Mumbai and through foreigners — mostly African nationals.

A photographer in the film industry, among those accused in a narcotic drug module, admitted he was procuring drugs through the Dark Web.

"We realised that we have no control over Dark Web or Bitcoins at the State level. A mechanism has to be evolved to keep tabs on the Dark Web," P&E Director Akun Sabharwal said. Mr. Sabharwal is meeting principals and managers of schools and colleges in the city to create awareness on the need to watch out against students becoming victims of narcotic drugs.

An anti-narcotics campaign with video clips has been launched.