



Ring the Bell

Stop domestic violence

In its next phase, Bell Bajao, a campaign that urges members of the public to intervene simply by ring the bell and stop domestic violence, has called out to men around the world to participate in the movement against violence towards women.

By Charukesi Ramadurai

He is unable to focus on his game of carom because of a quarrelling couple the next door. The man's verbal and physical abuse against his wife is audible. He walks over to that house, rings the bell and asks the husband, who opens the door, an inane question, staring at him in an intimidating fashion.

The bell was rung once more; an incident of domestic violence prevented once more. This ad made by Breakthrough, an international human rights' organisation based in the



Anoushka Shankar in performance for Bell Bajao

USA, was inspired by the true story of a bus conductor in India who 'rang the bell'.

The Bell Bajao Campaign has been on in India since 2008, launched initially with the support of the Clinton Global Initiative. The primary aim was to get men, conspicuously absent in this discourse, to be active partners in the fight against domestic violence. It has since reached more than 150 million people in India, through ads, mobile video vans, social media and community mobilisation programmes.

The campaign adopted by Pakistan, China, Vietnam and Malaysia, is spreading to more countries. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon is now its first global champion and he has linked it to his UNiTE End Violence Against Women campaign.

But how will ringing a bell help? According to Ban Ki-Moon, "This is a simple step but a very effective one, it interrupts what's happening. It shows that people are watching and listening. It may give the woman the chance to escape. It helps to stop the violence."

Take a look at these chilling statistics. According to a 2012 survey by the Thomson Reuter's Foundation, India has been ranked among 20 worst countries for a woman. Also, UNICEF's Global Report Card on Adolescents 2012 shows that 57 per cent of boys and 53 per cent of girls in the 15-19 age



group in India find wife-beating acceptable.

The issue is by no means restricted to a developing country. According to a report from the Home Office, domestic violence accounts for almost a quarter of all recorded violent crime in the UK. And in any given year, there are 13 million incidents of physical violence or threats of violence against women from partners or former partners.

Domestic violence is a difficult issue to address since people hesitate to interfere, shrugging it off as a personal matter between the couple. The campaign seems to have made an impact in this respect. Mallika Dutt, president and CEO, Breakthrough, says, "We found that there was almost a 10 per cent increase in those who felt that the community should intervene and that women should take legal action when facing abuse. Not only did people's attitude change, people actually took action by reporting incidents to the police or finding other ways to interrupt."

The campaign set in motion its next phase, the global launch of One Million Men on March 8 (International Women's Day) during the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York. If a billion women rose and danced recently (onebillionrising.org) against violence directed at them, this one was intended to be a wake up call for men.

Says Dutt, "This is a call to men to step up and make concrete and actionable pledges to help stop violence and discrimination against women. Promises could be submitted through video or text or pictures – the goal is to find ways in which men can share their promises and report back on what steps they took to implement them." There were speeches, social media discussions, protest marches, film screenings, musical performances, candlelight vigils that took place at various cities around the world including New York, New Delhi, Rio de Janeiro, Stockholm and Johannesburg.

As part of the launch in New York, actor Sir Patrick Stewart spoke about his own experience of growing up in a violent household and said, "Rape and abuse aren't lady problems that we need to fix with our lady solutions. Men and women need to work together on these issues, creating programs in schools, talking openly about solutions. The guy who's going to go on to commit violence against women isn't a nameless ogre. He's somebody's brother. Somebody's son. He's somebody you know, right now. So why wouldn't you want to talk to him now, before it's too late?"

So the next time you hear or see an instance of domestic abuse, don't turn a blind eye. Lift a finger. And stop the violence. **🔔**

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