

# She style substance spirit

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## THE NEW AGE WOMAN

### THE TALK

## They work to free men from the shackles of patriarchy



**Vrunda Juwale** spoke to **Harish Sadani** who, along with his team, has a vision to create a gender-just society where men and women live in harmony

**M**en Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) is the voluntary men's organisation that has been working since 1993 to bring about a change in societal attitudes and help prevent violence and abuse of women. Harish Sadani, hon secy, MAVA, recently became the Grand Winner at a global online competition organised by Ashoka Changemakers, US and Campus of Excellence, on the theme of 'Preventing Violence Against Women'. Harish, who was in Pune last week to participate in a panel discussion on 'Our Right To Live Without Fear', has been for the past four years, working with a number of male youths (age-group 18 to 20 years) in Pune and Mumbai. The youngsters are being trained to communicate with other young men on masculinity and sexuality-related matters.

Harish elaborates on this project and the change it has brought

among the communicators as well as the part of society they have interacted with...

**There have been many groups working for gender equality. How are you different from them?**

We are working for the liberation of men from the shackles of patriarchy and for that we necessarily approach men. We have continuous dialogue with women's movement, I think that is our differentiating factor.

**How did the idea of involving young men come up?**

Over the years, MAVA had started facing the problem of retention of men activists. In 2006, when I received the Health and Population Innovation Fellowship, I created this programme called Yuva Maitri. We chose 16-17-year-old men because that's the age when attitudes are shaping up. I chose colleges from Jejuri, Saswad, Hadapsar, Na-

rayangaon and Manchar as also the Haribhai Desai College behind Shaniwarwada. We started working with 33 students out of which we could retain 18 and that's a pretty good retention rate, we are told.

**When men show the sensitive or soft side of their personality, there is a tendency to brand them as effeminate or pansy. Have you faced such a situation?**

When I was young, I used to stay in a Mumbai chawl and was teased as *baylya* (pansy) because I expressed my views about gender equality. It was at the back of my mind when we started MAVA. For me, this mocking is a reflection of society's attitude towards women, and the only way to deal with it is by exposing men to newer ideas of equality and man-woman relationships.

Our communicators have gone through such situations. In the first year, the boys were trained and in

the second year, they had to use the training to help other youngsters to relook at gender stereotypes and masculinity. Initially, the communicators, as we call them, were quite enthusiastic, but some of them gave up after being mocked at by other men. Of course, there are those who did not get affected by all that, like Sunil Chachar from Mavdi Kadepathar village and Ganesh Phule from Khanavdi village. Despite coming from a patriarchal background, Sunil does an equal share of household work today. As for Ganesh, he fought against his parents when they forcefully tried to marry off his sister to a man she did not know. He convinced them to put off their plans. And when he realised that his sister was mentally prepared for marriage, he got a guy, arranged for some girl-boy meetings before his sister could say yes.

**How have women responded to your movement?**

In the initial few years, there was skepticism among women about our movement, but when we took stands on certain gender issues, they realised that we walk the talk and the credibility increased. Now many have warmed up to our efforts. Yes, there are some who still think that women's empowerment is the domain of women, that we are eating into their space but it's an unfounded fear.

**Where will the movement go from here?**

I think the question whether men will really change has been answered now. We can see the change around. From now on, we will engage in capacity building of young men in Maharashtra, have dialogue with youth bodies and work towards upscaling it in the other parts of the state.

MAVA's official website is [www.mavaindia.org](http://www.mavaindia.org). It runs a helpline 022 2682 6062.