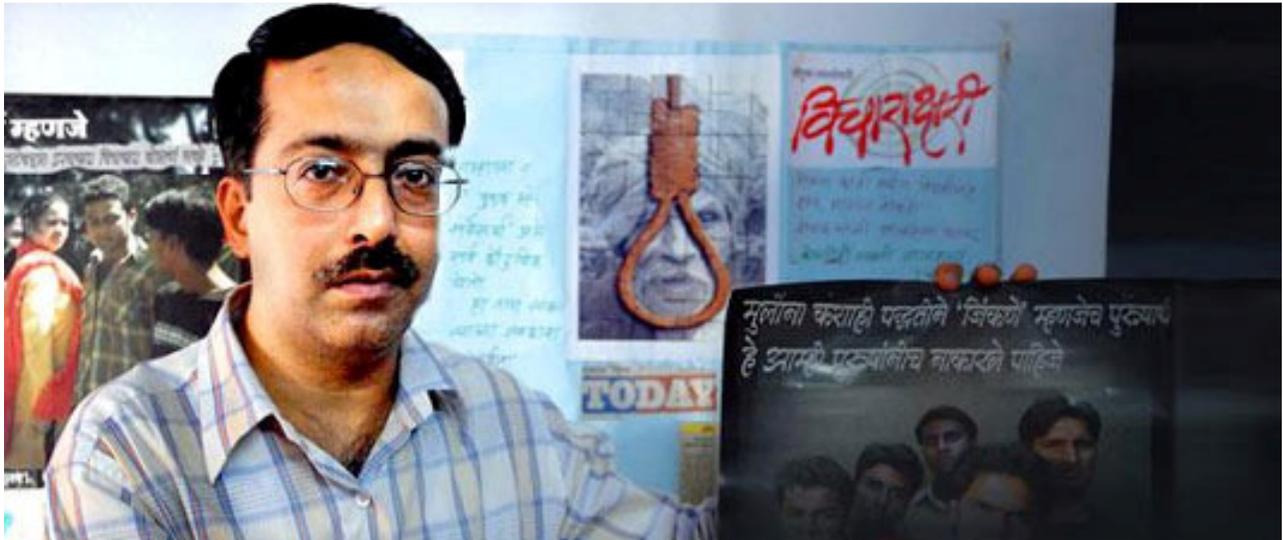


# Men Against Violence and Abuse

New Ideas About Men and Masculinity



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In 1991, Harish Sadani answered an Indian newspaper advertisement that read, “Wanted: Men who believe that women are not for battering.” He was one of 205 men who responded to the ad, which had been posted by a prominent Indian journalist.

After a year of meetings with those like-minded men, Sadani decided to launch the nonprofit organization, Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA). It is the first men's organization in India to intervene directly against gender-based violence on women.

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Since 1993, MAVA has been working to build a movement that explores the role of men as partners and stakeholders by addressing gender issues, including women’s empowerment, through cultural advocacy, direct intervention and youth education initiatives. Sadani believes that gender-based violence against women is a human rights issue, as well as a public health concern that has serious consequences for women’s physical and mental health.



MAVA’s pioneering work addresses these critical issues by creating a men’s movement that deconstructs masculinity. It replaces the patriarchal value system that disrespects women with an egalitarian alternative that empowers girls and women and improves their quality of life.

“Over the years, gender issues, including gender-based violence against women have been seen largely as ‘women’s issues’ by women’s organizations, other developmental activists and governmental bodies in India,” Sadani said. “Traditional efforts to tackle gender-based violence against women have concentrated on empowering women to assert themselves and prevent violence. This approach totally isolates and insulates men from the process of transformation and keeps them embedded in their patriarchal mold.”



In 2006, MAVA launched a new initiative, “Friendship Among Youths or “Yuva Maitri” in Marathi, the official language of the state of Maharashtra, where MAVA is based. The initiative was named to encourage young men to see women as friends and equals, rather than as subordinates or sex objects.

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sadani’s initiative, Yuva Maitri (Friendship Among Youths: MAVA’S Initiative on Gender & Masculinity: Engaging Young Men and Redefining Masculinity, was as winner in the Preventing Violence Against Women competition. Sadani will participate in Ashoka’s Campus of Excellence event to be held in Spain in October 2010.

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Yuva Maitri works with young men, ages 18 to 20 in several Maharashtra districts on issues involving masculinity, sexual health and gender-sensitive behavior. Sadani specifically targeted young men as a vital yet unreached population group, because he believes that their impressionable younger minds are more receptive to questioning and attitudinal changes.

MAVA’s theory is that a focused, long-term effort with these young men can significantly prevent gender-based violence. Yuva Maitri selects young people from colleges and rural communities who possess the leadership skills and creativity to become “communicators” who will train their peers in an intense, yet sensitive manner, to communicate with other young men on gender, healthy relationships, masculinity and sexuality-related matters.

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These trained communicators provide a safe, non-threatening platform for other young men to share comfortably their fears, thoughts, dilemmas and concerns, and get exposed to newer ideas on men and masculinity, including sexual health, male-female relationships and other gender matters.

To date, Yuva Maitri, with the encouragement of college and university faculty, has reached more than 20,000 young men and 5,000 young women via a series of interactive awareness sessions and outreach programs for the general student population and youth in the communities.

A baseline evaluation before Yuva Maitri's launch found that the primary source of information on sexuality for 90 percent of the group came from "blue films" or pornographic films, which are illegal in India. Now, the more than 25,000 young people who participated in Yuva Maitri's programs have gained factual information about health and sexuality, including HIV /AIDS, while simultaneously internalizing alternative, positive models of masculinity focus on gender equality.

Another key outcome has been a sizeable number of adolescent boys and young men have learned to talk comfortably about gender and masculinity issues in a healthy manner that is not disrespectful of women. The Yuva Maitri communicators have also observed that many young men have developed a new ease in communicating with girls in their colleges, and have ceased teasing and harassing them.



Many of the young men have started sharing work at home, including tasks that are traditionally viewed as "women's work," such as picking up dishes after meals, washing clothes, and sweeping floors. Some students are advocating for greater freedom of mobility and expression for their mothers and sisters, and one student even stood up against his sister's arranged marriage in which she did not have a say.

Sadani knows that changing traditional male mindset is a long-term, challenging process which will necessitate the involvement of many stakeholders, including the government, law, media, educational system, as well as women's and men's groups.

