



Harish Sadani

Harish Sadani was brought up in a community housing home where as a child he witnessed his neighbours' lives up close, observing how women faced oppression and violence even at home. His home reversed the order of the world outside. His father's sensitivity and willingness to share 'women's chores' coupled with the influence of paternal aunts, left a strong imprint on his character. At an early age, he began to question gender stereotypes. Why was he teased as being a 'sissy' when his friends found him helping his aunts with chores at home or when he refused to play with boisterous boys preferring his own company?

These questions plagued him throughout his adolescence. As a young adult he started writing letters to editors of newspapers and magazines to bring attention to gender-related issues. Inspired by the film portrayals of actress late Smita Patil, he began to write to her - as perhaps any fan would - but specifically focusing on the roles played by her through the lens of gender. She responded to his letters and thus began an unusual and brief pen-friendship where the young Harish analyzed her cinema roles and she offered her own views in return.

As a young man and a student of social work at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, Harish began to feel that the exclusion and absence of men in movements to fight violence against women was a big gap that needed to be closed. Identifying men as perpetrators was not enough; the attempt to change their attitude was essential. "Men have been seen as 'part of the problem' by all concerned, but unless they are seen as part of the solution', can we really address the root cause of the 'gender' problem? " He pondered while working as a volunteer in a leading women's organization. Men were not born violent, they were conditioned by the patriarchal society's image of masculinity and were trapped in it - it was time to question the image and break out of it. Men needed emancipation.

His thoughts found resonance in an advertisement that was brought out in English, Hindi and Marathi newspapers in Mumbai in September 1991. It said: 'WANTED: Men who believe wives are not for battering. If you are a man strongly opposed to violence towards wives from their husbands, and would like to help stop it, then send us your name, address and phone number, if you have one'. Journalist C.Y. Gopinath had put out the appeal with the hope of catalyzing change. More than 200 men answered the

advertisement, the youngest a 14-year-old and the oldest a 66-year- old gentleman. The group interacted for a year during which a core group of members emerged with Harish taking the mantle and lead. Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) was formed in March 1993 to deconstruct masculinity, help men break out of their dominant masculine image and help form an equal society that would regard women with respect.

--- Excerpts from article by biographer Devashri Mukherjee in a forthcoming book by Jaico Publishers

Vishal

"I first stumbled upon MAVA while researching on the internet for organizations that helped men reach out and express their internal struggles in a safe and supported way. Over the past few months, regular meetings with Harish Sadani at MAVA have helped me tremendously. He has listened to me, counseled me, and shown me that it is ok for men to express their feelings and deal with their anger in a mature and healthy way. My relationship with my girlfriend has improved. I continue to make strides with the way I express my feelings to her and handle disagreements or differences in opinions with her. MAVA continues to be strong support to help me accomplish this ..."

Vishal - A Caller at MAVA's Helpline