

**An icon of the women's movement
in India and across the globe!**

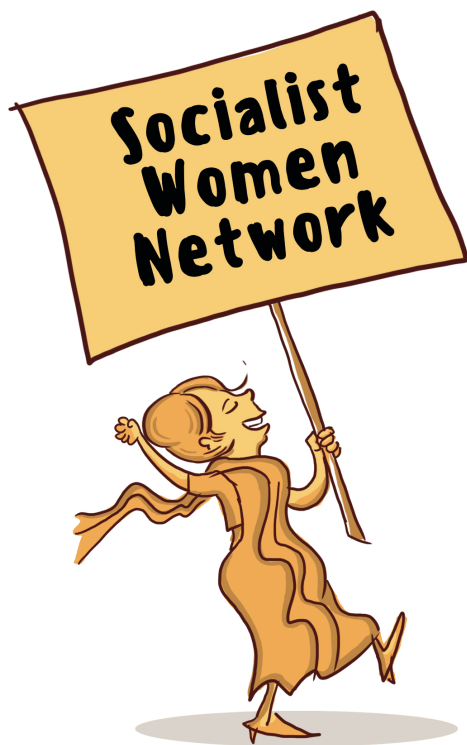


SONAL SHUKLA

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT
STIFTUNG**
India Office

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Sonal's journey makes her an icon across India and indeed the world!



During the 1975 Emergency* Sonal sheltered some socialist activists in her home. From this group, which included a feminist trade unionist, emerged the Socialist Women's Network.



*(21 month period starting June 25 1975 when all civil liberties and elections were suspended in India)



They decided to bring out a newsletter, Feminist Network, which was published from Sonal's home.

Some years later, she would offer the same refuge to victims of domestic violence.



As Vibhuti Patel, Sonal's feminist colleague since 1977, puts it:

"Other feminists are politically correct and articulate but not accessible to common women.

They show paternalistic concern or curiosity, but carefully guard their privacy.

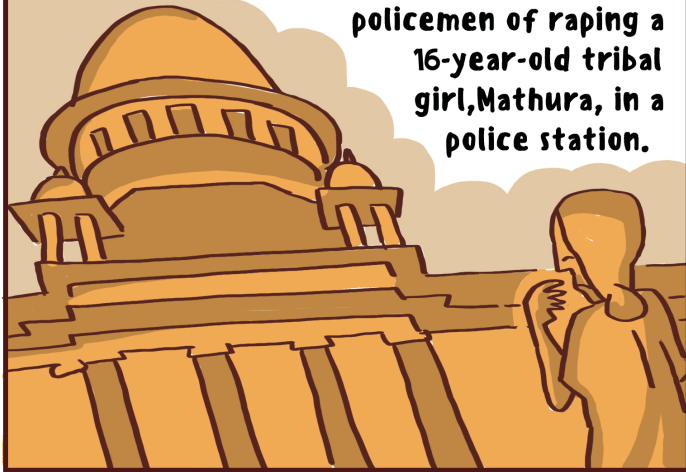


On the other hand, Sonalben* is a friend in need and specially accessible to women from underprivileged backgrounds."



*(ben=sister)

In 1979 came the infamous Mathura Rape judgment, where the Supreme Court acquitted two drunken policemen of raping a 16-year-old tribal girl, Mathura, in a police station.



This was a clear case of custodial rape in which the aggressors [policemen in this case] took advantage of their position of control over Mathura.



Four law professors wrote an open letter to the Supreme Court against the judgment. This letter became a catalyst for women to come together across the country in protest.



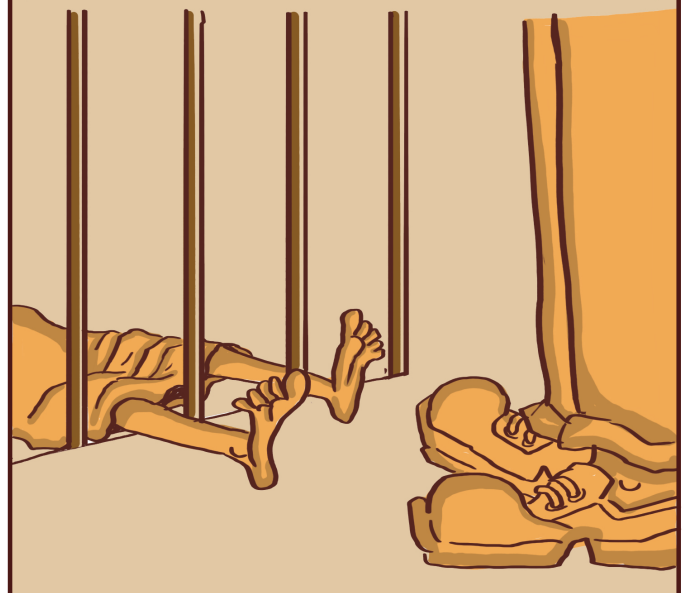
In Mumbai, 49 women met to discuss how to take the issue forward. Sonal was one of them. From this group emerged the first autonomous women's group in Mumbai, 'Forum Against Rape'.

In the words of Sonal...

"The judges had not even considered that Mathura or the policemen did not have scratch marks, because Mathura would have been stunned into inaction;



...they had not even seen the sheer difference in status between a poor tribal girl and policemen, that too inside a police station."



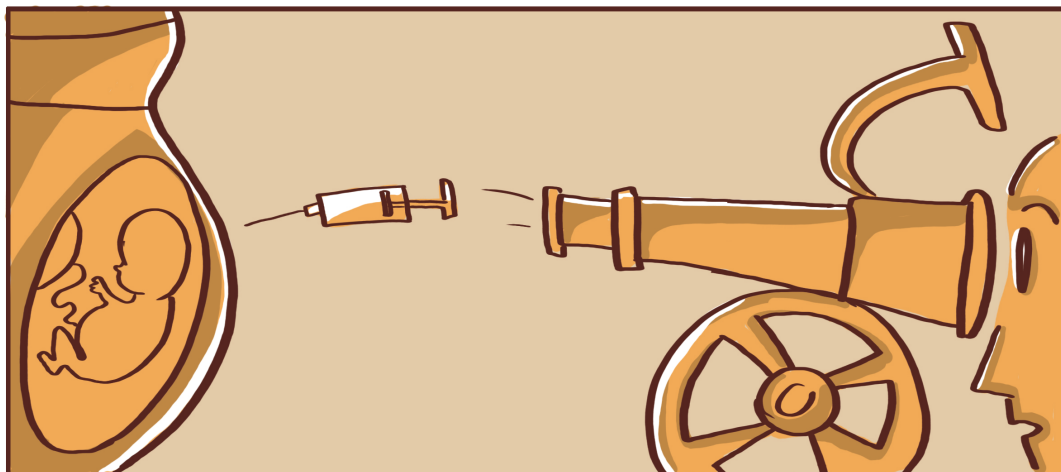
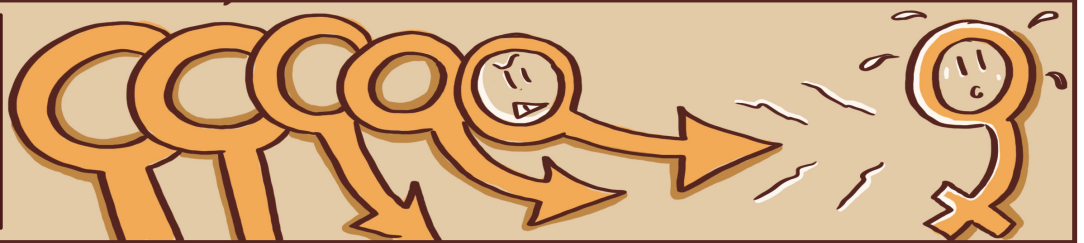
As a member of Forum Against Rape, which later became Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW), Sonal was part of all the ground-breaking campaigns that marked the women's movement in the 80s and 90s.



The second campaign worth mentioning is the campaign against domestic violence, which threw up the practical need for shelters for battered women.



India's skewed sex-at-birth ratio in favour of boys had become cause for concern by the 1970s.



The relatively new technique of amniocentesis had in India become a tool for families to find out the sex of the unborn baby and abort female foetuses.

प्रसव पूर्व भ्रूण का लिंग प्रकट करना कानूनी अपराध है।
PRENATAL DISCLOSURE OF SEX OF FETUS IS PROHIBITED UNDER LAW

FAOW became part of the campaign to ban such pre-natal sex-determination tests.

Sonal co-authored a paper on this in the monthly journal Seminar. These tests were banned in 1994.

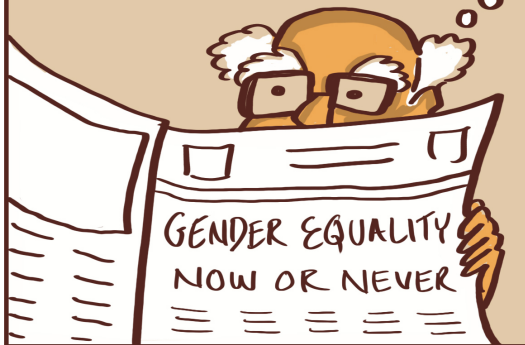


Due to her sharp intellect and early life influences, writing would become an integral part of her activism.

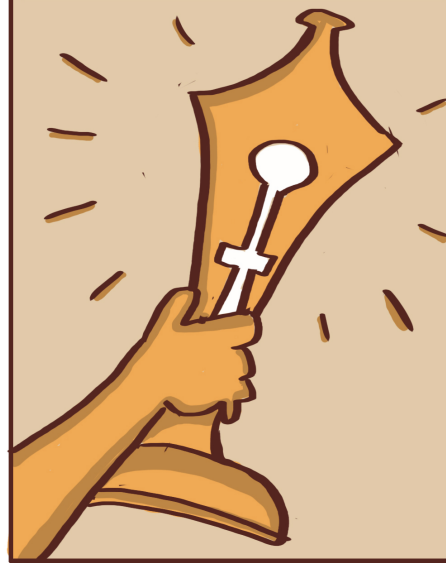


Sonal used facts and figures to support her arguments, making stereotypical audiences think it was being written by a man!

WOW! THIS GUY WRITES SO WELL!

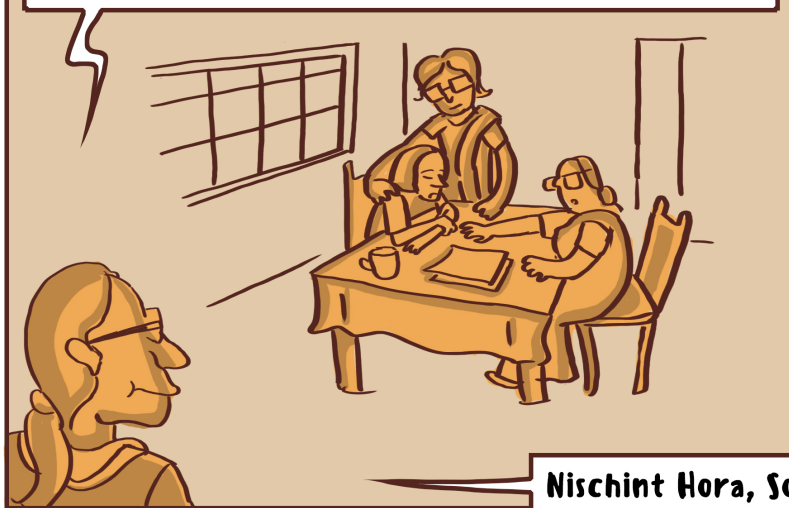


In 2000, a literary organization gave her an award for Best Writing on Women and Development.



Those who achieve so much often turn out to be impossible to work alongside.

"Working with Sonalben, who is both rooted and holistic in her approach, and whose feminism is a mixture of grassroots work and academics, gave me a sense of direction that changed my perspective on life or rather, put it on track."

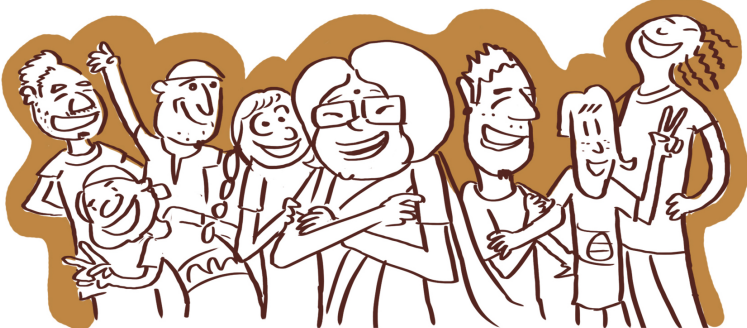


Nischint Hora, Sonal's colleague

...You can not be complacent; Sonalben encourages everyone to grow. There is also an element of fun and enjoyment; never a dull moment!"



Vacha, the organization Sonal started in 1987, transforms adolescent girls from Mumbai's slums into confident citizens through educational programmes, resource creation, research, training, campaigns, networking and advocacy.



A comment by Professor Vrijendra, sums up 79-year-old Sonal Shukla.

"I admire the way Sonal has lived her life: with joy and commitment."

