

## **Interview 38: NEPAL: Durga Sob**

Durga Sob is a prominent Dalit women's advocate and the chairperson of the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO).

### **How is the relationship between the citizens and the police in Nepal?**

The relationship between the citizens and the police is not good. The police are supposed to act for the security of the state and the citizens, but it is not able to maintain a close relationship with the citizens. The police and citizens should have the relationship of a finger and a nail, but it is not like that. The government did not facilitate the development of a close relationship between the two. Our country has just come out of a 10-year long conflict, and during this time, the behaviour of the police was appalling. The citizens were hit badly by the attitude and behaviour of the police. The situation was so bad that people would shake in fear when they saw police officers, even if they had not done anything wrong. Seeing police torture and the cases like the rape case of Suntali Dhami, the Bardiya Killing case, and the Sanu Sunar case; it is almost certain that the police administration, instead of safeguarding and providing security to the citizens, are rather the promoters of impunity in the country. We also shall not forget that while the trend is slowly changing, the police is still in the grip of their old ways. They are still working under the direction of a handful of powerful people, which is the opposite of their mandate. The existing structure of the police administration needs to be turned into a more democratic one.

### **So what do you think of the relationship between citizens and the police?**

The citizens are the supreme power of a country, but shamefully, common citizens are being smothered by people in power. The condition of Dalits, particularly Dalit women, is particularly critical; the Dalits enjoy few rights in Nepal. The police is one of the stateled mechanisms whose major role is to provide security to the citizens. So the police should be totally responsible for the wellbeing of the people, committed to promoting the rights of the citizens and taking the responsibility to protect their security. Any citizen and any police officer should share a familial relationship. While approaching the police, the citizen should feel a sense of justice. The citizens also need to change their pre-set attitude, that 'the police are always like this,' towards the police. The government should also create mechanisms which allow the citizens easy access to the police.

### **What do you think of the police's use of torture?**

Nepal has signed numerous international covenants and conventions against the practice of torture. Of course, the police should not torture anybody in custody in the name of gaining information. But we find police officers beating the person till she or he dies. We receive news of custodial deaths, such as Sanu Sunar of Lalitpur district. The police continue to beat the arrestees even after they have confessed to their crime. We cannot think of a worse foolishness than this. It seems that the police have enrolled themselves in these jobs solely to torture citizens. It should not be like that. We have to tell the police that in any criminal offence, they should follow the legal way of punishing culprits, which will raise a sense of security in those who are innocent.

**Do victims feel safe and secure after filing their cases at the police station?**

Citizens do not have direct access to the police; very few cases reach the police. In this society, people think it better to confine their sufferings to themselves, rather than to disclose it. People believe that going to the police will only increase their problems. I think this attitude is the result of mistakes made by both the citizens and the police officers. The police officers have been rude and disrespectful, and the victims do not feel any sense of security with the police. Society also believes that going to the police will invite stigma on the complainant, and people feel that they will be viewed differently when they are entangled with the police. Ultimately, this means that very few cases reach the police. To change this, the police should be more helpful; they should be kind and respectful towards those who approach them. Right now, if someone is believed to have committed theft, the person treat the person as though they are guilty from the very beginning. They do not investigate or try to verify the information. Then, the police beat the suspect mercilessly. In such an environment, how can any person feel a sense of security? Most people avoid going to the police station; they do not believe that they will get justice there.

**What do you think of the law against domestic violence in your country?**

There is a domestic violence law. But in reality, it has not been implemented properly. There are loopholes in it which should be addressed if it is to be effective.

**What do you think of the police administration in totality?**

The police lack an understanding and respect of the citizens. It is time for us to make the police aware of those issues, as we do not have any other options. We need the police, so the policing institution should be developed to be an institution which respects common citizens and is ready to help them when they need it.