

EMPOWERING WOMEN'S MOBILITY

a program with transport systems

AKSHARA



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By Akshara
A Women's Centre
2016





ABOUT AKSHARA

Akshara inspires young women and men to become gender advocates, change makers and leaders in their communities by using innovation, capacity-building, networking and technology. Since its launch in 1995, Akshara [a registered non profit] has consistently worked with women for their empowerment through educational scholarships, building skills and understanding rights. Men are trained in the prevention of violence, to recognize their own privileges and work towards equality. Through collective actions and advocacy, we work towards a Safe, Inclusive and Sustainable Mumbai City.

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INTRODUCTION

Women are free to move about anywhere, out of their homes, in the city and beyond and they also have the Constitutional fundamental right to the Freedom of Movement. However, there appears to be a ‘*lakshman rekha*’ – an invisible boundary presumably meant for their safety and protection – which is embedded not only in women’s minds but maintained by the norms of society and its institutions. For women, spatial mobility and social mobility is quite intertwined, each affecting and impacting the other. Women have been socialised to see the private space of the home as their ‘safe’ area and the public space as an ‘unsafe’ one. If they venture out, it is at their own risk as they would be followed by the shadow of sexual violence. Women’s daily mobility is so hampered by the threat of violence and sexual harassment that their decisions, livelihoods and participation in life around them is either restricted or continuously altered.

This is a real threat. In Mumbai, in just two years, there was a 43% rise in the number of rapes and a phenomenal 165% rise in kidnappings of women. [TOI, 18-5-15]

YEAR	RAPES	KIDNAPPINGS	How does this violence impact women? Fear of and actual violence restricts women’s mobility
2014	138	76	
2015	72	202	

and acts as a form of exclusion from society’s opportunities like education, work, health needs, leisure and political participation. And it is well known that women lag behind in all of these indicators. The most measurable of these lost opportunities is the participation of women in the labour market.

International Labour Organisation [ILO] places India as low as 120th of the 131 countries it ranked on women’s workforce participation rates. This has a huge

economic implication for the country. According to United Nations' Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, 2007, if the employment rate of women in India were to be at par with that of USA, it would increase the Indian GDP by 4.2%, which translates to a whopping \$19 billion. Even a mere 10 percent increase in women's participation would mean a gain of \$5 billion per year.

The 16th issue of Women and Men in India Report [Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2014] says that women's work force participation in India is lower in urban areas (15.44%) than in rural areas (30.02 %). How can this be true when cities today are the source of jobs, income and prosperity? Does it have something to do with feeling unsafe in public spaces?

Women need to move freely to be able to work, to use public transport or walk on the streets without fear if they take up employment. According to ILO, 27% of working women and 13% of non-working women in Delhi see mobility and safety concerns as a key hurdle to participating in the workforce.

It is difficult to measure other forms of impact but we know that every time there is a case like Nirbhaya, the young student gang raped in a Delhi bus or the photojournalist at Shakti Mills in Mumbai, hundreds of girls must be unconsciously registering the dangers of being on the street and drawing up their own lakshman rekhas.

Akshara is concerned about violence against women especially in public spaces or the city as a whole. Public spaces need to be safe so that women as citizens can use the opportunities a city has to offer and be productive and creative. Fear of violence drives them away from realising their potential, their education and their dreams.

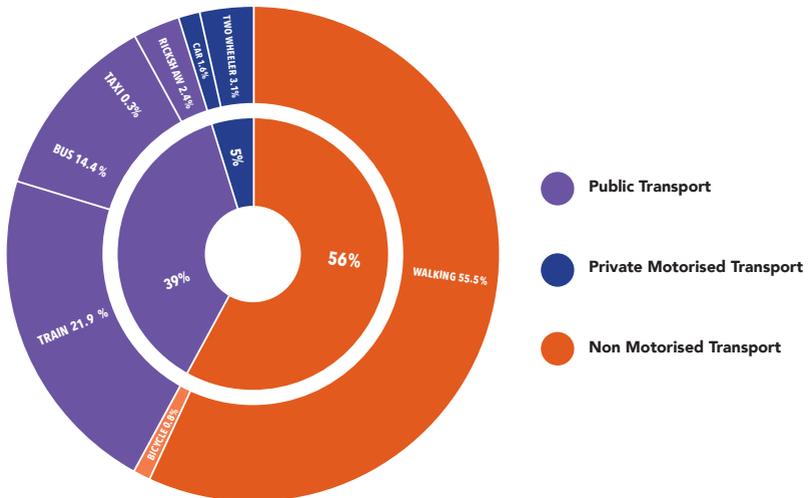
The purpose of this report is to show our efforts from 2013 to 2016 for ensuring safety for women in local buses and trains in Mumbai. We will demonstrate our model through the use of a multiple pronged strategy of surveys and safety walks; gender trainings of select personnel; and public awareness campaigns through the involvement of youth and other stakeholders.





GENDER, VIOLENCE AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

A multi city study by the London School of Economics shows how Mumbai travels. The majority walk and 29% use public transport. According to the Census of India 2011, almost half the people in Kolkata and Mumbai used public transport for travelling distances between 2-5 kilometres every day. 85% of Mumbaikars depend on public transport to travel distances more than 10 kilometres.



“When you look at who takes public transport, women depend much more on public transport than men, relatively speaking... so ensuring their safety and security, their ability to get to their jobs, and to get their kids to school in a safe manner, is absolutely essential and we need to focus on that.”

- Pierre Guislain, Senior Director, World Bank Transport and ICT Global Practice.

There is a body of literature which has studied the travelling patterns of women and found that they differ substantially from the modes used by men. Women often 'combine' multiple trips like picking up groceries/vegetables or children from school, on their way home from work. Their trips are shorter in both time and distance, they multi task and do household chores, travel with children and with more packages than men do. These 'combine' trips involve walking or using public transport [Violence Against Women and Girls, World Bank, 2015]. This also often makes it more expensive for women to get around, since they may have to pay numerous single fare tickets during such chained trips. *[Mar 08, 2016 Scroll.in]*

If data shows that women by and large use public transport, it also shows that they are not too happy about it. Women are far from safe in public transport. In 2011, Akshara collaborated with Hindustan Times and surveyed the level of women's safety in Mumbai by talking to 5000 respondents. We found that:

95% women had experienced sexual harassment in some form or the other in public spaces. It ranged from inappropriate comments, staring, molestation and groping to sexual abuse.

69% felt unsafe inside buses and at bus stops.

39% mentioned inside trains, walking on skywalks and on stations. The figures dip as mostly women travel by the women only compartments.

[for more details: <http://www.aksharacentre.org/ht2/>]

The Nirbhaya squad of the Railway Police, which discretely travels in ladies compartments, found that there is a rise in crime against women in trains. According to the GRP findings, the number of cases registered regarding crimes against women on the railways was 73, up from 69 in 2013. Molestation cases registered in 2014 numbered 55, up from 41 in 2013. The squad members also said that the numbers are not a true representative of the daily incidents occurring in local trains, where they have observed a rise in number of cases of molestation.

[Indian Express, Feb 3, 2015]



STORIES FROM THE WOMEN OF MUMBAI

"I used to take the 9:20 am train to Kurla from Vashi. Three months ago, this fellow groped me after I got down and I screamed at him and threatened to call the police. For two weeks after that, he stalked me without touching. He would follow me from the platform to the bus stop, sit nearby and keep on singing lewd songs. He would get down after a few stops, pretending he's travelling the same route. Since then I switched to taking the 9:40 train."

- Mrs N. Zaveri, Working Woman, Resident of Vashi.

"I have lost count of the number of times I have felt someone grabbing my back or intentionally colliding into me. Happens all the time- while dropping off my kids at school, or visiting my relatives or running errands. Who has the time to make a fuss every time this happens? You just learn to ignore."

- Mrs Dione Fernandez, Housewife, Resident of Elphinstone Road.

"I always have my headphones on. All these people leer at me when I am in my school uniform. Some even sing loudly while I wait for the bus. The music is a good distraction."

- Sakshi Goyal, School Student, Resident of Chembur.

"I had to leave this amazing music class I was taking. The only shift I could do was from 7-9 pm, and it would be past 10 in the night when I reached home. The bus stop has no lights, and most days there would be no autos. One day this man on a bike pulled my dupatta while I was walking. I ran home in a panic. My parents told me to drop the class since it's so risky to stay out at night."

- Sheetal Thambe, College Student, Resident of Ghansoli. Making Public Buses Safe



MAKING PUBLIC BUSES SAFE FOR WOMEN

Around 2 million women travel by public buses every day. The majority are daily short distance travellers going to the market, shopping, picking up children or going to work. Do these women feel safe in travelling in bus to go about their daily business? Or do they just bear with it as there is no option?



Collecting data: Akshara conducted one of the rare independent surveys done in Mumbai on the experiences of women travelling in buses. We collaborated with 314 students of NSS department from 18 colleges affiliated to Mumbai University to conduct the survey. They fanned out to wait at 106 bus stops all over the city and spoke to some 1527 women and girls. Stopping commuters as they got down from their buses, the students cornered and asked them a series of questions. They

spoke to housewives coming back from shopping with children alongside, young girls going to school and college students.



Our findings: 99% of commuters were regular travellers in buses. The majority were short distance travellers. Like many of Mumbai's citizens, they prefer to travel by train for long distances.

29% said that they were definitely harassed by fellow men travellers. Of these, the majority dealt with it on their own by moving away or getting off the bus. 10% said that they had asked the conductor to help out and 12% of them asked co-passengers to assist.

Discussions with bus commuters revealed that women and girls were quite aware of sexual harassment and that it was against the law. They had also read bus stickers [55%] and were aware of Mumbai Police toll-free helpline number 103 rather than the bus helpline which has a 10 digit number. Drawing on the data and findings, it was apparent that we needed a multi strategy approach to solve the problem of sexual harassment within buses.

Training Bus Personnel: Our first step was to contact the bus authorities, BEST and explain the problem to them. They agreed that their bus conductors needed to be trained to prevent sexual harassment. In the course of six months starting July 2013, our team conducted workshops for 2737 BEST bus personnel, including conductors, drivers and senior inspectors. The training sessions focused largely on the issue of sexual harassment, linking it with gender discrimination that commonly exists in our society. The session dealt with the definition of sexual harassment, types of sexual harassment, legal remedies and Akshara’s survey findings. A combination of film screenings, group discussions, presentations and role-plays were used to facilitate the trainings. Many important questions were raised by participants during group discussions. Preventive steps and interventions to combat sexual harassment faced by women commuters were discussed in these sessions. We collected feedback on the workshops from participants as well.



The problem was that we needed to reach out to almost 22,000 bus conductors and drivers and make them aware of the issue of sexual harassment. This needed a more mass based approach so Akshara and BEST launched the Twarita Mohim campaign which went to 26 bus depots, put up 52 posters, distributed 13,000 booklets and rule cards explaining sexual harassment and stuck 4,000 stickers displaying bus & police emergency helpline number inside buses.



The third part of our strategy was to undertake an awareness raising campaign. Helpline numbers were displayed prominently at bus stops, depots and inside the buses. We hoped that women commuters would read them and break their silence about harassment by resorting to the Helplines.

A complementary sub program for public awareness was held in collaboration with IIT Tech Fest and RTO. It was called the ROAR Campaign, in which NSS students from 18 colleges pasted stickers of 103 helpline in rickshaws and sought the assurance of rickshaw drivers in supporting the initiative of a safe city for women.

Suggestions:

- More seats should be reserved for women.
- Bus drivers and conductors can play an important role in making bus travel a safe and harassment-free experience for female commuters. Efforts must be taken to sensitize the staff so that they can help prevent harassment by speaking with the harasser, getting the woman to sit in the reserved seats, asking him to get off or in extreme cases taking the bus and harasser to the police station.
- Buses which have television can display helpline numbers on the screen.



MAKING THE RAILWAYS SAFE FOR WOMEN



Trains are an indispensable part of Mumbai's life. The Mumbai Suburban Railways consisting of the Western and Central Railways are one of the world's most busiest and overcrowded services. They have 2,342 train services and carry about 7.5 million commuters daily. Central Railways, the older of the two, carries about 40 lakh commuters daily of which roughly one third are estimated to be women. Usually women tend to congregate in the women's only compartment and take the 'ladies special' trains as the general ones are packed with men.

"There must only be some rare Mumbaikars who have spent the major part of their lives in the city and not travelled in a train. It's quicker than going by road and cheaper than a bus, if you don't mind the crowds in the train."

Understanding the Problem:

The Akshara-HT survey had shown that 39% of women had been sexually harassed at train stations, skywalks or within the general compartments. Many had mentioned being harassed whilst walking towards the station through the approach roads crowded with hawkers and shoppers.

To create a data base:

A total of 522 women were interviewed in great detail regarding their experience of travelling in Mumbai local trains. Out of the 522 women, that the student volunteers interviewed, 347 were regular commuters, while 175 said that they once in a while commuted.



We also conducted a Focused Group Discussion of 15 women and 21 were men commuters. The findings of the FGDs and the survey prompted us to undertake the task of studying selected railway stations and taking into account the specific factors that make them unsafe for women.

Overall 350 students, in groups of 20, were involved in conducting station Safety Audits on platforms, station approach roads and other areas around 18 Central Railway stations.

What is a Safety Walk?

A Safety Walk is one of the tools to assess the state of safety in an area or public space. It involves a group of people who are trained in gender and the mechanics of doing an Audit. The group walks in a selected area to observe, interview and record the physical and social aspects of the area after which they come up with as a set of recommendations along with a map, photos or case studies.

Our Findings: Our survey of 522 women revealed that there was a high level of incidents of sexual harassment in trains. The 'ladies only' compartments were crowded but relatively harassment free or had some stray incidents of hawkers harassing commuters. However, in general compartments and on stations, it was a different story. The Safety Audits showed the dearth of infrastructure whilst the Focus Groups Discussions threw up some personal experiences and suggestions.

Data:

61% complained of unwanted touching

56% of staring or ogling

51% said that men passed lewd comments

30% were afraid of stalking

14% had witnessed flashing

[Akshara Survey, 2015]

The number of women who simply preferred to ignore the harassment was high - 41.15% which shows how women have become immune to harassment or see it as an occupational hazard. Many women also hesitate to take action against the harasser for the fear of provocation.

Infrastructure Problems:

- Almost all public toilets on the 18 audited stations were very unsafe due to no lights or very dim lights, broken doors/windows and men either loitering, gambling or and boozing. Secondly all these toilets are unclean with no basic facilities like water, dustbins, attendants or signage.
- There was little or no patrolling by the police on station platforms outside women's compartments. What was required were visible Help Desks on platforms with the presence of police personnel to help women.
- There was a need to increase the number of women compartments within the existing suburban local trains especially during peak hours.
- Tubelights especially on platforms, foot-over bridges, below the staircases, toilets, on connected sky-walks and subways and below staircase were needed.

- Benches with a 'reserved for women' sign needed to be installed outside women compartments.
- Clear and visible signs were needed to be put all over station; like signs showing staircases, help desks, ticket counters, free urinals and display of emergency helpline numbers.

Women's Experiences:

- Majority of women commuters, irrespective of their age, the time of travel or dress, have been at some time or the other, harassed either on the station platform or walking towards it.
- Women use different strategies to travel safely. They always have to be on alert, use their bags or umbrellas to fend off clutching hands, change their routes, etc. Many prefer to take action against their harasser on their own, rather than approach the police or call the railway helpline.
- Majority of women were not aware of their rights to have basic facilities like clean and safe public toilets and clean drinking water.

Trainings for Rail Personnel:

There are two types of policemen in Mumbai Suburban Railways i.e. the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and the Government Railway Police (GRP). Since 2015-16 we have trained 398 personnel of RPF from their various cadres like the Helpline unit, Special Protection Force and the Mahila Vahini through interactive means like films, discussions and lectures on gender, sexual harassment and the role of the police vis a vis commuters. We also conducted gender sensitization trainings with 90 constables and officers of the GRP.





Campaign for Public Awareness:

A public awareness campaign for thousands and lakhs of people travelling by train everyday is a difficult task. So we focussed on some select stations with the view of attracting the attention of commuters through visual means and through volunteers who would interact with them. We also choose an important date to launch it so we would have the print and electronic media capture it.

The campaign was carried out in collaboration with Mumbai Suburban Central Railway, National Service Scheme and Akshara on the International Day for the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women [Nov 25th to 10 December] and Human Rights Day. 135 students from 18 colleges conducted it on 3 main junctions/stations by setting up a Wish Tree and a Selfie Booth to spread the message of prevention of sexual harassment.





The Wish Tree

Commuters put up their 'wishes' for safety in trains:

- 21.8% of people suggested infrastructural changes like broadening the bridges or adding doors to trains.
- 14.6% suggested increasing the number of trains and compartments
- Many women wrote on increasing the number of lights on bridges and platforms and working CCTV cameras on platforms and in trains.
- Some women suggested cleaner and safer toilets with dustbins.
- Almost 20% people wanted

more police patrolling on railways with a police constable in each compartment and platform and bridge. One of the alternatives suggested was replacing male constables with female ones in the train compartments at night.

- 5.4% men and women emphasized on the importance of helpline numbers.

SOME ACHIEVEMENTS

Our experimental model, of bringing Safety in Mass Transport Systems consisting of 3 main components has been dubbed the **ABC model**:

A

Accumulating Data
& Learning

B

Building Capacity
of Key Groups

C

Campaigning
& Advocacy

It has been successful in our interventions with the general public, bus authorities and train authorities.

HELPING IN GETTING A COURT ORDER

Akshara's Report "Safety Audit - Findings and Recommendations for the Mumbai Suburban Central Railway Line [CST to Thane]" was submitted in a written submission for Criminal Application No. 874 of 2011 filed in Bombay High Court by the Special Cell for Women and Children, TISS. On the basis of our 'Safety Audit' Report, an interim order was passed by the Court with special emphasis on improved lighting on all local platforms and station areas and clean and safe toilet facilities for women commuters. Post the High Court interim order, we saw infrastructural changes taking place in few of the railway stations on central line e.g. Matunga and Sion Stations. Below are a few images.



INVOLVING THE PRINT MEDIA

Reaching hundreds to thousands of commuters can only be done with the help of the media. Well designed and colourful public awareness campaigns got us wide press coverage and more eyeballs to the issue of sexual harassment.

Part of raising public awareness is getting youth involved in campaigns. Akshara's collaboration with the NSS of Mumbai University involved 314 students from 18 colleges taking interviews, safety audits and campaigns. These youth who have been trained and exposed to gender justice concepts will be the future gender champions who will support women.

Woman commuters on CR face most harassment at Dadar, Kurla

Pic: Shiram Vernekar

Study Finds 42% Of Respondents Suffer In Silence

Nitasha.Natu@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: Woman commuters face maximum instances of sexual harassment at overcrowded stations like Kurla and Dadar, according to a survey conducted by an NGO across 18 Central Railway stations. Findings of the report were submitted to the Railway Protection Force (RPF) by the NGO, Akshara, on Thursday.

For over a month, NSS volunteers trained by Akshara interviewed 522 women commuters travelling between CST & Thane. A shocking 42% of commuters said they had ignored sexual harassment fear either by themselves or others. Top RPF officials said they would step up presence platforms and also act against gangs of bullies that block entrances to coaches.

Almost all public toilets the 18 stations audited were found to be unsafe. "Female commuters said some of the toilets had broken doors and were



► Beggars and drunks enter the ladies coach between Byculla and Sandhurst Road, obstruct commuters trying to alight
► Women feel unsafe at Sandhurst Road station most

station to the Central line is dimly lit. During festivals/peak hours, this bridge is excessively crowded making women commuters feel unsafe

► Cleanliness of local RPF is not

Edition Name: Maharashtra Times
Date: 17-12-2014



► प्रवासादम्यान महिलांशी होणाऱ्या गैरवर्तणकीविरोधात आवाज उदबघण्यासाठी 'अक्षरा' या सामाजिक संस्थेतर्फे मुंबईतील विविध महाविद्यालयांतील 'एनएसएस' च्या विद्यार्थ्यांनी 'प्रीडम फ्रॉम फीअर' हा संदेश देत बेट्टच्या ओपन ब्रसमधून सोंपवटी ते नॉर्मन पॉइंट अशी रेली कावली.

hik, who interviewed female commuters at Sion station. "We asked a number of food-stall employees and shoe-shine boys if they ever intervened in cases of harassment. They said they couldn't as they had to continue working on the same station premises and did not want trouble," Kaushik added. Another volunteer spoke of how a group of young men sit under the foot overbridge at Vidyavihar station after 10pm and pass comments at women commuters.

The survey recommended women's compartments be increased and spread out within existing locals, visible helpdesks be put up at stations, benches be installed outside ladies' compartments and clear signage be put up across stations.

On Thursday, Akshara and the RPF put up banners across CST for awareness and created a self-help point where commuters could pose with props. A cut-out of a tree was put up where commuters were encouraged to write down their thoughts about a safer rail travel. Commuters demanded more locals, CCTV coverage inside locals, constant police presence etc. One male commuter wrote that women should dress properly if they did not want to be harassed.

Some Limitations and Future Work

So far, in spite of the recommendations from the public and survey findings, there has been marginal moves by the authorities towards improving infrastructure. Some of the stations have collaborated with NGOs and Trusts to paint and clean their platforms. It is a welcome change but NGOs do not have the resources for refurbishing hundreds of stations and the Railways claim that they do not have the financial viability to undertake such a task. This cycle can be chipped at by sprucing up and getting the toilets functional, increasing the voltage of lights on approach roads, motivating the hawkers on the platforms to support women and increasing patrolling of police on stations.



Painted Stations: Borivali and Khar [BetterIndia 29th Jan, 2016]



Capacity building of transport personnel needs to be complemented with changes in rules and tasks for them. For example the Rule Book distributed by the BEST to conductors went a long way in changing the attitudes of bus conductors in taking on the additional task of prevention of sexual harassment.

Helplines for both the bus and train systems are not being used by women in spite of the high rate of sexual harassment. There is a need to make the helpline numbers easy to remember backed by a responsive helpline personnel who answers calls and takes adequate action. The training of helpline personnel along with the development of a standard operating procedure should be undertaken.

Bystander motivation is another way to supporting women. If co passengers take heed of women who complain of harassment, they can apprehend or even warn off the harasser. This will in turn act as a preventive measure.

Creating safe conditions in mass transport system is part of the broader goal of making the city safe for women. It is only when the city, its streets, transport and public spaces, is free of harassment will women have the confidence to lead productive and creative lives.

WHAT IS A SAFE CITY FOR WOMEN?

A city where women and girls can enjoy public spaces and public life without fear of being assaulted.

A city where violence is not exercised against women and girls in either the home or the street.

A city where women and girls are not discriminated against and where their economic, social, political, and cultural rights are guaranteed.

A city where women and girls participate in making decisions that affects the community in which they live.

A city where the state guarantees the human rights of all people without excluding women and girls.

A city where the state and local government take actions to provide attention, prevention, and punishment for violence against women and girls.

A city where the state and local government guarantee women's and girls' access to justice.

Source: Un Women's End Violence Against Women Now Campaign





2016
REPORT