CHAPTER FIVE

BACKGROUND TO CASES

This chapter contains excerpts from the interviews of seven women who reported sexual harassment at workplace. These excerpts are the prelude and provide a background to experiences narrated by them.

CASE ONE - A

A is employed with a public hospital. She complained of sexual harassment from one of her male colleagues.

He made remarks about me that she is ‘chaalu’ and sleeping with hundred people. She is like a public toilet. These kinds of remarks he used to pass. I have not written that in the application. It was assassination of character. He was taking advantage of the fact that I was going through divorce. At that time I did not have the sense to retaliate. He used to say this to me directly in front of other women. It was humiliating for me. However I had no sense that time. This did not happen suddenly. It was a gradual process since the time I joined the hospital. I thought he will realise because earlier too I had tried to speak to him. Then I realised that something is wrong with him. His mentality was bad and that is why he could commit such a heinous crime later. I felt that it was not professional on my part to retaliate since it would disturb working relations at office. I was not professionally polished. I used to think why to have fights in the office, it is better to have cordial relations since we are spending most of the time in office. However, I was passing sleepless nights since my name was being tarnished. It was a sudden decision of mine to do face-to-face with him. Something triggered it that morning. I was irritated. One day during peak hours of the morning I went to his room with an intention of confrontation and fired him. I wanted it to finish it once and for all. I had a big fight with him in his room. I decided that I would fire him that day. I asked him what all he was doing and why he was doing so? During the confrontation I told him that either you should go from here or I should go from here. I told him that his drama was not going to work. What did he think of himself that men from other department came to me and said things to me? Was he trying to set some example? Did he think himself to be the leader? I did it in a public domain to realise that what he was doing was wrong. Probably if I would have asked him personally he would not have paid much heed to it. However when you speak with a man a public place he might feel ashamed. He went on repeating a single answer like a moron and a mad person that I am not all concerned. He was terrified. I did a big show in front of public. I felt that I was passing sleepless nights and he was sleeping comfortably. I felt that I should not allow him to sleep. Otherwise what is the use of my education? Anyways my name had been tarnished. Then why should I keep tolerating all this? I thought that I should pull him nicely. What would happen? At the most people would say that she is like that only. Let him too get sleepless nights. I complained because it was becoming emotionally taxing for me. It was beyond my tolerance limits. I had sleepless nights before for almost a month before that. Something was boiling inside me. It was my lack to understanding that had made me vulnerable to these kinds of situations.
CASE TWO - B

B is working as junior officer with a central government organisation. B and five colleagues of her complained of sexual harassment from a senior officer.

The man against whom we complained is a senior officer. He used target each of us individually at particular times when there was usually no one around. Our first reaction used to be that of crying and extreme irritation. It was not possibly for us to go to someone collectively and talk about it. Maybe we felt it would lessen our position. We had not realised that we could get together and do something. Each one of us was harassed individually. Other employees and officers were facing the harassment. They have not yet come forward. It was a spontaneous decision to come together when that incident happened. It was a situation where we were nose deep in the water. We felt that we could not bear the harassment further. The most dangerous issue was that he called a woman officer in his cabin the presence of six-seven male officers with an aim to target her, shout at her, and show her weakness. At that time there was nobody to protect her and all of us felt that we should go along with her. At that time, we were not prepared to fight and it was not in our head that we would fight it out. This is because we were in his scary environment and we thought how we could fight that out. In an office where there are many rules, we could be trapped in any of those rules and there could be cases against us. There are responsibilities that pull us back. We did not know the provisions and it was not in our mind to fight it out. This is because at that time there was no publicity given to the issue of sexual harassment in the organisation. It was our ignorance too that we did not find information about it. There was no forum as such in the office too. Our move was only to defend ourselves in response to the attack. It was expected that the top-level management knew about this kind of behaviour that he was doing in the office with everyone. It was proved from certain internal submissions. However, management did not take any action. He threatened us. He made me wait in the late evening until about 7.30 pm alone and gave me all kinds of threats.

CASE THREE - C

C worked as officer with a multinational company. She complained of sexual harassment from one of the Senior Vice Presidents of the company.

When I joined the department, people told me that the department is good, only that person is bad. His character is bad and that I should keep away from him. I thought that time that I had nothing to do with his personal life and character. My ethic is good and that I should work hard. I should not ignore whatever he says to me. Sexual harassment was going on for two-three years. He said to me I have one bungalow at a hill station. We stay there and come next day. Since you have a small child, we shall go in the morning and come back. When it started, he pointed out to the other woman working in the same department, told me that she is coming with me and listening to what I tell her to do. She is just SSC passed and not even a graduate. I promoted her to the officer level. She is supporting me and helping me. She comes with me on weekends. He started harassing me using her name. You are educated and good-looking. I will put you on the top in that company. I give you the managerial post. I
will give you power. Since I did not understand, I asked him one day what he meant by support. I was confused because of his age. His age is that of my father. When he openly talked about sex, I was shocked. I told him that, he should not talk about all these things. He used make me sit in front of him for the whole day and used to talk vulgar things. He promised me that if I did as per his demand he would give me promotion and car. I faced lot of torture. I told him that I was not of that category. I told him that I wanted to rise above by my hard work and I did not want his favour. I would do as much work as much as he would say. However, I would not do any such nonsense thing. However, when I did not listen to him, he tortured me in such a way that he did not allow me to work at all. Two-three days he has not allowed me to go for lunch too. He was making me sit idle. He removed the computer, intercom, phone from my table and said that you will not work. I will make sure that you will not work and you go from here on your own. That was because he could not remove me. On what basis, he could have done it. His only condition was that you have to come with me and do what I say. Otherwise you will not work. There was lot of torturing.

CASE FOUR - D

D worked as deputy manager with a private bank. She complained of sexual harassment from her immediate senior i.e. manager.

For about two months after joining the bank he used to treat me well and nicely. He used to project before everyone that I was the most brilliant and used to make me be ahead every time when it came to doing presentations. After two months there was huge change in him. He told about his intention clearly. After I said No to him, I tried to be away from it. I was on probation. My supervisor, who was my immediate boss, was initially co-operative and friendly with me. I now realise that he wanted to impress me very much. He used to gossip about other team members. He was trying to impress me with such act that he is the one who will be my godfather if I have to stay in the organisation. In this process I completed 1 ½ month in the bank. One morning, he called a meeting to discuss some of the issues related to work. I went for it. He started the meeting and within 5 minutes, he asked the other colleague to sit out of the meeting room. He praised me and told me that he likes me and asked me to make eye to eye contact ‘Mala Tu Faar Avadtes, Mazya Dolyat Dole Ghalun Bagh’. I was surprised and shocked by seeing his behaviour and strongly asked him to stop all this nonsense and call the colleague waiting outside. When he understood that I am not responding to his demands he used a double meaning sentences. When you will submit report? 14th Feb? He projected me as the most brilliant and made me do the presentations. After that incident there was change in his behaviour and communication. He looked at me like a sex maniac and kept asking for sexual favours both directly and indirectly. He kept suggesting that I should fall in line with him. I was demotivated and demoralised to the extent that I lost confidence in myself that I know the work and that I can perform. After that incident I could notice in him slowly. Then I went up to him three-four times. I asked him why you are behaving like this. What is the problem? Why are you insulting me? Then he told me that I am no longer interested in you. Now I will do whatever I desire. He was adamant .I complained because he was continuously insulting me in front of everybody. He used to tell with regards to work that you are a duffer and you do not know anything. I was not a fresher and I have a proven track record. I have awards from my previous jobs. I have an international qualification. He used to insult me in the presence of everyone.
CASE FIVE - E

E is employed as a clerk with a state government corporation. She complained of sexual harassment from immediate senior i.e. officer.

I am working as an assistant with the state corporation. He was harassing me since he joined this office. He was trying to be close to me on the pretext of work. He was using vulgar language. He stared at me. On my birthday he offered to gift me a saree and go out for lunch with him. He made me wait late in the evening by giving me more work. It was done in a manner that I had to wait late in the office while my colleagues left for the day. He used to coax me to work on the computer in his cabin. He came close to me on the pretext of having a look at the computer screen. When I got to know his intentions, I warned him to not behave in this manner. Then he started harassing me by talking to me arrogantly and insulting me in front of others in the office. I could not talk about the harassment to anyone due to embarrassment. I told about it to my husband. One day my husband came to the office and confronted him. On that day he apologised to my husband and me. He confessed about his behaviour and assured that it would not repeat. This happened in the presence of the executive engineer. Even after this, he continued harassing me. He did not sign my attendance register. He talked vulgar things and maligned my character in the office. He also threatened me with dire consequences by saying that that he would involve me in some false case.

CASE SIX - G

G is working on the position of teacher in a public school. She complained of sexual harassment from one of her colleagues.

I am working as a teacher with the school for past fourteen years. I did not find the behaviour of that officer proper. I did not like the importance he gave to me at the time of competitions and otherwise too. I did not like going to the hotel with him alone. If it was to be done, all of us should be taken to the hotel. Since I could do all the jobs, an order about me was issued by the officer. Due to this order, the superintendent recommended my name for an award. After the order was issued, something went wrong with him. May be because he was not consulted, his ego was hurt. He could not bear my growing importance and that officers were praising me for my work. He pushed me at the time of the wrestling competitions and made some comments that were sexually coloured. They were ‘Aap Mere Do Haath Hai’, and ‘Aap Aaye Bahaar Aayi’. Later during the meeting, I told him that whatever you are talking is not correct. This dirty talk caused trouble to me. Once he pushed me during the sports competition. In the meeting I had tried to make him understand and he apologised saying that he would not repeat the behaviour. He used to request me to speak to him and tell me to sit on the front bench. This hurt me a lot and I went into depression. I went to a municipal hospital and I got proper treatment there. They asked me questions and I told them that I felt like not going to the school and that I wanted to resign from the job. It is nauseating.

CASE SEVEN - H
H was working as manager with private multinational bank and complained of sexual harassment from her colleague.

I was hired by a private multinational bank. My performance was appreciated by my managers and I was promoted within a short period. He was a peer of mine. During my tenure, there were numerous instances during which he harassed me sexually and made my work environment hostile. He used to take my pictures/videos from his mobile phone without my consent in office. When I objected to it and asked him to delete them, he refused and told me that he watched them every morning in his bathroom. On certain occasions, he came to me in the office and made lewd and threatening remarks such as ‘Kone me chal abhi batata hoon’. On several occasions he told me, you are so dark. You know your skin color is same as that of tea. So when I drink tea, I imagine you. On several subsequent occasions, he told me that I looked nice in Indian clothes and that he would do all my work for that one reason alone. Many times he insisted on going on customer calls with me even though it was not professionally required. He would also try to block my interactions with other male colleagues in the office. Additionally, he made remarks alluding to the interest of my customers or other male colleagues in a relationship or marriage with me. He would just sit next to me either at my desk or during lunch when it was totally unwarranted. Despite my objections to him about the same and my repeated complaints to my managers, nothing was done to deter him. The problem became so acute that I even requested my manager to transfer me to another part of the office. On most occasion, in response to a question about why he was harassing me, he retorted by telling my colleagues and my supervisor that since he was subject to ragging when he joined, it was his turn now that I was a junior. Despite my repeated objections, he would make all efforts to travel with me in the same taxi. On one occasion, he insisted on going with me in a taxi after a company training. All through the day at the training, he had been making unwelcome remarks about my dress and I was quite uncomfortable about going with him in a taxi alone. I remained calm throughout the ride and made it clear to him that I was not interested in a relationship with him. It was a very difficult conversation for me to have. Though I made it entirely clear to him that I was not interested in a relationship, he continued to make advances to me and kept trying to connect with me on social networking sites. Initially I had added him in good faith along with several of my other colleagues. However, since he was making unwelcome advances and when he told me that he browsed my entire photo album every day, I blocked him on the networking sites. Subsequently, he kept sending me messages to allow him to connect with me. Some of his messages included things like ‘I am reincarnated now’ or ‘don’t dump me’. When I submitted my itemised mobile phone bill for reimbursement, on several occasions, he wrongfully got hold of the same and questioned me about the phone calls that I made to various people. He did so even when he was not my manager and had no official authority in regards to approval of my phone charges. Repeated harassment made it extremely difficult for me to work at bank. It came to a point that I eventually decided to resign from my job.