



LEGAL AID FOR GENDER JUSTICE

“One fine day, after five years of marriage to a mentally ill man, I was literally thrown out of the house by my in laws...I have not been allowed to see my 6 year old son for the last one and a half years that I have been forced to stay with my mother...”, shares a 25 year old Tabassum with the Legal Advisor of CEQUIN.

Her problems were not limited to her in-laws she adds, *“my mother who is a widow had a house of her own but her brother has cheated her of that single support in her life... without any legal divorce I receive no maintenance money so I am an added burden on my mother now... I was not even allowed to collect my jewellery from my husband’s house...our relatives are no help and we are now two women struggling to survive without any source of income...”*

CEQUINs Gender Resource Centre provides free legal aid by a lawyer who visits the centre twice a week. The primary focus is to first provide counsel and work out reconciliation. The next step is to provide legal counselling and, if required, help from the legal aid cell. Tabassum accessed this help through some friends who advised her to contact CEQUIN. The legal advisor adopted a strategy of first empowering Tabassum with some skills to fulfill her daily financial requirements. She was advised to join the ‘*Beauty Culture and Health Care*’ course at the Gender Resource Centre. The idea was to help her gain some economic independence first so that she gains the required confidence to deal with her situation. When Tabassum was told about a free of cost course that could help her become financially independent she grabbed the opportunity with gratitude. She worked with full dedication to complete the course in six months and today she is employed with an income of Rs.2500 per month.

She exclaims, *“as a fifth standard drop out I had thought I would never be able to do anything worthwhile to support anyone... but this course has revived my confidence... I am going to now fight for my rights...the legal advisor has educated me about out of court divorce procedure and how I can legally separate from my husband; claim for maintenance and custody of my child... I have finally decided to file a petition for divorce...to get legal rights over my child...”*