

Building Human Rights through Popular Culture

By Mallika Dutt

Breakthrough is an international group that seeks to raise awareness about human rights through popular culture and education. We believe that it is important to reach out to a general public and begin a dialogue about violence against women and human rights. For example, by raising the issues of domestic violence through a music album and music videos, *Breakthrough* is able to reach millions of people across South Asia and other parts of the world.

Mann ke Manjeere (Rhythms of the Mind) is an award winning music video produced by *Breakthrough*. It narrates the exuberant journey of a woman who flees her abusive husband and becomes a truck driver. Women of all ages and backgrounds get a ride on this truck: dancing and rejoicing as they traverse an arid desert. It was nominated for an MTV award and won the National Screen Award in India.

What has been particularly heartening is the realization that music videos speak a universal language. Just as we have always insisted that violence against women is a global phenomenon that has culturally specific manifestations, we have found that the music video, although located in an Indian context, appeals to a global audience. We have linked the media product to our website, and we also use the video to conduct workshops on violence against women. In fact, groups around the world are using the video for public education on domestic violence, women's access to non-traditional occupations and public space.

At *Breakthrough* violence against women is a human rights issue; and for us, human rights are fundamentally about values of dignity, equality, and non-discrimination. Human rights provide a universal framework about justice and equality: violence against women is one of the areas where amongst the worst violations of these rights occur. With *Mann ke Manjeere*, we ask women to understand human rights not simply as a list of violations, but more importantly as a vision of where women want to go. *Breakthrough* is ultimately about building a human rights culture – a culture where respect for one another, the ability to live with dignity, food, shelter, and freedom from violence and discrimination is the ultimate goal.

In the anti-violence movement, we have often focused on the single issue of domestic violence without understanding its broader connections to social and economic issues, to class, religion and geography. We focus on providing better services to battered women rather than engaging in community education to end

violence. We hope that a human rights perspective will help connect our anti-violence struggle to a larger movement for social justice.

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