

## **Kamayani Bali- Mahabal - Resistance to Coercive Psychiatry- A New Beginning**

Is mental illness really a public health problem in developing countries? Certainly, there is no mental health equivalent today of the enormous global initiatives for infectious diseases, child health or, more recently, non-communicable diseases such as heart disease. The empire of psychiatric power is more than three hundred years old and grows daily more all-encompassing. Psychiatry has little trouble in establishing its potential benefit to the exercise of human rights when 'difficult' individuals acknowledge that they have a mental disease and seek treatment for it. But, the atrocities taking place under the auspices of mental health systems and quasi-mental health systems continue to be exposed everywhere in the world. This paper tried to place these atrocities in the broader context of mental health systems, societies and governments (and their laws) with special reference to India and also elaborate the strategies adopted by civil society for attaining human rights of the mentally ill. It also elaborated on various resistance strategies which overturn the single-strategy model of medical intervention that continues to dominate the mental health field in India and replace it with a diverse, comprehensive system of rehabilitation alternatives that pay respect to the integrity and dignity of all involved. The new interventions in the area of mental health aim for safe and effective recovery, while defying both convention and legal precedent by refusing to function as a custodial psychiatric institution. They are visibilising the voices of people with psychosocial disabilities, especially women, and foundationally challenging the custodial outlook of the Indian mental health system. So long as the idea of mental illness imparts legitimacy to psychiatric coercion, the myriad uses of psychiatric compulsions and excuses cannot be reformed, much less abolished. Hence, for those opposed to psychiatric coercion, the principal adversary is its legitimacy.