

FIFTY YEARS OF
SHATTERED
D R E A M S
BATTERED
L I V E S

The Story of Indian Women

1947- 1997



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Stree Chetana is a Nagpur based Women's organisation which believes that equality between the sexes and women's liberation can be achieved through radically changing the present social system. It has been struggling against various instances of patriarchal oppression on women, in general as well as individual cases. It has also been organizing workshops and seminars to raise women's consciousness on social and political issues.

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WOMEN BETRAYED

As the government and other institutions, celebrate, with pomp and splendour, the golden Jubilee of Indian Independence, one is reminded of a song from the women's liberation movement:

*"If, in this country, women are
demeaned and oppressed,
Answer, with your hand on your heart,
Is this country independent?"*

The song reflects the reality in Indian society, that it is not just women, but the vast majority of peasants, workers, dalits, adivasis who are devoid of independence - that is, deprived of all democratic rights and compelled by an exploitative, unjust, social order to lead a miserable existence. In fact, what occurred in 1947, was merely a transfer of power from British rulers to a set of Indian rulers, who not only continued to protect their economic interests, but opened the doors for various other powerful foreign countries to loot and plunder India. In spite of superficial attempts at land reform, 20% of land is still in the hands of only 2% of families and the vast majority of the rural population continue to live as impoverished poor and landless peasants. The burden of foreign debt on India has reached an alarming amount of over Rs. 2 lakh crores making the Indian state even more politically subservient to the imperialist powers.

These 50 years, then, have seen India as one of the few countries where males

outnumber females and with no significant improvement in the status of women in India. The sex ratio of females per thousand males has been consistently declining. India is home to the maximum number of illiterate women in the world. The proportion of women workers in industry has declined considerably since 1947, while the percentage of women agricultural labourers has been increasing, showing that whatever limited industrial progress has taken place, it has been at the cost of women - pushing them to an area of economic participation where they are most exploited and vulnerable - the informal sector. Women in the urban labour force in India are far less than other Asian Countries like Indonesia, Korea and Phillipines. In terms of Gender Related Development Index and Human Development Index (which includes literacy, life expectancy, Income, employment etc.) India is far behind most Asian and African and Latin American countries. India may have had a woman Prime Minister, but participation of women in Legislative bodies is abysmally low. The few women who may have become governors, judges, bureaucrats or IPS officers are such an exception, when actual numbers are considered that they do not reflect any progress. Besides, their role has invariably been to support the establishment and hardly ever to alleviate the problems of women.

All over the world women have been continuously oppressed & whatever rights they have secured for themselves, even in modern capitalist countries has been a result of their struggles, as workers, as women. In these countries economic participation of

women & their share in income is as high as 35-40% even 45%. In India, when modernization & western liberal values & culture are superimposed on a backward semi-feudal, semi-colonial economy, there is a constant resistance to granting women their rights.

STATE POLICY : TALL PRONOUNCEMENTS AND HARSH REALITY

Women had participated in large numbers in the struggle to free India from imperialist British rule. From tribal and peasant women to working class and middle class women they rallied together under the Congress banner, the Communist banner and the Socialist banner. Along with this general political awakening came the awakening about the rights and problems of women themselves. Women's organisations had been formed and the struggle to gain women's rights was carried out alongside the struggle to free India from colonial rule.

1947 :

When it became clear that the British were preparing to transfer power, in July 1946 leading women of the AIWC published an "Indian Women's Charter of Rights". The Charter reflected the hopes and aspirations leading women of the time had from independent India. The Charter called for equality of the sexes to be the basis of citizenship in India and made demands for improving the status of women in the fields of education, health, work, property rights

and the family. It suggested reform of the personal law as a step to a uniform civil code. It stood for equal inheritance by men and women, monogamy, marriage only by the consent of both parties, intercaste and interfaith marriages and it defended the right to divorce. It also proposed equal rights of guardianship.

But the women's movement faced a setback from 1947, at the stage of the drafting and finalisation of the constitution itself. The Constituent Assembly, dominated by representatives of princes, landlords and traders and conservative religiously inclined political leaders was opposed to granting equality to women in the sphere of marriage and family and opposed provisions to curtail religious customs that were anti-women. Though there was no opposition to granting general formal equality many of the substantial points dealing with provisions to improve women's condition were made non-enforceable by placing them in the Directive Principles Section of the constitution. The same forces also vehemently opposed the

enactment of the Hindu Code Bill soon after. Thus women's aspirations even in the sphere of legal reforms were consciously betrayed by the newly appointed political rulers of India led by Nehru and the Congress party. It was a pointer to what was to follow. The policy after 1947 upto today, is a story of continued betrayal.

Post-1947 :

Nehru's Government launched the five-year plans with major fund allocations for the development of agriculture and industry. But in the first twenty five years the successive Govts. had no specific policy to improve the conditions of women. The only policy targetting women was the family planning program. Women in their role of producers of children became the target of a vigorously pursued program to curb the population of the country. Much pressure was put on women to accept birth control measures, without any concern for their health, without any sensitivity to the fact that women alone do not determine the decision to have or not have children. Yet this was the only program concerning women that was well funded and pursued. Under the pressure of women's organisations diluted and truncated reforms in Hindu Personal Law were enacted in 1955 and the Anti-Dowry Law passed in 1961, but no special efforts made to implement them.

It was only in the 1970s that the Indian rulers had to take note of women and they

appointed a Commission to enquire into the Status of Women in India (C.S.W.I.). This was partly in response to the active participation of women in the political agitations in the country against food shortages, price rise, famine, corruption and the participation of women in the armed uprising under Naxalite leadership. It was also part of the response of Govts. from all over the world to the Women's Liberation Movement that emerged in the advanced Capitalist countries in the late 1960s and had a world wide impact.

The CSWI in its exhaustive report (1974) exposed the decline in women's economic and social conditions in the first 25 years of "independence". It also made detailed recommendations to bring about improvement and justice in women's lives. Needless to add, most recommendations have been ignored by successive Govts.

From the 6th Five year plan (1980-85) women's contribution to the economy came to be acknowledge and special allocation for women's development came to be made. The state has initiated a policy not of ensuring jobs for women, but of encouraging self-employment by women by giving credit through various schemes. This is in keeping with the new economic policy's orientation of allowing the unorganised irregular sector to grow. Family courts to deal with family disputes, special police cells/ police stations to deal with atrocities against women, polytechnics

for women, special literacy programs, reservations for women in ZPs and Municipalities, Women's Commissions, and the ICDS program which now covers 1/3rd of the country were initiated by the Govt. in the 1980s. A National Perspective Plan for women (1988-2000) (NPP) was also prepared. Yet in spite of these schemes and plans the reality for women is dismal. For all this has come at the same time as the implementation of the imperialist sponsored New Economic Policy with its disastrous

consequences for the vast majority of Indians. Voluntary organisations have been used by the Govt. to implement these schemes but they have run out of steam and got exposed for what they are - half-hearted attempts at reform which attempt to diffuse the growing aspirations of women and deflect them from the path of agitation. These reforms can have little impact given the fact that the New Economic Policy (NEP) and structural adjustment policy has cut back all resource allocations for the welfare of the masses.

IMPACT OF NEW ECONOMIC POLICY

The formulation of the New Economic Policy in 1991 by the Narsimha Rao Government has driven the imperialist backed development strategy to the hilt. The structural adjustment policies tuned to World Bank conditions, include a new Industrial Policy that removes regulations and licence restrictions, emphasises profit maximization and competition. It invites larger foreign investment and amends the MRTP Act, to give bigger companies with foreign collaboration a free hand to wipe out small-scale industry and any indigenous industry. Public sector Reforms and the Exit policy, lays the grounds for closure of Public Sector undertakings and growth of privatisation. Trade policy reforms emphasizes maximum growth of exports.

At the social and cultural levels, the New Economic Policy with its emphasis on

liberalisation has flooded the country through TV, audio cassettes and magazines with the degenerate aspects of culture of capitalist societies. This foisted on the reactionary feudal culture in India is creating a pitiable condition for women and girls, who now become victims of both types of patriarchy. Dowry deaths, sati and wife beatings flourish with Jalgaon type sex scams, sex tourism, beauty contests and obscenity in the media. With growing unemployment and other causes of frustration and increasing avenues of escapism like drinks, drugs and commercial sex, many families are breaking up intensifying the suffering of women. Even school going children are being lured by this depraved culture. The NEP has glossed over all this while making verbose proposals to "empower" women. Any plan for women's

How SAPs Affect Women

Cuts in health services : These hit women in number of ways :

- a. As the majority of the lower paid workers in the health services are women, they lose jobs when health services are cut.
- b. Women are expected to care for the sick and old members of the family when Government hospitals cannot cope and private hospitals are too expensive.
- c. Women use health services more because they have children.

Cuts in Public Services :

- a. Since women are rarely financially independent, any services provided for them such as child care facilities, creches, women centres are first to be hit when governments make cuts.
- b. Cuts in educational services fall on adult literacy classes for women or on the extension of schooling for girls. Where schools are closed and the distance between home and school is increased, girls, who must help with household work, have less opportunity for education.
- c. Cuts in food subsidies also affect the women. Women spend more time travelling further to cheaper shop or markets, preparing cheaper food and often eating less herself in order to feed the family members.

Creating Unemployment :

Women are generally more vulnerable to unemployment than men because :

- a. Many women are employed in less skilled jobs such as food packing and assembly work which is replaced by machines.
- b. Women are seldom members of or actively involved in trade unions; and
- c. Quite often, women take less secure, temporary jobs in order to fit their unpaid work as wife and mothers.

emancipation which does not oppose this imperialist backed, anti-people new economic policy can have little relevance to the conditions of women. The record of the past 50 years has been one of tall pronouncements while pursuing policies that have worsened the plight of the masses.

Therefore, while India never became independent in '47, each successive government, irrespective of whichever party comes to power has been continuing to sell the country to imperialist powers to protect

the unequal division of landholdings, to use populist measures to come to power, repressive measures to continue in power and carry on seeing dalits, minorities and women as vote banks to win over. It is no wonder that Indumati Patankar of Kasegaon, Maharashtra who participated in the militant Prati-Sarkar movement against the British, reminisces sadly:

“What we had then was really a band of trained and dedicated women to go out and work on a nearly full time basis through

villages and towns, during all the ups and downs of the movement. And you wouldn't believe it, we did so many of the things then that people are trying to do now. We had cheap marriages and marriages without dowry at all... We had long study camps ... We had

programmes of self-defence ... There were even some women who fought themselves with guns during the time of the underground movement .. Then we thought we were fighting for freedom for the poor but it turned out that the rich controlled things after all.. "

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMY

Increasing Marginalisation and Pauperisation :

The International Women's Conference held in Beijing in 1995 pointed out that though women contribute 60% of the world's labour, they share only 10% of the world's income and own 2% of the assets. This aptly sums up the condition of Indian women as well.

The transfer of power has brought absolutely no change in the nature of

women's participation in the economy or has in fact worsened it. While in 1951, 76.8% of women workers were in the agricultural sector, 40 years later, in 1991, 80% of women workers were still working in the fields! In fact there has been a steady deterioration in the condition of women in the rural economy with a steady rise in the number of women who are mainly agricultural labourers. In 1974 itself, 25 years after independence, the CSWI had noted this trend with alarm and commented

Trends in Distribution of Women Workers

Year	Agriculture	Industry	Service	Total Women	% of Ttl. Labour Force (in Lakhs)
1911	73.90	14.70	11.40	418.00	34.44
1931	72.30	13.70	14.00	376.00	31.17
1951	76.80	11.20	12.10	405.39	28.98
1961	79.60	11.60	8.80	594.02	31.53
1971	80.10	10.50	9.40	312.98*	17.35*
1981	80.83	10.39	9.35	448.00	20.02
1991	80.72	8.40	10.84	629.00	22.40

* Due to a change in definition in 1971 Census Survey the number of women who were recorded as full time workers (main) was reduced.

“the increase in the no. of agricultural labourers from 12.6 mn. in 1951 to 15.7 mn. in 1971, or shift from less than one third to more than one-half of the total women’s workforce is the greatest indication of poverty and reduction in the level of employment and not improving rights and opportunities for economic participation”. And the 1991 Census recorded 28.3 mn. women agricultural labourers constituting 45% of the main workforce of women. To this if we add women recorded as marginal workers the proportion will go up to more than half the total working women.

exploitation by men from powerful landlord families in the area. Peasant women regularly work in the fields belonging to the family but it is in a rare case that they have any ownership rights in the family lands. Since 1980, the Govt. of India has repeatedly made pious statements about issuing pattas of Government distributed lands in the joint names of the husband and wife, but has yet to implement it. For lack of alternative employment pressure on land has been increasing leading to fragmentation. Women have been the worst victims of this process. Every effort to

Women’s Labour - How Cheap

The discrimination in wages paid to women in the unorganised sector is glaring. But it is considered justified. So deeply ingrained is the feudal view that women’s labour is less valuable and her work is lighter. Equal wages for equal work is even now only a pipe dream. Between 1971 and 1981 a male labourer in Rajasthan earned Rs. 12.63 while a female labourer received only Rs. 8.42. Due to uneven development there is also extreme disparity in wages in different areas while a male agricultural labourer in Haryana earned Rs. 19.35 and a female labourer in Tamil Nadu earned only Rs. 5.05.

These women even now toil in primitive conditions doing hours of back breaking work like weeding, rice transplanting etc. In spite of legal rights against discrimination, the gender based division of labour is still being rigidly enforced. A woman for example cannot plough the land. And wage discrimination is sharp. Women are paid much less than men in every area. Labouring women, like men are subject to debt bondage, and are often, in addition exposed to sexual

organise labourers has been ruthlessly crushed by the State, bent on protecting the interests of the landed rich. The 283 lakh women agricultural labourers around the country are still awaiting independence from a pauperised and insecure existence.

At the same time the post 47 phase of industrialisation has had tragic fallout for women. If in 1911 women constituted 34.44% of the total industrial workforce, by 1971 they constituted only 17.35% of the workforce. The proportion of women

participating in industrial production having fallen to half that at the beginning of this century! And here too they are concentrated in household, handbased industries.

The destruction of household industries, handicrafts, handloom, oil processing, leather pressing, rice pounding has been rapid in the post 1947 period, throwing lakhs of women out of their traditional jobs. This has been the direct consequence of the development model adopted by Nehru at the behest of big Indian capitalists and MNCs. They were provided with major concessions and incentives while household industry was left to face this competition without any aid whatsoever. This process has become even more rapid in the 1980s due to the new economic policy.

Further in the period after 1947 large numbers of women were thrown out of their jobs in factories and mines. The process of rationalisation and automation in cotton textiles and jute mills affected women's employment in these mills very adversely. The extent to which this process affected women's jobs can be seen from the coal mines. While women constituted one-third of the total workers in mines in 1921, they were reduced to one-fifth of the workforce by 1961. The implementation and enactment of certain laws like Maternity Benefit Act, equal Remuneration, ban on night shift work for women, which are meant to protect the health and safety of

women have been used by both private companies and public sector to restrict the employment of women. The trade union movement failed to stem this retrenchment of women from the modern industrial sector. The large scale closure of factories and mills in the 1980s as a result of the new economic policy has intensified this process. These five decades have led to the marginalisation of women from the modern industrial sector. They are still concentrated in lower paid occupations like bidi rolling, tea & coffee plantations which are labour intensive.

The New Economic Policy with its emphasis on export oriented production and globalised production has added new dimensions to the exploitation of women by imperialism. Thousands of women are being employed in the Export Promotion Zones to labour for long hours in prison-like conditions for low wages. The imperialists have also encouraged home based production of small parts of various goods. Thousands of poor urban women labour on a piece rate basis for hours taking the help of their children and neighbours. Yet they earn a mere pittance, nowhere near a subsistence wage. The patriarchal notion that a woman's wage is only supplementary to family income is being used to severely exploit women.

The New Economic Policy has also promoted self employment among women encouraging them to become vegetable &

Tiny Victims of Big Neglect

Excerpts from a Memorandum of 19 Organisations united in a Forum for Creche, Child Care Services Submitted to Central Govt. on 5 March, 1990.

It is a half a Century since the need for child care services for working women was recognised but National Policy has still to be evolved. A plan for child care services as an essential support for women's participation in nation building efforts was accepted by the National Planning Committee before Independence (1940); we regret that even 50 years later this is still a dream. 35 years later, the committee on the Status of Women in India (1974), while discussing the multiple roles played by women as home-makers, child rearers, and members of the labour force, suggested that provisions be made for creches and nurseries. The Empowered Interministerial Committee of the GOI accepted this "in principle" as early as 1976...

Today the magnitude of the problem is greater than ever before. 15 crore women in families below the poverty line make-up the female workforce with 90% in the unorganised sector. They work long hours for low wages at the cost of their own and their child's health. As a result, the very survival and development of 4.5 crore young children below six years age are threatened by neglect and lack of essential care. Innumerable young girls are deprived of education because of the need to take care of younger siblings and carry out domestic chores. Provisions of Day Care as a Support Service for women becomes essential in order to;

- i) ensure equal opportunity to work for all women.
- ii) translate into reality the constitutional guarantees for the child under Art. 39 (f); and
- iii) Provide impetus to the enrolment and reduce drop-out of girls from school, to achieve the objective of Art. 45 of the Constitution...

fruit vendors, running tea stalls, do tailoring etc. Voluntary organisations have been used to help poor women obtain small loans from banks for this purpose. Now obviously recognising the financial viability of this field, major imperialist banks like Citibank are directly providing credit to big voluntary organisations like SEWA and SPARC to disburse to self-employed women! Thrust them into the insecure voluntary sector and there too exploit them, is the policy being pursued by the rulers. The World Bank itself stated in its report (1991) that 41% of casual workers are women. Only 2% of working women are on regular wages.

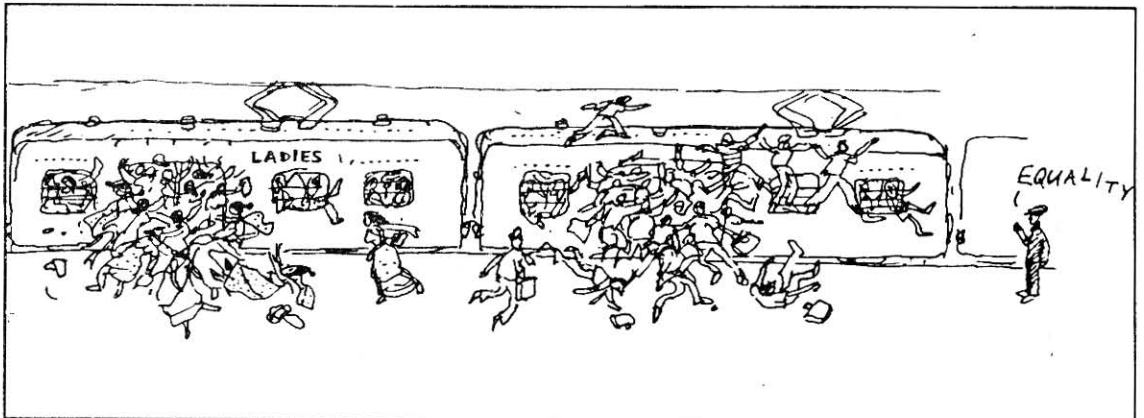
The only sector in which the number and proportion of women has been steadily increasing in the post 1947 period is the service sector. The so-called boom in women's employment means employment has been restricted to this sector and to women from the urban middle class. The rapid expansion of the govt. bureaucracy, expansion of banking, insurance, educational and medical fields opened opportunities for educated women. But even here till today a rigid gender based division of labour is still operating so that women are largely confined to the jobs which are suitably "feminine" are less responsible.

Thus women are teachers and nurses, clerks and typists, sales girls, computer operators. The more responsible jobs, requiring higher proficiency or managerial skills whether they be of a chef in an expensive restaurant or a general manager of a bank are overwhelmingly dominated by men. Though the number of women college teachers is large, there are only 6 V.C.s in the country who are women. Even in the elite Govt. services the picture is dismal - There were only 339 women among 4548 IAS officers and only 0.9% of IPS officers were women in 1988.

Yet even this limited gain in employment is now under attack with the policy of rationalisation and computerisation are adversely affecting women's employment. Even the fifth Pay Commission has recommended a drastic cut in jobs. The Maharashtra Govt. too attempted to slash women's regular jobs by promoting "flexi-time" jobs and easy-entry easy-exit jobs for women in the name of

helping women cope with demands of home. A vigorous opposition by women employees and women's organisations to this forced the then Sharad Pawar's Govt. to withdraw this proposal for the time being. But the half century of so-called independence has been extremely disappointing for women in India in the economic field.

India's record in the economic field is lower than even other poor backward countries. While the modern industrial work participation of women in countries like Indonesia and Phillipines is 12 per cent and 17 per cent, in India it is not more than 7.5 per cent. Women continue their existence dependent on their family esp. their fathers and husbands. The rulers have also promoted feudal patriarchal norms which are useful for keeping women docile and thereby allow for the intense exploitation of working class and peasant women, without giving them their due status as workers and wage earners.



WOMEN & HEALTH : CONTINUOUS NEGLECT

India is one of the few countries in the world where males outnumber females. Worse still, the number of females per thousand males has been constantly declining. In the 1981 Census there were 935 females per 1000 males, in 1991 Census the number declined to 927. In spite of dedicating a year to the girl child, India houses the largest number of malnourished children in the world. Though women, through their reproductive labour give birth to the future generations, in India, each year 1,20,000 maternal mortality deaths take place, according to WHO reports. Besides, since 60% of women suffer from anaemia, they are easy victims of infectious diseases like malaria, typhoid, gastro-enteritis etc.

The reasons for high female mortality are linked with both, the backwardness and acute poverty in Indian society and also the gender discrimination faced by the female sex right from birth upto death. Deaths of young girls in India exceed those of young boys by almost 1/3 of a million every year.

Part of the reason is less employment opportunities for women, even in agriculture. Apart from this female infanticide, prevalent in parts of Rajasthan and Salem and other districts in Tamil Nadu is surreptitiously practised in other backward, rural areas too. The use of aminocentesis and misuse of sonography leading to abortions of the female foetus has also contributed to the decline in the female

population. Between 1981-91, 4 million girls were prevented from being born, killed through sex selected abortions or post natal murder.

Though women, through their traditional role, provide health care and nurture the sick at home, their own access to health care outside the house is severely limited. The decrease in expenditure on social welfare has further worsened the conditions of government hospitals, primary Health Centres, ANMs and health workers. Malaria prevention schemes have been stopped, safe drinking water and hygienic conditions are scarce. Govt. programmes for women suffered serious budget cuts. Expenditure on DWCRA (Deptt. of Women & Children in Rural Areas) programme was down by 21 Pts., on nutrition programmes was down by 11 Pts. between 1990-1993. The entire emphasis of healthcare from the government is on family planning especially sterilisation. Dangerous family planning methods like Norplant and Depo-provera rejected by the Western countries are being introduced in India and the poor of the Third world are being used as guinea pigs. Added to the problem of poverty and lack of facilities are various cultural beliefs and superstitions in our patriarchal society. There is the widespread belief that women and girls must learn to tolerate pain, to suffer, to sacrifice for others. Studies have shown that more money is spent in families

Every sixth infant death is specifically due to gender discrimination, girl infants are breastfed less, for shorter intervals, weaned earlier, receive less food. Over 80% of girls in the age groups of 13-18 years receive less than the required calorie intake. 21% of girls from low income families suffer from severe malnutrition compared to 3% boys in the same families. Studies in Uttar Pradesh show that survival chances of girls in poor families have actually declined over the last 18 years.

on outside medical care for men than women. Women try out home remedies, or go for medical care only when illness takes a very serious turn. In the North, several studies of hospitals show that a larger number of males come for treatment. Ignorance about their bodily functions, the custom of keeping fasts, wrong notions about menstruation, superstitions and poor diet in post natal care, the fear and shame associated with gynaecological illnesses and sexually transmitted diseases all add up to women's health problems, even

preventing early detection of cancer. Many women workers are victims of occupational diseases, working in the unorganised sector where safety provisions and precautions are not taken. Where housework is highly labour intensive, hours of bending, fetching water etc. cause problems. It has been calculated that the smoke inhaled from choolahs, by women confined to the kitchen is equal to smoking 10 cigarettes a day. Therefore, the triple burden of reproduction, production and domestic work takes a heavy toll on the lives of women.

EDUCATION : STILL DROPPING OUT !

Those who took the reins of power in 1947, framed the constitution and formulated the directive principles had envisaged the eradication of illiteracy by 1960, but even today, after 50 years, India is home to the maximum number of illiterate women in the world. Also the disparity in women's education is very wide. While the literacy rate for women in Kerala is 86%, in Rajasthan it is 20.4%.

It is a wellknown fact that the drop out rate in schools is much higher for girls than

for boys. Though education is free for girls in states like Maharashtra, yet the cost of books, clothes, travel, house keeping and childcare duties at home force many bright and enthusiastic girls to drop out after primary school. The dowry system also acts to deter poor parents from educating girls. They argue that to find an educated groom they will have to pay higher dowry which they cannot afford! In 1981, 30.9% boys from rural areas and 8.9% girls enrolled for higher education, while 50.2% boys and 34.5% girls from urban areas

Female Literacy (in Percentage)

Year	Male	Female	Female SC	Female ST
1981	56.37%	29.75%	10.9%	8.0%
1991	63.86%	39.42%		

enrolled. Here again we find a gender bias in the kind of courses girls enroll for, since higher education is sometimes pursued only to increase bargaining power in the marriage market or to get jobs that are traditionally meant for women. In the professional education courses (B.Ed. etc.) there is 92 per cent enrollment of girls while in Law there are only 7.4 per cent for every 100 males, and in medicine 33 per cent. It is often felt, even by an enlightened section of women that education is the means for women to achieve equality and emancipation, but the quality of education where facts distorting the social reality are learnt by heart and reproduced, (text books reinforce traditional sex roles and attitudes) churning out semi-educated youth to join the clerical ranks is surely a limited

step towards women's liberation. Hundreds of educated and working women have their lives and fate completely controlled by fathers and husbands, brothers and sons.

The 10+2+3 pattern, introduced by the Kothari Commission emphasised the need for growth of polytechnics but how many women enrol in these, and how many polytechnics are there for the girls? The few which do exist mainly offer home science, beauty and diet courses. Even Kerala, where women's literacy is highest, has a severe problem of unemployment due to industrial backwardness. Thus education for women can only improve and play a more meaningful role in their lives if it is linked with overall progress in the country and the breakdown of patriarchal norms and culture.



POLITICAL PARTICIPATION : WHERE ARE THE WOMEN ?

Women participated in large numbers in the freedom struggle with adivasi and rural women playing a militant role. Under communist leadership girl students too became active even going to villages to campaign. In the tumultuous period after 1947, when the peasantry revolted against landlordism, women peasants and labourers were extremely active. The bravery and militancy of women in the Tebhaga movement in Bengal has been praised everywhere. In the Telangana and Punapra-Vayalar struggles too women were active participants. Yet in the decades after so called independence women completely withdrew from the political arena. Though women are actively participating in the nationality struggle, revolutionary peasant struggles at present, women are rarely

anywhere near the leadership in either these movements or in the political activities of ruling class parties. In fact women have very much lagged behind. Feudal values are so firmly entrenched in society that they have acted as major obstacles to the active participation of women in political work.

The ruling class parties like Congress, BJP, Janata Dal, Samajwadi Party and even the CPM have created a political culture dominated by corrupt, criminalised, factional politicking. Such politics promotes the use of women only to satisfy the ambitions and lust of men, it gives no respect and encouragement to women. The "Tandoor" murder of Naina Sahu by her Congress politician husband, or the suicide of youth congress leader Sarla Mishra are examples of the fate of women in the

Women MPs in Lok Sabha			
Term of Lok Sabha	Total Seats	No. of Women Reps.	Percentage
1952-57	489	14	2.8%
1957-62	494	18	3.6%
1962-67	494	30	6.0%
1967-71	520	31	6.0%
1971-77	520	20	3.8%
1977-80	542	19	3.5%
1980-84	529	28	5.3%
1984-89	542	42	7.7%
1989-91	523	23	4.4%
1991-96	537	36	6.0%
1996-2000	537	36	6.0%

criminalised and debauched atmosphere among ruling class parties. Women can participate in such an atmosphere only by compromising with this debased culture and upholding patriarchal values.

The question of women's political participation has been reduced to a vulgar crass level by politicians of the ruling party in this 50th year of India's Independence. Reacting to 33% reservations for women in the Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha, Sharad Yadav, now President of JD (whose manifesto promised women reservations in the higher legislature bodies), a so called campaigner for social justice lambasted the reservation saying that women with "bob-cut hair, sleeveless blouses" will enter Parliament while "their" women "sit in front of the Stove" ! Laloo Prasad Yadav's wife becoming the woman CM of Bihar is a crude

but perfectly apt indicator of how women are being used by ruling class politicians. The controversy over 33% reservation is meaningless because even if implemented, it will more often than not be used by men to rule by proxy. As it is, male politicians ruling by proxy through their female relative is common enough from municipalities to the Chief Ministership. With such an undemocratic culture entrenched it is not surprising that women's participation in the Parliament is abysmally low. Besides the minority few like Indira Gandhi who had a mind of their own were prime representatives of the ruling classes and in their interest continued to inflict hardship and suffering on the poor and the oppressed. They were not even in a reformist way involved in improving the status of women. The few progressive laws

Women Head All South Asian Countries

The fact of a woman becoming a Head of State or Government is often bandied as a triumph of women's Liberation. South Asian countries of which India is one, all have got patriarchal backward societies. All have had Govt.s headed by women in the past 50 years, including Islamic Pakistan and Bangladesh. Yet all that these women politicians proved is that women can be as ruthless and corrupt as men. They have all served the interests of imperialists and monopoly capitalists rather than the interests of the vast majority including women.

Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister of India earned a reputation as an autocrat with the declaration of emergency and ruthless suppression of agitating masses, revolutionaries and the parliamentary opposition. Begum Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh clung to power inspite of mass discontent and strong agitations against her Government for its pro-US policies. She defended fundamentalist forces against writer Taslima Nasreen. Benazir Bhutto used her power to take corruption to new heights and was repressive against the mojahirs. Chandrika Kumartunge won power in Srilanka on a mandate of peace but has used her power to carry out the longest and most systematically ruthless army operation against Tamil nationalist forces led by LTTE. The lesson is clear. Give power to the individual woman in the present set-up and she will pursue policies that defend exploitation and the patriarchal system.

passed by Parliament for women have meant cosmetic changes while the Parliament continues to defend and uphold this exploitative social order.

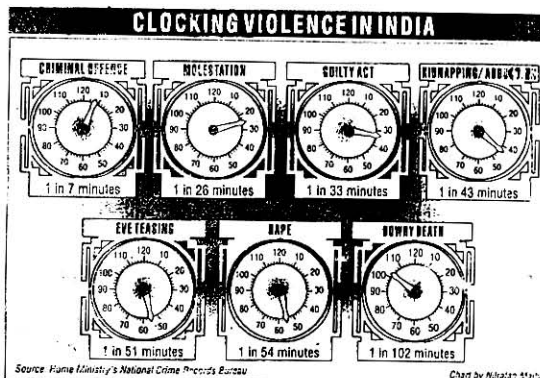
Women's movement enhanced the political consciousness of women upto a certain point. But with the domination of NGOs and other voluntary organisations in the women's movement they are veering the movement away from politics or restricting

their participation to being active only on "developmental" issues within the present structure keeping them away from ideological issues. This in fact has been a great disservice to women, preventing them from participating in the real struggle for political power. Women should take an active role in leading mass struggle and in the leadership of revolutionary and democratic movements.

SOCIAL STATUS : THE SECOND CLASS SEX

Violence and crimes against women, their sexual abuse and mental torture is deeply connected to their inferior social status and the social sanction accorded to such violence by patriarchy. While the beating of wives is even legally permissible in some countries, in no society at this time, is even the slapping of a husband by a wife easily accepted. Since the dawn of private

property and the setting up of the monogamous family, women were considered the property of men and monogamy was strictly enforced on women only, so that family property is not passed down to an illegitimate offspring. In India, the oppression and subservience of women was codified in the Manu Smruti in the ancient feudal age itself. Unfortunately even



in the so-called independent India, the code of Manu still carries on. Instead of exposing its undemocratic nature and opposing it, it is being revived and glorified by the Hindu fascist forces. The marriage system and family, religion and various social customs deny women their basic democratic rights. Women are still seen essentially as bearers of children. The hankering after a male child makes the social life of women miserable and affects her health. The state and the state machinery which wants to maintain women's subjugation all play a big role in keeping women backward and "under control".

Marriage is growing more and more into a commercial contract with dowry increasing in importance amongst all communities. Even in states like Kerala with high educational level of women consumerism has led to very high crime rate against women. The burning of brides for dowry, bigamy for dowry, torture for dowry,

deserting women after keeping her dowry have all become burning issues of post '47 India. Cases of torture in the in-laws' home are being registered in such high numbers under Sec. 498 A in police stations, that in a backlash, lawyers in a big metropolitan city like Mumbai have petitioned against it, afraid that the patriarchal fabric of the Indian family is being threatened. A number of women, who could not buy themselves a groom, and a number who sold themselves in a bad marriage deal, commit suicide in frustration and those responsible for their abettment go scot free. The number of women deserted by their husbands, is so large that in Maharashtra large conventions of women have been held with separate slogans and demands of deserted women. A few years ago, it was estimated that there are 6 lakh deserted women in Maharashtra. While Muslim personal law allows a man to cast off his wife by pronouncing 'Talaq' 3 times, a Hindu man takes another 'wife' without even bothering to inform the first.

Without Comment

Ever heard of a place on earth where young women are killed and used as manure to grow fresh vegetables ? Yes, such a place exists in Bihar. It is in Ichak block of Hazaribaugh district where such gruesome murders are a reality if social activist Monica Roy of Nari Shakti Manch working in this district is to be believed.

According to an estimate made by an agency working for upliftment of women, anywhere between 30-35 cases of dowry deaths are reported every two months. But a good number of cases that are hushed up are of hapless women, who are tortured and pushed into wells and ponds or ruthlessly murdered and buried in the fields which is then used for sowing vegetables like onions and garlic.

What is worse is that even harijans and tribals who had never faced such problems are increasingly being affected by it. Even a rickshaw puller demands Rs. 25000- 30000 as dowry.

Times of India 21st July 1997.

The Economics of Sati

Statistics has clearly established the fact that the revival of Sati in Rajasthan esp. in the Shekhawat region is linked to the success of the Rani Sati temple in Jhunjhunu. There are over 100 Sati temples in Rajasthan. Today many of them are dedicated to specific women who were immolated. In the last 40 years there have been an alarming increase of Sati incidents esp. among Rajputs, almost one case a year. Not less than 28 widow immolations have taken place within a radius of 200 kms. of the Jhunjhunu temple since 1947.

Jhunjhunu is the ancestral centre for Marwari business communities. Its entire economy depends much on the spendings of the visitors to the temple. The turnover from the annual mela is estimated to be Rs. 4 crores. The temple is managed by seven trustees all of whom are Marwari businessmen settled in Bombay and Calcutta. The trustees of this and other temples in Rajasthan and other parts of the country have filed a case that their fundamental right to worship was violated as a consequence of the anti-Sati Act of 1988. This Act bans their annual mela.

Since the 1980s, the revival of religious fundamentalism on the one hand and the growth of imperialist penetration in the Indian economy, on the other have gone to make women's plight even worse. Faced with a growing economic and political crisis, the ruling classes have tried, through the various political parties and other organisations to unite the Hindu majority by creating a bogey of Muslim threat by appealing to Hindu chauvinist sentiments and equating them with nationalism. They have used this technique to divert the peoples' attention from basic issues and to justify their fascist measures. In retaliation, fundamentalist forces among minorities have got organised. The result has been a backlash on the few rights women have won with more orthodox views coming to the fore. In communal riots, women are raped and molested as a symbol of attack on a community. As a result their outlook becomes more inwards, seeking the security

of their own men rather than opposing the male chauvinism in the community. The strident demand of Hindu Communalists for Uniform Civil Code and the resistance against it by Muslims is a prime example of a women's issue being distorted by politics of communalism. The revival of heinous medieval practices like Sati in Rajasthan and witch-hunting of women in Bengal, Maharashtra, A.P. and U.P. also show how easily fundamentalism can be revived in a semi-feudal society in collusion with local state officials and condoned by a weak, patriarchal judiciary. Hindu fascist forces, in fact, have been dangerously mobilising 'woman power' to actively and militantly participate in lumpen communal clashes and forming women's organisations to press for women's traditional roles.

Liberalisation, globalisation and the New Economic Policy have not only laid out a red carpet for the economic exploitation of women's labour but also for

Devdasi System - Tradition at the Service of Commerce

Devdasi system enslaves women and oppresses them in the name of religion - The worship of Goddess Yellamma is very widespread in the Southern Maharashtra, Northern Karnataka and Western districts of Andhra Pradesh; especially, among the lower castes. Young girls are dedicated to the goddess after the appearance of Jath (matted hair). The dedicated girl also called Jogti is forbidden to marry, though she can have sexual relations with men and also mother children. In the feudal period devadasis were forced to serve feudal lords, and village bullies. Even today rich merchants and landlords pay the cost of the dedication ceremony and thus buy their right to sexual access to the girl. But what is more prevalent today is that pimps from big cities like Mumbai and Pune pay for the dedication ceremony in order to recruit the giri directly for commercial brothels. It was estimated that atleast 40% of prostitutes in Mumbai were devadasis! The Karnataka government passed legislation against this practice only a decade ago and dedication at the Saundatti temple near Nipani has officially stopped only recently. Yet it is secretly conducted and still is widely prevalent. This remains an important form of oppression of uneducated Dalit and other lower caste women.

the sexual exploitation of the daughters of independent India. If projects like Bailadila mean plunder of our natural resources for export and exploitation of tribal labour, it also means rape of tribal women and commercial sex. The flooding of the markets with consumer goods means a culture of high fashion, heavy marketing for the cosmetic industry warped concepts of beauty and culture, enhancing the outlook of women as sex objects. Growing obscenity in the media, growth of pornography are all linked with liberalisation and have a cruel

and horrifying effect on the lives of girls and women. Eve-teasing is the only way of approaching a girl, according to films these days and succumbing to this humiliation the only way of accepting a boy.

In the last 5 years, it has been calculated that there have been 3 rapes in every 4 hours in our country. In India many more rapes take place within the family circles. Rape of poor women by police is also widespread and cases of child rape are increasing. The growth of tourism opens the doors to sex tourism and most will be



shocked to learn that India has the largest number of child prostitutes in the world. With growing unemployment and poverty more girls become trapped in networks, like in the Jalgaon, Bhusawal Sex Scam, more women become victims of vices like alcoholism and drugs that men turn to. It is in this context that the agitation against the Miss World Beauty Contest in Bangalore

in 1996 should be understood. In fact, religious revivalism and the decadent culture of imperialist countries both form an excellent combination for the sexual exploitation of women - whether it is our ancient books and temple sculpture or the Star Plus serials like Bay-Watch, they all have an obsession with the naked bodies of voluptuous women.

THE LAW : BATTLING ON

In the face of innumerable atrocities women often take recourse to the law as a means of getting justice. Thousands of women spend hours, year after year in the law courts, trying to obtain a mere pittance as maintenance, to prove their spouses' adultery, to get a share in the family inheritance or to get custody of their precious children. Innumerable cases of rape, molestation, bride burning and torture get quashed as the rapists and murderers get acquitted, thus adding insult to injury and shame for the woman who dared to raise her head. Justice is indeed blind for the poor, oppressed, underprivileged and for women. The entire legal edifice and the structure to execute it and protect it is tainted with patriarchal ideology and discriminate against women.

Though the constitution proclaimed the end of gender based discrimination in 1950, various laws are in themselves discriminatory. It has been the women's movement and social movements that have

challenged and fought against such laws to bring about legal changes necessary for the dignity and equality of women. But at every step this effort has been opposed and subverted by reactionary patriarchal forces in power and in the community.

The Hindu Marriage Act (1955) makes bigamy an offence, child marriage illegal but they are non-cognisable offences. The police will not take action till the court takes cognisance of the offence. But as long as these actions have social sanction and there is no social movement against them, these laws remain violated as a rule. Often the law has granted certain rights but getting them implemented is often next to impossible. Section 125 of the IPC grants women the right to maintenance. But the limit to maintenance that can be claimed is Rs. 500/- irrespective of the husband's earnings and even this pittance, if granted, can be collected only with great difficulty and harrassment.

Communalisation of women's issues

The demand for a uniform civil code (UCC) came up during the freedom struggle. It was raised by the democratic women's movement in order to ensure equal rights for women in family life and property inheritance.

But immediately after 1947, this demand was usurped by conservative and Hindu communal politicians of Congress and Jan Sangh, to oppose reforms in Hindu personal law. To cover up their extremely conservative stand of denying Hindu woman a say in the marriage and family property, they demanded a Uniform Civil Code. The most vocal proponents were Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Shyamaprasad Mukherji and Vallabhbhai Patel. This demand was revived in the 1980s by Hindu Communal forces like VHP, RSS, BJP to attack Muslims and force them to Hinduise in the name of national integration.

All progressive, democratic women's organisations are opposed to this demand for a uniform civil code by Hindu Communalists and are demanding and encouraging women from the various religious communities to demand and struggle to reform the personal laws in order to change their anti-women clauses. How a women's rights' issue can be used to serve the most retrogressive clause is seen from this history of the UCC.

Since all religions discriminate against women and uphold the patriarchal social order, it is natural that the religious based personal laws codified during British rule are biased against granting women equal rights. In the sphere of marriage, divorce, inheritance, guardianship etc. all of which are crucial to women, the laws still keep women independent and hence in misery. All attempts in past 50 years made by the people of various religious minorities to reform their personal law have come to nought due to the covert but aggressive opposition of politicians in power. The Christian community prepared a draft of reformed law in 1990, after extensive discussion, but the Narsimha Rao Govt. scuttled it. Affected Muslim women have campaigned against oral talaq, a practice outlawed in most Islamic countries, yet the

various govts. - Congress, BJP and Janata Dal, in the name of non-interference, have actively opposed any reforms and pandered the fundamentalist forces in the community to protect their "Vote Bank". Rajiv Gandhi even went one step further by enacting a law to bring Muslim women out of the purview of the Section 125 (maintenance) and leaving them at the mercy of corrupt, bankrupt community bodies like Waqf.

The laws themselves are flawed and full of loopholes which help the criminal to escape without conviction. The judiciary too in the past 50 years has not been sympathetic to women. The class-caste bias of judges, their patriarchal outlook has in many cases denied justice to women. The interpretation of the Sessions Court judge on Roop Kunwar's Sati in 1996, is a pointer to how nothing has changed in past 50 years.

Our first experience with PIL was in 1981 when Manushi filed a petition in the S.C. on behalf of Maki Bai and her daughter Sonamuni, Ho tribal women of Donjo village in Singhbhum Dist., Bihar. The petition sought to overturn the denial of equal inheritance rights to woman of the Ho tribe. Maki bai died last year, but the S.C. has yet not delivered a judgement on the case, which has remained pending for the last 13 years.

Manushi March-April 1994.

Social activists who have filed public interest cases in the High Courts and Supreme Courts, hoping to get justice for some poor women, must share the experience of Manushi's editor. "... despite all the fanfare of media coverage, PIL has very rarely actually benefitted those victims whose cases were brought to the Supreme Court. This is my impression not only from talking to various people and organisations who filed PIL cases, but also from Manushi's own experience with PIL."

The women's movement fought a bitter battle to ammend the rape law after the Mathura judgement. Rape is a criminal offence, which is fought by the state. But the victim is a mere observer. The women's movement had insisted that the past history of the victim and her character should not be considered - even a prostitute can be a victim of rape. The women's movement was successful in making custodial rape (rape by police, superintendent of women's hostel etc.) a more serious offence. It also wanted

The Deorala Judgement

On Sept. 4, 1987, 19 year old high school educated Roopkunwar was forced to commit Sati at Deorala, Rajasthan. Last year the Addl. Dist. & Sessions Judge of Neem Ka Thana, Shri Omprakash Gupta acquitted all 32 accused in Roop Kunwar's murder. This had been the ninth case of Sati to have come up in this Court and in all cases the same lawyer, Kedarnath Agarwal, defended the accused. In all the cases the accused had been acquitted.

Though Roopkunwar was burnt to death in public, the judgement claimed that, 'from the evidence of the prosecution witnesses, no witness was present prior to the occurrence and they did not see anyone placing Roopkunwar on the pyre or forcing her to sit on the fire nor was Pushpendra seen giving fire to the pyre ... It is not proved from the evidence of any witness of the prosecution that Smt. Roopkunwar has died due to the burning in the pyre ... witnesses examined by the prosecution had given evidence on the basis of the story told or heard from unknown persons ... The prosecution has not examined those persons who have actually witnessed the commission of the alleged incident'.....

When the Govt. . the police and the Judiciary are made up of the same conservative, fundamentalists who glorify Sati, how can women expect justice?

forced intercourse between husband and wife to be considered rape. Yet the Bhanwari Devi rape case judgement in Rajasthan and the Suman Rani custodial rape case judgement of S.C. reveal that all these prejudices and social biases are still operating as strongly as ever to deny justice to women.

Indian women need progressive laws in order to help their struggle for a dignified

and independent life. Yet 50 years of rule has shown that even reformed law in the hands of a patriarchal, corrupt legal and judicial machinery most often strengthens the arms of the state and can lead to the new forms of harrasment of women. The maximum justice gained by women has been as part of a peoples' struggle. Whether it is with reference to getting a share in land or punishing a rapist.

WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND STATE RESPONSE

The women's movement has been growing all over the world and also in India, especially since the 1970s. The Mathura Rape Case judgement galvanised women's groups in cities, and towns throughout the country. Rural women too have been mobilised in large numbers in peasant struggles leading to separate women's organisations being formed in villages for their demands. Women's participation in political movements - especially in nationality struggle, revolutionary struggles has grown. All this has shaken up the state establishment.

The state has responded by promoting various schemes already outlined earlier like family courts, Women's cells in police stations, appointing Women's Commissions. But their ineffectivity in tackling the extremely deep rooted problems of women is clearly visible. The state has also promoted NGOs many

financed by foreign funding agencies and research organisations/ centres. While women's studies have helped to research aspects of women's condition ignored all these years, yet these organisations have absorbed many of the leading women from the middle class women's groups into implementation of Govt. Schemes and in research. This has reduced the agitational activity of urban women's groups, encouraging the politics of lobbying for change, rather than mobilising the vast mass of woman to change this system and their lives. State and foreign funding for research has also had the subtle but significant theoretical impact of viewing women's issues in isolation without linking them to the class dimension and the concrete politico-economic structure of Indian Society.

At the same time the naked face of the state has revealed itself both in the sheer

Molestation and Rape of Kashmiri Women by Armed Forces

Excerpts from fact finding team reports

Awanpore village, Tahsil Awantipore, District Palwama.

May 4, 1994.

Fifteen year old Faizia had been molested at 10.00 a.m. People had gathered and were discussing the incident when jawans ordered them to disperse. At 3.30 p.m. a jawan stole into Jamila's house, quietly entered the kitchen and threatened her with a gun. He gagged her with a dupatta. She hit him and managed to shout out. Her brother who was studying in the adjoining room, rushed to her and was manhandled by the jawan who then ran away. A 45 years old woman reported that she was reading Namaaz when two jawans entered her home and tried to molest her. She managed to escape by jumping out of the window.

Two girls who lived with their families on the hill side were also molested...

Bijbehara town, dist. Anantnag

Oct.22, 1993

We met Sohra, mother of Shabnam who was gangraped by four jawans on the afternoon of Oct. 22, during search operation ...

Sohra was also an eye witness to Hanifa's rape by four jawans. Hanifa's husband refused to accept her and her child, and in fact wanted to divorce her. Militants intervened and persuaded her in-laws to change their minds...

Women's Testimonies from Kashmir

Women's Initiative, June 1994.

Rape by the armed forces is a form of torture. It is used as a weapon of suppression to cow down the people who the armed forces are fighting.

Women in Jammu & Kashmir are rarely taken into custody. They become targets of sexual aggression of the armed forces when house to house searches take place the border villages are the most vulnerable ..

The village of Kunan Poshpura in the border district of Kupwara saw the first major incident of mass rape that was publicised effectively. On the night of 23 February, 1991 hundreds of soldiers, many of them drunk, arrived in the village. According to a fact finding team led by retired Chief Justice Mufti Behauddin Farooq, the men of the village were taken out of their homes to be questioned and in the meanwhile the houses were raided and the women gang-raped. Some women were raped by 7, and some by 10. Atleast 23 women were thus assaulted.....

A High Court lawyer of Shrinagar, associated with the Jammu & Kashmir Forum for Human Rights & Civil Liberties said to our team that atleast 13,000 women have been molested in the last 5 years of army cracked down.

Blood in the Valley

August, 1995.



callousness towards the miserable plight of women and in the brutal repression of women who choose the path of struggle. There are innumerable examples of police/para military forces colluding with local elites to crush the struggle of the oppressed, including women. Among the dalit agricultural labourers burnt alive in Kilvenmani, Tamil Nadu, in 1968, many were women. Seven tribal women

(Saptakanya) were killed by the police in Naxalbari on May 23, 1967, in order to crush their uprising against jotedars. The police were silent spectators to the rape of women by Hindu communal forces in Surat in December 1992. Bhanwari Devi got no support from the Rajasthan Govt. though she suffered rape for doing her work as an employee of the Govt. Scheme campaigning against child marriage in villages. The state

Repression of Tribal Women - An Example

On March 8, 1992, several women of Gadiapalli Village in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra were molested and raped by SRP men at noontime when all the male members were away. This was the punishment meted out to these villagers for their active support and participation in the revolutionary mass organisation Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangathana (DAKMS). The news about this police attack reached the press and it was flashed in several newspapers in Maharashtra.

In retaliation for this negative press publicity, the special police cell set up to crush the Naxalite movement released a video cassette in which four tribal women alleged that they had been sexually exploited by the Naxalites. The four tribal girls filed a complaint against this video film before the Sp. TADA Court in Chandrapur from Jail and thus the truth about this much publicised cassette was exposed. It reveals the extent to which the police force, esp. the joint command can go to malign and crush the tribal people for taking to the revolutionary path.

Rakhma and Leela Dharro of Sundurdand village and Romoti Pandhare of Maseli village, both villages being in Deori Tehsil, Bhandara district were arrested by the police because they were active members of the Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sanghathana in their respective villages. They were arrested sometime in the beginning of December 1991. Tarabai of Maseli was arrested by the police on January 21, 1992. The four were kept in police custody and beaten badly to reveal the names of other active members. Almost every night these girls were raped by the policemen. They were taken around to several villages, and later villagers who were arrested were told that these girls had revealed their names. After two months of such severe physical and psychological torture, these four girls were forced to speak before a video camera, about how they were used by Naxalite squad members. The video shooting took place inside the police station.

Soon after being remanded to jail custody, these girls filed a complaint before the TADA Judge in Chandrapur seeking to restraint the police from showing this cassette around. The Judge did not accept the plea and the police used this cassette as propoganda material both in the villages and with the press.

is itself a part of the Hindu communal forces. The State Govt. support to the Sati Mahayagna last year after Roop Kunwar murderers were all acquitted being a recent example of this.

Repression of women participating in or supporting movements is taking various forms. Arrest, torture, rape and even killing in false encounters have become common in areas of struggle. In the last few years itself the following incidents received wide publicity and condemnation :

The rape of women agitators for Uttarakhand state, the rape of Budhiben of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the roughing

up of Medha Patkar and other women agitating against the imperialist Enron Power Project on the Konkan Coast, the mass arrests and beating of women agitating against country liquor and against cut in subsidised rice in Andhra Pradesh, the brutal treatment to women protesting against the Miss World Pageant in Bangalore last year. Besides women in nationality struggle in Kashmir and in the revolutionary struggle in Andhra Pradesh and Dandakaranya have particularly faced brutal repression. Active women have been killed in the villages and forests of Telangana and Dandakaranya. Snehalata Reddy, Nirmala were among those shot dead in Srikakulam in false

Only a Family Affair

This is an account of a courageous girl who stood up for her rights. Kiran Singh's case is but an extravagant version of what takes place routinely in a large number of homes in India.

25 yr. old Kiran Singh, a research student of Patna University lived in the University's women's hostel at Patna. Her father Dharamnath Singh was a rich landlord, active Congress leader, well connected. Kiran married a fellow student, Anwar Ahmad. On hearing of her marriage her father tried to forcibly take her home. She escaped from the car and ran away but her father reached the hostel and searched it in the middle of the night. He laid seige in the hostel while Kiran was hiding inside. Kiran finally managed to escape to Delhi where she filed a petition before the Supreme Court. In the petition Kiran highlights how her fundamental rights were violated. Excerpts :

"1. My fundamental right to life and liberty guaranteed by article 19(1) (d)(a) and (9) of the Constitution is under attack by Shri Dharamnath Singh, the police authorities in Patna, and the pro-Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of Patna University-

2. My right to freedom of movement, freedom to live, reside and move in any part of this country, freedom to peacefully pursue a lawful vocation, to enter into legal contracts (in this case marriage), to seek legal redress, are all under attack by Shri Dharamnath Singh, the police authorities of Patna and pro-Vice-Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor of Patna University..."

(November 1982)

Have'nt most of us heard of or witnessed similar incidents, but then the family is allowed this exercise of unbridled power.

encounters in the early 1970s. In past five years alone several activists like Bhagyalaxmi and Jyoti (Swaroop) and Padma were arrested, severely tortured

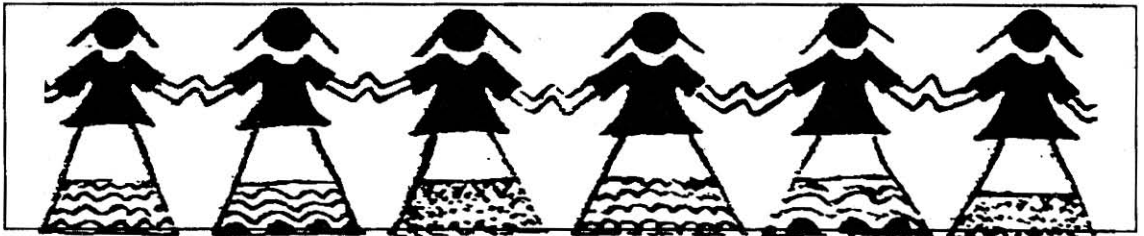
and killed. Bayakka, Vinoda and two others were shot dead in Balaghat district in March 1996 while attending a political camp.

CONCLUSION

Whatever be the diverse trends in the women's movement, there will be no difference of opinion that women are not independent in "Independent" India especially if we consider the condition of the vast majority of women.

We have seen how little has been the effect of reforms superimposed on the existing structure. Without fighting the classes that are upholding this structure, without attacking the state that is protecting this oppressive structure on the basis of its apparatus of violence - The police and the Army, efforts of women's movement to emancipate women will bear no results. Many women's organisations exist which are exposing the atrocities against women, which are taking up women's issues, but their focus is only women, in isolation from the economic and political structure, in isolation from feudalism and imperialism. They have hopes that the state can help women and want to adopt a policy of co-

operation and struggle. But such an approach is leading the struggle for women's liberation to a dead end. It has not brought even elementary benefits for the vast majority of toiling women. Therefore it is imperative for the women's movement to join hands with those forces that are fighting for a radical change, to create a genuinely democratic India. To create an India in which people of the toiling classes along with the tribals, Dalits and women can wield power and control use the resources of this rich country for the benefit of the majority. Women of the various oppressed nationalities, Dalit and tribal women are already active in the struggle. Women are participating in peasant and workers struggles. Student and women's organisation in the cities are also growing. The women's movement can achieve liberation and equality for women by joining these struggling forces and taking to the path of democratic revolution.



Do Not Offer Us a Trifle

The shame
insinuates itself on the victims
the one who is beaten
has committed a crime
the blood that drips from the wounds
is unclean
the abused body guilty.
The shame
insinuates itself on the victims
centuries upon decades
millenium upon centuries
will this never end?
Sisters, comrades, women
our anger rises now
it rises and rises like a tide
up from the innermost darkness in us
carrying with it the glowing ash
from all of the fires
carrying with it the blows, the screams
the boot-tramplings of the heart
and those countless used-up, unlived lives
for which there can be no consolation.
The anger rises and rises
it is our mighty gift to the world
together with the love
never requited
that found it too cramped
to be confined to a man's breast

we give it to each other now
and to this earth
with the people who live on it
black, white, yellow, brown
to the younger reindeer
unprotected against fallout-bearing rain
to the sea that breathes so heavily
and to the nameless, unseen flowers
deep in the Amazonian jungle.
Do not offer us a trifle
something halfway
Do not ask us to be grateful!
We come here
with the blaze from all of the fires in us
the pain from all of the blows
and the boot-tramplings of the heart
with the hunger of unlived lives
and that terrible heat
from our unrequited love.
Do not stand in our way
when we come to change the world
with vehement strokes
when we come to cultivate it
in our own way.
Do not stand in our way
for we are the owners of tomorrow.

Kjersti Ericsson

(translated by Francesca M. Nichols)



BREAK THE SHACKLES OF OPPRESSION