

# SANGHARSH

For Private Circulation Only

## For All Women On March 8, International Women's Day

Take time to listen  
to the voice of our strength  
to the quiet brag of our hearts  
We can, We can, We can  
Then let our strength fuse  
with that of our million sisters  
and surge to the moment of change  
moving always towards  
another time  
another place  
of our own making

Let our newly blossoming anger  
actually subverting the injustice  
that women and every oppressed class  
live daily

ESTHER RAMANI



It is time now to raise our subdued voices and join the millions to 'speak the unspoken'; to lift the weight of the crushing circumstances that confined us to function within the narrowest limits; limits that we all are forced to share just because we are women; limits that divide us because of our race, religion, caste, community and class; limits that stifled our creativity through our education and ethos.

As the murmur of our awakening fills our fibre, we shall refuse to let ourselves be trampled upon. Let our surging power challenge the bartering of our bodies, the subjugation of our feelings and thought to mere trivia. Let no one but ourselves define our roles, our intellect, our selves.

March 8, 1857 represented one of the first organised assertions of our collective will. On this day the women textile workers in the United States marched into the streets for the reduction of working hours and more human conditions of work. In 1910 the Russian woman revolutionary Clara Zetkin proposed that March 8, be declared as International Women's Day. From then on our legacy has

been one of resistance, of innumerable struggles our sisters have waged all over the world which has split open the myth that our grievances are 'private and personal' and revealed its political character; that ours is a struggle against all forms of oppression which is rooted in our society; that as women we are marginalised from the main stream of political and social life.

We celebrate March 8 as a moment of breaking away from the culture of silence and we grow and spread by fusing our energies with the movements of women and the oppressed all over the world and so

Let our newly garnered strength  
build a world of just laws  
in which every person woman and man  
can work and live in human dignity.

VIMOHANA

Forum For Women's Rights

## Women and Social Reproduction

As socialist feminists we see women, just as we see the working class, not simply as an oppressed and exploited mass but as a revolutionary force which can change the whole of society. That is why this topic is so important because it tries to locate the role of women as people who produce and reproduce society, and therefore as people capable of revolutionising that society. It thus deals with women as workers, and therefore predominantly, although not exclusively, with working class women.

All working class women work, whether they are wage-labourers or not; in fact, if they are wage-labourers, they are consistently working a double shift, day after day. If they are considered purely as wage-workers, then there is no reason why they should be considered differently from any other section of the working class, even though they have peculiar problems of their own. But the fact that they are house-workers as well affects even their status within wage-work, confines them to badly-paid work, marginal jobs which are supposed to be 'women's work' and so on. So it is

necessary to begin by examining the role of women as house-workers in order to understand their role in the reproduction of society as a whole.

The work which women do within the home—cooking, washing and cleaning, caring for children, etc., is work which has to be done in any society to keep it running. If they stop doing this work and no one else takes it up, all factories, transport, construction and so on will come to a standstill, disease and hunger will increase day by day, and very soon people will start dying. No production means no profit, and a deep crisis will result. So this is *socially necessary labour*, work which is necessary

housework. However badly you get paid, at least you get something back from society for your wage-work, and you have the advantage of working with others (unless you are engaged in domestic industry). But in the second two features, housework has the advantage; within the limits of your income you can, for example, choose what you are going to cook, whereas in a factory you have no control whatsoever over the product; and in spite of poor living conditions, over-work and dominating family members, you can, to some extent, organise your housework in your own way, bring up your children as you please, whereas in wage-labour you are constantly supervised and directed by others.

So if we could choose what kind of work we would like to do, we would combine the first two features of wage-work with the second two features of housework. We would do work which is recognised and compensated by society, and we would do it collectively instead of being stuck away in isolation; but we would ourselves collectively decide what to produce and how to organise our work, rather than having some boss make these decisions and force them on us. And of course there are features of both housework and wage-work which we would

### PERSPECTIVE FOR WORKERS CONTROL?

for society; it is *productive activity*. In fact, from the standpoint of social reproduction it is perhaps the most important productive activity, because it produces the people who produce everything else. This is why it is rather absurd to look at women simply as consumers, because they, more than anyone else, are producers. They are most concerned about inflation not because they eat up most of the rice, wheat and sugar and drink the kerosene, but because for them these are means of production, the materials with which they work.

But although the work itself is absolutely necessary, the way in which it is organised is not. There are some features about it which are advantages over wage-work, and some features which are disadvantageous. If we compare housework with wage-work we get something like this:

Housework	Wage-work
1. No pay	Some pay
2. Isolated	Collective
3. Some control over product of work	No control over product of work
4. Some control over method of work	No control over method of work

In the first two features, wage-work has the advantage over



like to avoid, such as too much work, bad working conditions and the division of labour, both mental/manual and sexual.

From this standpoint we can begin to evaluate the kind of demands and perspectives which women have raised concerning housework. Three main types can be considered here.

(1) The first is not a demand about housework: as such,

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## I AM A WOMAN.....

I am a mother,  
I am a sister,  
I am a faithful spouse,  
I am a woman,

A woman, who, from the beginning  
with bare feet,  
has run all over the steaming hot lands  
of the deserts,  
I am from the small villages of the north,  
A woman, who from the beginning,  
has worked to the limits of her capacity  
in the rice paddies and tea plantations,  
I am from the far away ruins in the east,  
A woman, who from the beginning,  
with bare feet,  
along with her skinny cow in the  
threshing field, from dawn to dusk,  
has felt the weight of pain,

I am a woman,  
from the nomad tribes who wander  
in the plains and the mountains,  
A woman who gives birth to her baby  
in the mountains,  
and loses her goat in the expanse of  
the plains,  
and sits in mourning.

I am a woman,  
A worker whose hands turn  
the great machines of the factory,  
which, each day,  
tear to bits my strength,  
in the threads of the wheels,  
in front of my eyes,  
A woman from whose life's blood,  
The carcass of the bloodsucker gets fatter,  
and from the loss of my blood,  
the profit of the capitalist increases,  
A woman for whom in your shameful vocabulary,  
There is no word  
corresponding to my significance,  
Your vocabulary speaks only of woman,  
whose hands are clean,  
whose body is supple,  
whose skin is soft,  
and whose hair is perfumed.

I am a woman,  
with hands full of wounds,  
from the cutting blades of pain.  
A woman whose body has been broken  
under your unlimited, shameless, back-breaking work,  
A woman whose skin is the mirror of the deserts  
and whose hair smells of factory smoke.

I am a liberated woman,  
A woman who, from the beginning,  
shoulder to shoulder with her  
comrades and brothers,  
has crossed the plains,  
A woman who has created  
the strong arms of the worker,  
and the powerful hands of the peasant,  
I myself am a worker,  
I myself am a peasant,  
with all my body  
an exhibit of pain  
with all my body  
the embodiment of hate.  
How shameless of you to contend  
that my hunger is an illusion,  
and my nakedness is  
a dream.

I am a woman,  
A woman for whom  
in your shameful vocabulary,  
There is no word  
Corresponding to my significance  
A woman in whose chest  
there is a heart  
full of the festering  
wounds of wrath,  
A woman in whose eyes  
the red  
reflection of the bullets  
of liberty are waving,  
A woman whose hands have  
been trained  
through work, to pick up  
the gun.

Marzieh Ahmadi Oskooji was born in 1945 in Oskoo (Iran). From early childhood, through working in her father's field, she became aware of the gross injustices, within Iranian society. This made her determined to actively participate in the struggle against a system which was the root cause of the exploitation of her people. She played a leading role in the student movement of the 1970s. She soon joined the ranks of the Organisation of the Iranian People's Fedaii Guerrillas. In May, 1973, after courageously fighting the enemy in a street battle, she was shot by the Shah's mercenaries, who even after her death were afraid to approach her lifeless body.

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## ON SUBVERTING A RHETORIC:

The last three years have marked a major development in the history of Indian women. The nation-wide interest in the Mathura case and the subsequent effort to get an antiquated rape law amended were no doubt important in themselves, but were also, I believe, the enabling factors for the actual development which is of a different order and represents a significant advance for women.

For women, sexual assault (of which rape is just one form) has been a fear we constantly live with. A fear that determines and restricts the scope of our lives. But just as, or perhaps more oppressive and destructive, has been the silence in which this intimidating experience has always been shrouded. If we were attacked in the street, on a bus, in the classroom, or in the home, we bore the guilt, the shame, the blot on our honour (it was always our guilt, our shame we had been told, even though we were the ones attacked) and took pains to ensure that the event never became public. The significant advance that has taken place over the past three years is that such assault has shifted, especially at the social or public level, from the region of the unspeakable or the taboo into the realm of speech. I say at the social or public level, because even today at a personal level unless a woman has a great deal of support from her immediate environment and especially from other women, it is very difficult to speak openly about such experiences. The dangers are psychological, but more importantly physical, material. On the other hand, it is possible today, in a way that was only barely so even 10 years ago, to talk and write about rape, to make films about it, and even, as in the Maya Tyagi case, to initiate a political campaign where rape is the central issue. There can be little doubt that this is a major move forward, and that the media have indeed played an important role in relation to it.

What is, however, cause for alarm is the exact form this publicity has taken. Atrocities on women are obviously the concern of any responsible media. But there can be little doubt that the publicity rape for instance has received, is also because it combines the three ingredients: sex, violence and power, guaranteed to arouse the sado-masochistic sexuality that is typical of our time. Nothing like rape to up the sales! Within such a sexual structure, pleasure has its source in inflicting (and the converse, suffering) pain. Consequently, nearly every time rape is spoken about or imaged, be it in a journal, a film or a political campaign, however moral or reformist the overt concern, the event is always presented at its goriest and most sensational. This means that the report focuses and elaborates on the woman's sexuality, her body, her age, her occupation, her class; then goes on to report in horrendous detail, often accompanied by photographs, the

crime itself, before it salves the guilt the average reader is by this time inevitably feeling over his perverse engrossment, with a moral edict denouncing the rape.

And however loud or fervent the explicit moral anguish, the real message, embodied in the style of the report, is unambiguous. That the basis of this "moral" indignation is again nearly always male outrage at the violation of his property; affront because his woman-wife, sister, mother, has been attacked and never really outraged at the violence itself, is a related question. But of that, more later. The point I'm trying to make now is that if we probe deeper into the popular imaging of atrocities on women, we find that the rhetorical act involved is structured in such a way that it nearly al-

### OR How the Media use Rape

ways addresses and reinforces, at this psychosexual level, the very norms that give rise to and support such attacks. And further, by evoking, by way of stricture, a morality based on the assumption that woman is property, and that a sexual attack on her is dishonour, not so much to her, as to the patriarchal family and its extensions in caste, class and race. What the rhetoric actually does is reaffirm the socio-cultural system that such a sexual relation is correlate with.

A parallel can easily be found in the nineteenth century concern with the abolition of sati. Here we have an atrocity on women that was taken up with a fervency that was to make it imaginatively, if not actually, the touchstone for a whole reform movement. And yet, as we search back to the original reports, (well reflected in their modern day version of spectacular colour spreads, showing the women, the massive crowds, but most of all, the fires) we find the focus remains on the number of times

meet the haunting sense that the moral indignation, willfully, remains part of the same perverse structure. Recent research confirms this hunch, for it indicates that the incidence of sati actually increased around the time the reformist action was initiated.

It is useful to look back. History reveals a startling fact. The incidence of sati was not exclusively, or even predominantly among the primitive, tradition-bound Vaishnavite peasantry, (as Rammohan Roy would have us believe) but among the urban elite of the Calcutta region. In fact, during the early part of the nineteenth century sati was most prevalent in areas exposed to western influence such as the Bengal Presidency. In a society thus disrupted, where new, non-traditional opportunities for upward social mobility and economic advancement became available to those who came within the sphere of British influence, sati actually became a means of upgrading a family's social status and demonstrating its ritual purity. It is not unimportant that the Lalama Sabha was able to organise what might be regarded a proto-nationalist movement in defence of the morbid practice. The issue is no doubt an involved one, but what I'd like to point out here are the connections between three nodal features in this cultural world. First at the moral level, where we get the idea of the "virtuous" wife, the women on whose life the family honour or status finally depends; second, the religious, communal or nationalist sentiment which can quickly cohere on the issue; and third, the psycho-sexual basis which established sati as the "choice entertainment" it had obviously become by the 1820's; and (if we are to judge by the contemporary revival of interest, both at a sensationalist and a communal level) has remained even today. Such issues, are always complexly powered. The sources of their energy far more deeply and mysteriously rooted than we imagine; the hold tenacious.

Take the currently popular film Insaaf Ka Tarazu for instance. Overtly it is a film designed to reveal the bias of the

the basis of this "moral" indignation is again nearly always male outrage at the violation of his property; affront because his woman - wife, sister, mother, has been attacked and never really outraged at the violence itself.

the widow had to be pushed back into the pyre, the force with which she was held down, how piercing her cries were, how "consuming" the fire was and so on. It is obvious that the excitement aroused by the event is no moral indignation, though the overt intention in these reports is to decry sati on liberal humanitarian grounds. In fact just as in the case of rape today, here too we

existing law on rape, more especially the fact that women can never expect justice under its tenets. The plot is probably familiar to most readers; but a summary will be useful. A woman, working as a model, and living with her school-going younger sister in a well appointed city flat is attacked and violently raped by a man whose attentions she spurns.

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The court acquits the rapist on the grounds that there is no proof that she did not consent. Broken, she leaves her fiancé whose family now rejects her, and the job she can no longer do as her image is tarnished. With her sister she moves out of the city to find work elsewhere, this time as a typist. But the story is repeated; the sister is raped by the same man. Enraged, the heroine takes justice into her own hands and shoots the rapist. At the second trial, the whole story comes out, and the judge, disturbed and chastened by what he hears, gives her a token punishment, then, in a heroic concluding gesture resigns, thus severing all personal connections with this faulty law.

At the explicit level this would appear a pro-women movie. One that all women must see, even the advertisement declares. But the same bill tells us not to miss the exciting beginning where the real theme statement of the film is made in an abstractly posed, but spectacularly filmed attack on a woman, that resounds with the noise of shattering glass. At the gates (don't tell me the site was not deliberately chosen) of the "posh" theatre where the film has been running for four months, is a huge hoarding of Rajesh Khanna, the rapist hero of Red Rose, who, we are told, wears "Fabina Suitsings". We have here in cameo the actual dynamic of the film: an explicit moral or humanistic statement coupled with a concrete filmic rhetoric that not only undermines and emasculates the former, but

firmly re-establishes the status quo. In other words, the covert rhetoric of the film determines its message.

The movie opens with shot after shot where Zeenat Aman, who plays the heroine (the star sex symbol of the Hindi screen is aptly cast in the role) is shown in revealing "westernized" costumes. The image of the alien here, is not negligible, or incidental. Neither is the "she-asked-for-it" exposure of her body. The film maker could argue that his effort here is to establish that a woman's job or her dress does not make her fair game for rape. But the repeated exposure, and, more specifically, the camera angles, leave us in no doubt about the function of these frames. Next is a sequence in the very modern flat where she lives with her sister, without protection, either in the form of husband or father, of the patriarchal family. The new woman, one might say. But what do we see here of the struggle, the fight, the demoralization of a woman living alone in a city like Bombay? This woman's living alone is just a ball.

But we must not dwell too long on such minor details. She prances around the luxuriously appointed flat, in stages of undress, cooking a meal for her fiancé in between a great deal of necking and cuddling. As one might expect, the predominantly male cinema audience now is really aroused and the film responds by providing the predictable "dream sequence". Shots of feet interlacing,

of a bed festooned with marigolds, of a bride being kissed, of her in underclothes again, of her going down his legs, and nauseam. Whatever also she

titulatory story sequences. We pause briefly to note with the police photographer the scratch marks on her face. We see her declare to her fiancé

## HOW THE MEDIA USE RAPE

might aspire to be in this film, she is established first and in controversially as sex object.

The first round (as things go, these days, fairly innocent, I suppose) is over. Now for the second. The setting: the same flat. This time she emerges from a naughtily decorated bathroom where we watched her shower, clad only in revealing red negligee, and is brutally raped by the man waiting for her. The episode is presented in great detail: the sado-masochistic scenario complete with silk gag, black underwear, ankles and wrists lashed together. Each black thong, each knot, each brutal move is caringly watched by the excited camera. Later we will have this scene replayed in flash back, twice. (The modified replay, remember, only serves to evoke the original scene even more vividly than an actual presentation).

The crucial event over, we move on to the police report, the lawyers office, the court, and so on in quick succession. The pace here is in striking contrast to that of the earlier

his kind) are made to win. It matters little how. What of the woman lawyer? White saree. Deep red lipstick. Composed, but tight, even brittle. Very stylish. Immaculate hair do. Immaculately manicured fingers. Several shots of long shapely nails painted red. The theme sound as she moves into action, is the click of high heels. She argues too. She speaks the truth (what use is it?) she argues with indignation, but her passion is real, not calculated and it seems like hysteria-unnecessary, uncontrolled. Worst of all, the more sexy, the more desirable and toyluke, she becomes..... She's for the taking too, it would seem.

Now for the second rape. This, men who have seen the film tell me, is what gives the film its "hit" rating. Evidently they are right, for the film made Raj Babbar (who acts the rapist) a super star. This time the kid sister looking for a job is trapped in this opulent man's ridiculously furnished office suite. She is slowly made to strip. She protests, screams, tries to break out. No effect. No one can hear. She tries to defend herself. Again its no use. He's on the winning side from the word go. Its a cool game for him. With ease he catches the objects she flings at him, and smiling, sets them aside. He insists she take her clothes off. The camera stays fastened on her. Moves up and down her body. Stops at each button, each hook. She is made to walk, up then down, then up again. Only occasio-

nally, and that too very briefly during all this are we shown the attacker's face. Who is interested in it any way? In fact, for the audience he is an intrusion, they are so completely involved with the woman. Her indignity is their thrill. The rape a fitting climax. At the trial that follows his murder. Zeenat, now moulded into respectability, wears an asner grey saree and a demure blouse. Such is the function the chastening authority of the phallus. And the end of the movie? As all happy endings a fictive sequence: extravagant, unreal, of only formal value, quickly forgotten. What remains is a clear message identical to the one the world is perpetually proclaiming.

How can this effect be subverted? How could the movie maker, even if we allow his good intentions, have changed the court scene or the second rape, to question, even controvert the sado-masochistic rhetoric that dominates? How could he have projected a world that reflects women's real experience? The point am trying to make is that given the over-all structure, the basic psycho-social system that is not only left unquestioned and uncriticized, but reinforced and the essentially male point of view that is filmically expounded, it is impossible to avoid such an effect. No surface change, no more intensification of moral purpose, will transform the sexy, hysterical, toy that the woman lawyer is in the film, into a serious powerful voice, any more than the

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## WOMEN ARE CONSCIOUS

Rural women in India who constitute 81 per cent of the female population and 36 per cent of the total rural labour are viewed primarily as homemakers and are denied their productive roles. Furthermore, while men increasingly have opportunities to develop their skills and awareness, the treatment of women as members of the families/households and not as individuals in their own right perpetuates women's backwardness alienating them to the outside world. A study on the impact of the Green Revolution on women carried out by us in three villages of Etawah District in Western Uttar Pradesh reveals that peasant women are highly conscious of their economic roles and their sex-specific and caste and class specific social position. Our research report (this paper is abstracted from the report) suggests that the rural development realities are seen critically by these women. Rural women in this region seem highly conscious of the fact that development and welfare programmes launched by the Government are usurped by the rural rich and the government officials at the local level.

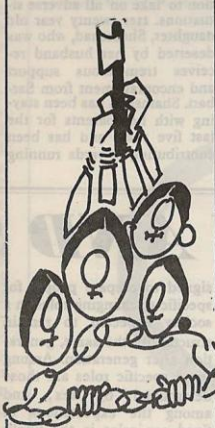
Our training as social scientists and the ideology of planning encourages an image of agricultural women in which the technological and scientific solutions of the problems of development are constantly

generated by an expert group of planners and policy-makers but are not accepted by the 'backward' peasant women. It is assumed that the reasons for non-acceptability of development programmes are to be found in the ignorance and conservatism of the rural women. This is not the case. Here we attempt to dispel the myths about women's 'backwardness'. While we supplied some useful background information about the causes of women's subordination in the structural and historical processes, the village women themselves interpreted their own situation. Many of them accused planners, development administrators and academics of premeditated insulation and deliberate neglect of peasant women and their men.

We interviewed women from 58 households from a cross-section of village society. The majority of them belong to the scheduled caste and minority communities. Agrarian technology and production on commercial lines in these areas has not only led to pauperization of small peasantry but also polarisation between women and men. Marginality and discriminatory low wages are prevalent among rural women throughout the northern region of the Green Revolution in India. Most of the manual and non-technological work is done by

women, while men operate the new agricultural machines and control the inputs as well as the produce. Women's involvement in production is viewed as secondary to their reproductive, 'homemaker' role and this is the basis of their marginality and subordinate character in production as well as neglect in the development process. Significantly, in addition to the pressures of poverty, the struggle against patriarchy is reflected in these peasant women's answers, irrespective of their socio-economic background.

### SISTERHOOD



Why am I Invisible, Irrelevant, Isolated, Privatized?

Have I a choice Can I change? Support me So I may be Whole. With you, my sisters I must be More

ASTRA

not easily accessible to a Bhangi woman because of pollution restrictions. Prema Devi seemed a conscious woman having the capacity to reflect and articulate. She denounced the attitude of caste Hindus towards her and her caste women and men. The caste Hindus pass taunting remarks on the latter's mode of dress, hairstyles, behaviour and "caste Hindu-type" names. These manifestations of modernity are considered the prerogative of caste Hindus. According to Prema Devi, the present generation of young, literate and semi-literate women and men are more ruthless in observing untouchability. "Although now we are allowed into the courtyards of most houses, the younger women throw food at us as though we are dogs." The village functionaries refuse to touch Bhangi women, men and their children. The village medical practitioner, reportedly, would examine the Bhangi patients only in the morning prior to his ritual bath and *pooja* (prayer). Prema Devi's husband has a reputation of being lazy, non-productive and a gambler. He is dependent on her. The sole responsibility of providing for her family rests on Prema Devi. Prema Devi is an assertive woman making major decisions in the family regarding consumption and expenditure. However, while her husband is largely unhelpful where contributing to the family income is concerned, yet, when Prema Devi undertakes wage labour during

Prema Devi  
Thirty five year old Prema Devi was married to Munshi when she was seven and he was ten years of age. She belongs to one of the two families who work as Bhangi (scavengers) in the village. Munshi owns about 1.5 acres of land and six pigs which are reared for sale. Premadevi, who has two young sons, participates in all the agricultural activities on her own fields, except ploughing. She goes scavenging to the caste Hindu houses each morning and, depending on availability of work, does wage labour. However, she said that even wage labour is

not easily accessible to a Bhangi woman because of pollution restrictions.

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Prema Devi's husband has a reputation of being lazy, non-productive and a gambler. He is dependent on her. The sole responsibility of providing for her family rests on Prema Devi. Prema Devi is an assertive woman making major decisions in the family regarding consumption and expenditure. However, while her husband is largely unhelpful where contributing to the family income is concerned, yet, when Prema Devi undertakes wage labour during

transplanting and harvesting periods he does most of the house work including cooking washing and cleaning of the house. This breakdown of the sexual division of labour was noticed among Chamar families and among poor Muslim and non-caste Hindus of the other two villages. Economic necessity drives the able bodied women and men to work in the fields and the household chores and children are attended to by older men and women.

Socio-economic conditions put the Bhangi in the role of scavengers and the arresting social system offers no avenue of release from this role. Prema Devi said that the placement of her caste in the lowest social rung, poverty and thereby dependency on the class of caste Hindus restricts her mobility and results in a loss of bargaining power. About 15 years ago she as well as other Bhangi women and men organised to strike work till such time that their wages were enhanced. The daily wage of one *roti* for scavenging has not been raised for the last 50 years. The Bhangi went without their '*roti*' for a couple of days, but hunger drove them back at the same wage rate to the caste Hindus who threatened to withdraw even that one '*roti*' if the Bhangi people did not 'behave' themselves.

However, Prema Devi's self-confidence, self-respect and refusal to be cowed down by the high-handed treatment of caste Hindus especially the

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## WOMEN AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

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but for an escape from housework, the demand of employment. The positive aspect of employment for women is that it enables them to break out of the isolation of the home and gain some financial independence from the family—the two advantages of wage-work. The negative aspect is that it increases their workload and decreases their leisure time—both of which are consequences of ignoring the socially necessary character of housework and therefore not raising any demands directly related to it. But over and above these disadvantages is a more serious one: by itself, this demand is totally unrealistic. Nowhere in the world, let alone in India, is there likely to be a return to conditions of labour shortage or absence of labour organisations, which historically were the conditions in which large-scale employment of women took place. In the advanced capitalist countries, where more and more women are joining the wage-labour force, they are not so much being employed in industry or agriculture, where employment as a whole is declining, but in the ser-

vice sector. Here, however, most services, as well as a significant amount of manufacturing, e.g., food processing—are provided in the home—by women (although even here the tendency to shift from employment in agriculture and industry to services is beginning to be seen). In other words, women as house-workers are competing with themselves as wage-workers. In a profit-oriented system, it is obvious that so long as women go on doing this work without payment, no one is going to pay them to do it.

So the demand for paid employment, cannot meet with success so long as women continue to keep themselves out of paid work by working for nothing.

(2) One movement which has tried to meet this difficulty is the 'wages for housework' movement. Unlike the simple demand for employment, this movement does not accept the prevailing social definition of housework as useless, but recognises its social usefulness by demanding payment for it. But it accepts the other disadvantage of it, its isolated character, and by doing this, makes the demand one which is extremely difficult to fight for. The most that a movement like this can achieve is something like a family allowance for women. This is certainly a step forward,

and gives women a small degree of financial independence, but even if the movement is successful, there is still the problem that once it is over women go back to isolation in their homes.

(3) Alternatively, women have demanded that the state take over various functions which are now performed in the family by women. This converts these into paid jobs and also socialises them. But at the same time the advantages of housework are lost: any control which was earlier present is taken away. The state, representing the capitalist class as a whole, is asked to take over functions which were formerly under our control.

All these solutions then, have serious drawbacks: is it possible to develop something better? Not something perfect, of course, but a solution which is superior to those which have so far been put forward?

At present, all we can do is suggest what a solution could mean: actually working it out will be something that has to be done in practice.

Firstly, it would mean women organising collectively to do the work which they now do in isolation—organising canteens where children can be looked after collectively, canteens where the preparation of food can be centralised, and so on. There may be problems at first, because women are not

used to working together in this way, but it should not be difficult to overcome these. What is most important is that women should do all this themselves so that they can develop their initiatives and make use of and extend the skills, knowledge and experience which they already possess.

Secondly, doing it this way would mean retaining control over the whole process; in fact, even extending it, since a group of women working collectively would be less subject to pressures, for example, from family members, than one woman in isolation. They would be able to decide what exactly they want to produce, what kind of up-bringing they would like their children to have, what kind of diet would be best, and so on—without leaving these important decisions to others as they would have to if the state took them over.

Thirdly, it would also leave the women in control of the way in which they organised themselves; it would be possible to eliminate the division between those who make decisions and those who carry them out, those who work with their brains, and those who work with their hands, those who are more skilled and those who are less skilled—the kinds of divisions which exist in every capitalist enterprise. It may even be possible to question popular notions of what is 'women's work' and 'men's work' and thus to begin breaking down the most stubborn division—the sexual

division of labour.

Finally, it would also mean a struggle to get payment, probably from the state for this work—some compensation from society for work which is done for society. This may be the most difficult part, because it is not likely, that small local groups of women will be able to achieve it alone. It would be necessary to link up and form a wider organisation of women, as well as gain the support of other sections of the working class, especially the trade unions. This would involve convincing them that this is not simply a sectional demand but a demand in the interests of the working class as a whole. Surely, if a movement of this sort were started, it would give an enormous boost to the working class movement as a whole. The self-confidence and experience of organisation and struggle gained by women within it would undoubtedly help increase their participation in work-place struggles. More than that, it would introduce a new element into these struggles. Because the struggle for control over the production and reproduction of human life, human individuals, must, by its own logic, extend to a struggle for control and planning of every aspect of social production and reproduction. For example, ensuring the health of those individuals will involve control over the production and distribution of food, clothing, housing, sanitation, medical services—and even ultimately, control over some part of what goes on in their work places. Ensuring their psychological well-being involves much more. The circle steadily extends outwards. Thus women, instead of struggling at the tail-end of the labour movement, would be right at the forefront of it. Upto now, the very centrality of women to the process of social reproduction has been their downfall: it has been used to marginalise them within the labour force and exclude them from any meaningful role in organisations and struggles. Can we reverse this situation and convert their role in social production into a source of revolutionary strength?

ROHINI BANAJI  
—Forum Against Oppression of Women  
Bombay



Revolution means change from the top to the bottom and that includes the way we deal with each other as human beings—

ALEY KUTTY  
Mathrubhumi

## AGITATING FOR THEIR RIGHTS

The fisher women of Goa and Kerala are at the forefront of the fisher people's agitation against the invasion by the trawlers and mechanised craft. Over four hundred trawlers have been licenced in Goa. In violation of the law forbidding trawlers to operate within the five fathoms limit, they have been encroaching systematically on the preserves of the traditional fishermen. As a consequence, Goa's 80,000 strong fishing community is facing virtual extinction. For the last three years the community has been agitating for the enforcement of the five fathoms limit. The agitation has considerably intensified in the last three months.

All through the agitation the fisherwomen have been fighting along side the menfolk. In the last year the fisher women of Trivandrum participated in a chain hunger strike. They also participated in processions and marches. In Kerala, the Government has been able to solve their problems to some extent. In Goa, the fisher

women blockaded the road of the Chief Minister's residence. More than two hundred fisher women were arrested and taken to jail.

One of the women complained bitterly of the conditions in the jail. She said that "..... a hundred and fifty of them were kept in a very small crowded cell." They had to sleep on the bare floor and were treated on par with criminals and murderers. They were served with inedible food and watery tea out of old tin cans. They were further intimidated by the police and warned that they would be kept in jail for an indefinite period of time unless they withdrew from the agitation.

But all this has not dampened the spirit of the brave fisher women; one of them said "It is a life and death battle for us. After the trawlers have invaded our territory we do not get any fish at all. There were times, in the old days before the trawlers came, when I could make Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 a day during the

season from selling fish. Now I can barely make three or four rupees. Our earnings are now less than Rs. 1000 a year, as against Rs. 7000 to Rs. 8000 before."

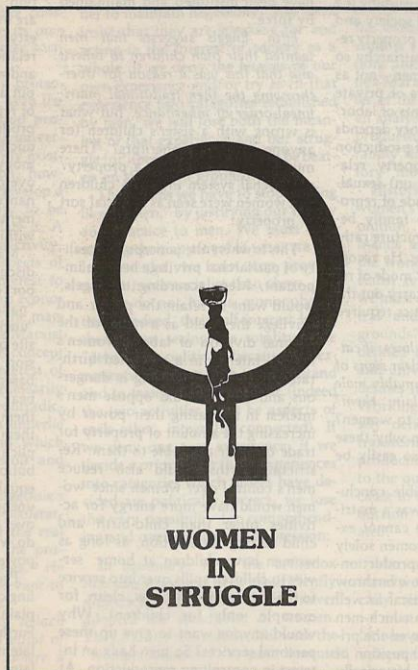
Another woman in the crowd intervened and said

bitterly that many of them had to stop sending their children to school because they could not afford to do so any longer. She herself had sold or pledged many of her gold ornaments. "We manage to keep the home fires burning only by borrowing heavily at 18%

per month from the local land lords. "What is going to happen to us?"

"Your agitation does not seem to be getting you anywhere. What if the Government does not yield to your demands? Are you not afraid of violence?" I asked them ".... we are even prepared to die rather than give up our fight. We have no choice in the matter. What do you expect us to do?" ".... It is already three years now since the agitation has started. We are now prepared for drastic methods and desperate solutions if the Government will not do anything about the trawlers we will catch hold of the trawlers and burn them."

The fisher women of Goa are extremely militant. They are determined to carry on the fight to the finish. They are not deceived by the offers of trawlers for all of them. "How can we afford trawlers? How many people will get employment? Each trawler can employ only five people, where the rampon employs one hundred and fifty people. They will give trawlers to some of the rich fishermen and to the leaders and what will the rest of us do?"





Historically, women have always been treated as property of their fathers, or their husbands, in legal statutes. Consequently, all laws are drawn up within this framework. For instance, the penalty for rape is in retribution for defiling another man's property rather than as a form of protection to women in full recognition of women's rights over their own bodies. It is in this light that we must view the proposed Bill on Rape.

Much has been written on the Mathura rape case and about it. Mathura has sparked off a public debate on the question of rape, more significantly bringing into focus the inadequacy of the rape law.

Mathura's was not a lone search for justice. Women's organisations recognising the need for an urgent change in the law, worked collectively to demand an amendment to the existing law.

Following nation-wide campaigns, protest marches and demonstrations, a Law Commission was instituted by the Government to study the prevailing law on rape and to propose amendments. If such a step promised some respite, these hopes were soon belied. Infact, the new Bill currently pending in Parliament is a matter of serious debate to all Concerned about justice. It is the bounden responsibility of every conscientious citizen to pressurize the Government into accepting the recommendations of the Law Commission, failing which, the institution of a Commission to study

the law on rape becomes a mere exercise in futility.

A study of some of the salient features of the Bill and the recommendations of the Law Commission is necessary to understand its implications on victims of such abuse and on women's movements.

In its introduction 'Rape: Proposed changes in the Law' published by the Lawyers Collective, the book describes the Bill as meant to 'protect the police rather than women'. There is every reason to believe this, since the police have a shocking record of atrocities perpetrated on women and other weaker sections. Of course, fearing public outrage at abuse of power by the police, the law cannot be too progressive. The recommendations of the Law Commission have been cast aside only to preserve and 'keep up the morale of the police.'

The proposed Bill assumes great significance in the context of growing repression; rape at the hands of the police being one specific form.

### Some of the Main Features of the Bill

A comparison between the recommendations of the Law Commission and the provisions of the Bill reveals the de-

# BILL ON RAPE

## PROTECTION FOR WHOM?

gree of commitment a Government that claims to be the largest democracy, makes to its people.

### (a) Custodial Rape:

Custodial rape is said to have occurred when rape is committed by a male in a position of authority or custodial control over a woman, who, by his very power and status should abuse his officialdom to have sexual intercourse with a woman who would otherwise refuse. This applies to policemen, public servants, jail or hostel superintendents and staff members of hospitals.

In recent times, police misconduct including rape (as the highest form of physical violence committed on the person of a woman especially of the poorest classes), has received wide coverage in the media. In both the cases of Mathura and Rameezabee the police have been indicted; the incident at Bhagpat followed soon after. Since then, the frequency of rape in police stations has assumed alarming proportions.

Justice Mukhtadhar, who headed the Commission that enquir-

ed into the rape of Rameezabee reiterated the 'pitiable condition of suspect women' especially of the poor at the hands of the police in police stations. He even suggested that the Government should act promptly to provide safeguards to such women. But despite his appeal, the Bill includes no provision to protect women from the harassment of the police.

Recognizing the insecurity women experienced at the hands of the police in the police stations, the Law Commission in a sensitive gesture outlined several measures to protect the dignity and honour of women.

1. That a woman should be interrogated only at her dwelling place.
2. That no woman should be arrested before sunrise and after sunset. If in case she is

arrested before sunrise and after sunset, then a written report, following permission from a superior, must be made. In situations of emergency, prior permission can be dispensed with but a written report has to be submitted to the officer immediately after the arrest has been made.

3. That once a woman has been arrested she should not be detained in a police station, but should be kept in a women's detention centre or a women's or children's institution.

4. That during interrogation by a police officer a woman should be allowed to have a male relative or friend or female social worker with her.

5. That in instances where police refuse to record a complaint in cases when a cognisable offence is reported, it should be considered an offence.

It is distressing that the Government has not incorporated any of these preventive measures which certainly would have contributed in affording

women some protection. Instead, it has responded to the situation by stipulating a minimum punishment of ten years for all custodial rape. The minimum punishment in other cases is seven years.

The statute of minimum punishment was opposed by the Law Commission because it went against the concept of reformist penology which is a universal concept. The idea that minimum punishment would act as a deterrent is false: in no way will such long sentences guarantee a drop in the incidence of the crime, when the roots are social, economic and political.

Further, a longer sentence in the case of custodial rape almost implies that rape committed by a landlord, for instance, is a lesser crime. And yet we know that in most cases of land disputes, wage increases or caste conflict, it is the class of landlords that use rape as a weapon to suppress popular revolt, e.g., Belchi, Narainpur.

A redeeming feature in this section of the Bill, however, is the decree that in the cases of custodial rape 'where sexual intercourse has been proved and where the question is whether it was without the consent of the woman, and she states in her evidence before the Court that she did not consent, the Court shall presume that she did not.'

### (b) Past Sexual History:

The Bill indifferently overlooks the sensitivity inherent

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## MORE ABOUT RAMEEZA

A News item in the Indian Express (Bangalore edition) dated October 2, 1981 says:

Mr. Justice Vittal Rao of the Karnataka High Court has admitted a petition filed by the Indian Federation of Women Lawyers, the Stree Shakti Sanghatana and the Vimochana (all Women's organisations) challenging the acquittal of Mr. T. Surendar Singh, police sub-inspector, Hyderabad, and other policemen by the Sessions Judge, Raichur, in what has become known as Rameezabi rape case. It was alleged for the prosecution that the accused had committed rape on Rameezabi and committed murder of her husband Ahmed Hussain, in custody in the Nallakunta police station of Hyderabad in March, 1978.

The sessions judge acquitted all the accused. The petitioners contended that the decision of the sessions judge was wrong and illegal and prayed that the same might be set aside and the accused persons sentenced according to law. The State Government had also filed an appeal separately challenging the acquittal order of the accused."

This small item which did not reach other editions is extremely significant for the women's movement. It breaks a lot of ground and constitutes triumph for women's organisations although it is merely an admission. It may be recalled

that when women's organisations wanted to move the Supreme Court in the Mathura case their movement was not recognised. The admission of this revision petition is important because it indicated that for the first time rape which was seen as a private wrong now assumes the importance of a public issue. The Supreme Court judgement on the Mathura case provided a rallying point for women's groups all over India. This judgement which reversed the Bombay High court judgement and acquitted the accused policemen brought into focus very sharply the actual status of women in this country. A large number of women are jolted into awakening to reality by the bias of the judgement and the obviously male attitude and assumptions underlying it. The main focus of the women's movement was an amendment to the law concerning rape. This was chiefly because these organisations saw rape as an extreme form of violence against women, an inhuman crime. The main issues raised in this context were that—the previous 'history' of the victims of rape was immaterial; the long interval that elapsed between the actual incident and the trial was against the interests of justice; the onus of proof should lie with the accused rather than the victim considering the peculiar nature of the crime.

Women realised that they could not expect more than a

travesty of justice in the existing set-up. Besides, they realised that rape being one aspect of the general violence against women—every woman is a potential victim of rape. Sita's "ordeal of fire" and the myth that virtue protects a woman were rejected outright. After all, if virtue can protect a human being why did Gandhiji fall a victim to an assassin's bullet? Or has virtue a gender and is there a distinction between male virtue and female virtue? Why is it that when a man falls a victim to a vicious attack he is glorified as a martyr while a woman who is attacked is despised and held in contempt?

One of the main demands raised by the Women's Organisations was that they should have the locus standi to move a court in a rape trial. This is because rape is basically a violation of a human right. What happens in an act of rape is not the dishonour of her husband, father or brother, not a loss of chastity but the violation of the dignity of the human body. The general trend now in courts of law seems to be towards a liberalisation of the interpretation of standing. With an increasing number of incidents of violation of civil rights being brought before the courts it is no longer possible to restrict standing as in the past to one who has a direct interest or whose private right in private law is affected. The focus has now shifted to the objectives of the

statute itself. Even the right of a member of a class who is likely to be affected by the act to move the court in such matters is recognised. The news item 'S.C. on Locus Standi' (Indian Express, 20th October) points out that the judge agreed with the counsel that any of the 600 million citizens can move the court if the court is satisfied that he is moving it in genuine public interest. Now cases of rape are cases of public interest deeply affecting the status of one half of the population.

The few cases of rape which managed to reach the courts are cases where the incident produces a public outcry forcing a trial. Why the question of standing assumes importance is that the victim of rape or any atrocity is invariably poverty-stricken, illiterate and oppressed. To expect this victim to move a court or to appeal is unrealistic.

What is needed is that any public minded citizen with real public interest or "belonging to an organisation with special interest in the matter" should be able to move in the matter. The position taken by the women's groups in this matter regarding the maintainability of the revision petition refers to the chapter on fundamental duties. This requires that not only should a citizen perform his/her duties but it is his/her duty to prevent infraction or breach of these duties by other citizen or by the state. Since one of the duties of the citizen is to denounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women, it be-

comes our duty to prevent deeds such as rape.

The involvement of women's organisations in this issue and the admission of the revision petition marks the beginning of an important trend. The reason a revision petition had to be filed rather than an appeal was that only one—the state or Rameeza—is entitled to appeal under the Code of Criminal Procedure. The fact that women's organisations have moved in this matter before the state merely proves that women are no longer prepared to wait for justice but are determined to fight for it. That even the state was forced to appeal, however slowly, in the matter as a result of the pressures brought to bear by the women's organisations underlines the importance of a concerted action.

When the hearings actually begin women all over India will follow the progress of this case as it will provide a clear indicator of the quality of life and liberty that they can expect in this society. What is needed is that all of us should realise that every incident of rape affects everyone personally and politically. Of hundreds of rapes only few see the light of day. Each case of rape allowed to go in favour of the accused through default or public apathy is a gradual erosion of our rights as citizens. We must begin to see this now. Otherwise it may be too late.

VASANTHA KANNABIRAN  
Stree Shakti Sanghatana



Contd. from page 8

in this particular recommendation. The Law Commission was against the use of past sexual history of the woman as evidence to testify rape. In both cases of Mathura and Rameezabee it has shown how the history of their sexual lives was used against them. Mathura was unmarried and not a virgin. Rameezabee was a prostitute it was alleged, and 'so she must have asked for it'.

The judgement of the Court is often influenced by the prevailing conventions and attitudes born out of social conditioning, however distant they might appear to the issue at hand. It is maintained that a woman of 'loose character' is not to be taken seriously, falsely assuming of course, that she must have consented to the act. Often, if the victim is a prostitute, the logic runs 'it could not have made much difference to her' or 'she asked for it'. Ironically, the accused is relieved of suspicion by default while the guilt is sought to be surreptitiously transferred on to the women.

Despite strong pleas from women's organisations and the recommendations by the Law Commission that the private life of the victim should be of no consequence in establishing rape except in her relations with the accused itself, the

Government has deliberately refused to recognise a women's right to privacy.

**(c) Medical Report :**

The medical report is of primary importance in confirming that sexual intercourse had taken place. Fully aware of its significance the Law Commission argued that for the medical report to be of any use it should include the medical history of 'both the victim and the accused.' Further, it suggested that a medical report should be complete with details of the accused such as age, injuries on the body, etc. The duration of the examination, the conclusions arrived at by the doctor supported by reasons, should be promptly sent to the Magistrate. There is always a possibility that any delay in submission might allow for discrepancies to creep into the report as was evident in the case of Rameezabee.

The Government however, has not accepted any of these recommendations.

**(d) Trial in Camera :**

Of immediate concern to the women's movements is the controversial provision in the Bill that makes it compulsory for the trial proceedings to be held in camera. Under this provision, the publication of the name or any matter which will

make known the identity of the person against whom the offence is alleged or found to be committed' will become a punishable offence. By this it is assumed that the victim will be exempted from any undue adverse publicity. Clearly, such a ruling has a twin objective of protecting the name and reputation of the accused with the external appearance of being instituted out of due concern for the 'protection of the fair name of the woman' involved. But there have been several instances of rape where police personnel have been indicted, in others, either landlords or individuals supported by powerful political groups.

Naturally, such a law will only put the lid on any attempt to expose the atrocities indulged in by the accused. It is known for a fact that it was largely due to the supportive role of the press and the wide publicity in the media that provoked universal outrage at the callous attitude of the police in the cases of Mathura and Rameezabee. It also brought into sharp focus the inconsistencies in the existing Rape Law and the need for long overdue amendments to safeguard the interests of women. In fact, the institution of the Law Commission is a direct outcome of the struggle taken up by various women's organisations all over

the country.

The Government has taken a controversial stand on the rape issue. On the one hand, it appears so keen to protect the reputation of the victim by making it compulsory for the trial to be held in camera. On the other hand, its total indifference to the various recommendations proposed by the Law Commission that could have prevented or minimised the occurrence of custodial rape, can perhaps best be summed up in a statement made by the Union Home Minister: 'Rape has been committed in the past, and would continue to be committed!'

From experience we know that it is only organised resistance that delivers some justice. In the circumstances, can we afford to place a controversial law in the hands of an inconsistent Government that shams sympathy over the ever increasing atrocities on women, and yet fails to make amendments that could ensure physical protection to all women?

DONNA  
VIMOGHANA

and defeated  
we shall always win.

MIROSLAV HOLUB

**On Subverting  
a Rhetoric**

continued PAGE 3  
Raped sister can become a figure women identify with, because in some way or other we share her experience.

In fact this anti-woman world-view which is unquestioned and which provides the film its ground, emerges in another, elaborately developed aspect of the theme. The heroine, the film reiterates, may be a model, she may wear sexy foreign clothes, but at heart (rapes apart!) she is really a virtuous Indian girl. She is totally 'faithful', will marry, keep her husband happy, raise a family. She will coyly defer to his wishes (even as she projects and deflects with true feminine wile, his opposition to her job). She will dress in a saree, drape her ghunghat over her head and touch feet when she meets his family. When she is raped, she will feel her life is over. There is nothing left for her. She refuses to marry a good man and bring him disrepute. In fact, her fantasy presents her alone, widowed, dressed in white, contemplating suicide. Like the truly virtuous woman, her anger and remorse is turned destructively on herself.

Where will this take us? What can we do about it? One answer of course, is what the

Rape Bill, placed before the Lok Sabha early last year suggested; protect the woman's honour; go back to the age-old place of not speaking about these atrocities at all. In brief, ban publicity. That, there can be little doubt, is the most retrogressive response possible. The real answer, however, is far more difficult, its form more that of a still hazily defined direction rather than a solution or a destination. Its humanism a knowledge that is in the making, not already made. One can only subvert powerful and many splendoured a rhetoric when we women (and men, of course but women primarily) speak and write in the process of searching our mutual experience. But as this point of view emerges in opposition to the current socially formulated one, what will necessarily also have to be questioned is a whole world-view: a sexuality based on pain, a group identity based on our oppression and notions of virtue designed only to safeguard property. The process is difficult and inevitably hazardous, but unless we are conscious of the basic pervasions that rest in the easy humanism we proclaim, the results of contemporary action will be dubious.

SUSIE THARU  
STREE SHAKTI SANGATHANA



**A NAMELESS GRAVE**

Glass bangles tinkling on trembling hands,  
But alas devoid of golden bands,  
Timid, she lay on the bridal bed  
Awaiting the man she had just wed.

He entered the chamber, locked the door  
Flung his coat upon the floor.  
His greedy eyes looked her over  
Her beauty the only wealth to offer.

Where was the gold she was to bring?  
There was nothing except the wedding ring.  
This flowered creature—was she his wife?  
No—never—not on his life.

With bloodshot eyes—lips snarling  
He fell on her—a rabid beast mauling,  
Groaning and mangled, bleeding she lay  
Till finally her life gave way.

In the darkness of night  
A mound took shape,  
A young girl was buried  
In a nameless grave.

Leela Khan  
Vimochana



The mountain moving day is coming  
I say so, yet others doubt  
only awhile the mountain sleeps  
In the past  
All mountains moved in fire  
yet you may not believe it.  
Oh man, this alone believes,  
All sleeping women now will awake and move.

AKEKO YOSANO



So you've kept shackled and chained  
My anger burns, burns, burns!

There is no fire as blue  
Fueled as it is by my pain:

To cool the flame  
I can laugh though  
At the powers that be  
Who prove themselves unworthy  
of their humanity.

They keep you in shackles and chains,  
But your word they cannot  
And it shall be!

A Philippine woman

