

MADHYAM

INFORMATION PACK

**NGO'S AND THE PRESS -
AN INTERFACE**

COMPILED BY MADHYAM

DECEMBER 17th 1996

CONTENTS.

1. CHILD LABOUR

2. CHILD ABUSE

3. WOMEN IN POLITICS

SOURCE: ACTION AID INDIA
STRATEGY PAPER 1993-1997

1

SITUATION ANALYSIS

CHAPTER III

THE COUNTRY SITUATION

The Paradoxes

With a population of 865 million (growing at 2.1% p.a) India is the second most populous country in the world and ranks sixth in land area. Its kaleidoscope of peoples, languages, religions, castes, etc, make it easily one of the most complex societies anywhere. Yet, since Independence in 1947 India has, unlike many other developing countries, evolved a sound democratic tradition through holding of regular and, by and large, free elections. The political space that exists for dissent in India is unique in the developing world and even puts it a cut above some of the so-called developed countries — particularly of Southeast and East Asia.

India is the ninth most industrialised country in the world with technical and scientific power to place its own satellites in orbit. The purchasing power of middle class Indians, some 200 million of them, would be the envy of any developing country. Indeed, it is these two factors that underlie the widely held view that India has the potential to turn itself into an economic tiger in the not too distant future.

Paradoxically, however, India is also one of the poorest nations with a per capita GNP of \$360. It ranks 134 out of 173 countries on the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index. More than a third of the world's absolute poor (i.e. over 300 million) live here. About 73 million children do not attend school, a similar number under fives are malnourished and 220 million have no access to clean water, according to the UNDP (Human Development Report, 1993). India's human rights record has also come in for severe criticism.

Female literacy of 39.4% (1991 census) is among the lowest in the developing world. Yet in 1990, the Indian government spent a mere 2.5% of its budget on education (most of it for higher education); 1.6% on health. In contrast, neighbouring Nepal spent 10.9% and 4.8% respectively. Social spending may fall further in the wake of an economic recession, which has seen GDP growth fall from 5.6% in 1990-91 to 1.5% in 1991-92, and a crushing foreign debt of over \$70 billion — the third highest after Brazil and Mexico.

CHILD LABOUR POSITION PAPERS:-

Over 17 million children are working as child labours, in hazardous and dangerous activities :

Over 90% are Indian Child Labours in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, U.P. Karnataka State, Bihar Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa and West Bengal :

Government wants to eliminate child labour by the year 2000 and has allotted Rs.34.40 crores, for the year 1995-96 :

The National Authority for Elimination of Child Labour has prepared objectives to be undertaken :-

Enforcement of law for protection of children. Withdrawing children from work and sending them to school vocational trainings, with stipend and mid day meals. Economic sustenance for parents of children taken out of work, by providing job and increase incomes. Preventing fresh entry of children into occupations through education :

Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act 1986 from working with-
Railways, Carpet, Cement, Construction,
Cloth, Dying, Weaving, Match Industry,
Fireworks, Beedi, Printing and Electronics:

Child Labour is a deep rooted socio-economic problem, India Legislation and policy are in line with the 1979 resolution of the ILO : NGOs could supplement government efforts to eliminate child labour: Under the Human Resource Ministry Non Formal Education has been introduced for Child Labours in the age group of 6 to 14 years :

According to the 1981 census there are 11 lakh child labours in Karnataka and these children work for 10-12 hours a day. 1978 census shows that there were 2 crores child labour in India.

It is estimated that in DELHI alone there are over 4 lakh children who are engaged as Child Labours, more than 1,50,000 of whom are Street Children and these children from street are mostly deviant ways and this hamper their overall growth.

In India 50% of the people live in slum areas and 70% in cities India's slum population is expected to touch 62 millions by 2000 A.D. of which 32 million will be living in cities :

CATEGORY OF WORKING CHILDREN, engaged in working within & for the family. Going out to work with parents. Employed in different enterprises. Engaged in self-employment:

The Government target set forth in the program^{me} of action is to provide education, including literacy, to about 40 million illiterates by 1990 and another 60 million illiterates in the age group of 15 - 35 by 1995 :

12. According to an official estimate regarding enrollment of children, there are 770 lakhs children in the age group 6 - 11 and 220 lakhs children in the age group 11 - 14 while 1359 lakh are working children. The remaining children of age group 6 - 11 are either out of school or street children in the age group 6 - 14 are working places are difficult :

PROBLEMS OF WORKING CHILDREN:-

Development problems.

Nutritional and health problems.

Exploitation.

Access to education.

14. India has the largest number of world's working children 1991 census. INDIA:

Govt Sources :- 1981 - 18.6 million child workers :

1983 - 17.36 million child workers :

NGO Sources :- 44 million :

Statewise :- 1981 census :-

Andhra Pradesh 1754 : MP 1372 : MUMBAI 1263 : U.P. 1246 :

KARNATAKA 966 : Bihar 950 : Tamil Nadu 921 : Rajasthan 604 :

and Kerala has the lowest record in child labour :

15. The ill effects of Child Labour :- The child loses the childhood, at a tender age and lack of family ties has a negative impact on their emotional state;

16. VARIOUS LEGISLATIONS RELATED TO CHILDREN IN INDIA :-

Pledging of labour Act, 1993 :

Employment of children Act, 1938 :

Minimum Wages Act, 1948

Factories Act, 1948,

Plantation Labour Act, 1958,

Mines Act, 1952,

Merchant shipping, Act, 1958,

Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961,

Apprentices Act, 1961,

Atomic Energy Act, 1962,

Beedi Workers Act 1966,

Shops & Establishment Act, 1986,

Prohibition of Child Labour Act, 1986,

Convention on Rights of Child 1992,

17. India has about 23 million able bodied men and women, who do not have jobs, at the same time there are from 17 to 44 million child workers slaving at jobs which adult should be doing.

CACL-K reports that the issue clamours for attention as about 56.76 million working children in the country are working as cheap labours :

The National Human Rights Commission states that high incidence of TB among child labours is found so far :

Constitution which under Article 24 prohibits any child below the age of 14 from employment :

Constitution concerning universal primary education under Article 45 remains largely unfulfilled:

30 lakh girls die each year out of one-fourth of the 12 million girls born in India every year, do not see their 15th birthday

UNICEF reports every sixth female child death occurs due to gender discrimination :

Dr. Malathi Das Secretary, Dept of Women & Child Development says 92% of the country total labour force is child labour : And 80% of working children are directly engaged in agricultural and allied areas, the study was done by 5 NGOs in 5 divisions, Bangalore, Belgaum, Gulbarga, Mysore, Bangalore City by DEEDS :

CACL-K reports a national coalition of nearly 1,000 NGOs atleast 74.8 million children in India are out of school and working : And for instant the vast majority of adult workers in India - 290 million or 92 % of the country total labour force is employed in informal sectors :

Child Labours in Bangalore hotels are usually migrants from Mangalore and other rural places, CAC reports that in Bangalore so far there are 3,052 hotels and about 6000 child labours are working Labour Dept was able to detect only 1% that is 342 child labours CITU estimates that there are 20 workers on an average in each establishment thus the total number could be over 60,000. Of these 13,000 to 14,000 are children, since 50% of hotels in Karnataka are in Bangalore it could be assumed that there are 27,000 child labours in hotel in the entire state. 17,400 children work in hotels in Bangalore, the shop Act states of 1961 not to employ under age of 12 years any children, but these children work from 4.30 AM to 11 PM..

90% of work force in Silk Units of Magadi consist of child labours according to CACL-K activist Ms. Saroja reports that there are 8,000 child labours employed by silk units in the age group of 6 - 16 years

National Literacy Mission reports, 1994-95 girls accounted for

42.8% of those enroled in primary-schools, 38.9% of those in middle school, 34.4% of those in higher secondary school and 34% of those in higher educational institutions

Slum Population in India up by 67% (rose to 46,621 million in 1991 from 27.92 million in 1981 showing 67% increase in a decade.

Over 16 lakh people live in-slum in state residing in 1,871 slum in Karnataka state, survey conducted by KSCB :

A GLIMPSE OF CHILDREN WORKING IN VARIOUS INDUSTRIES

	Nature of work	Places	No. of child labourers
1	Match and fire works	Sivakashi	80000
2	Stone quarries	Kerala	
		Markapur (AP)	
		Mandsaur (MP)	20000
3	Mines	Meghalaya	28000
4	Fishing	Kerala	20000
5	Handloom	Trivandrum	10000
6	Hosiery	Tirupur	4000
7	Lock industry	Aligarh	10000
8	Carpet weaving	J&K	
		Uttar Pradesh	150000
9	Glass	Ferozepur	50000
10	Pottery	Khurja	5000
11	Gem Polishing	Jaipur	13000

NB: The above list excludes the agriculture sector which has significant number of "invisible child labourers".

SOURCE: Dingwaney CACL, 1993

ACTION AID INDIA
SECTOR STRATEGY PAPER
ON EDUCATION
1996-98

Eenie, meenie, minor more

16/2/90

Child labour is one of the gravest problems India, together with other south Asian countries, confronts at present. By planning commission estimates there would be close to 20 million child workers by the year 2000.

Independent studies, though, have concluded that this figure is inaccurate. The Operation Research Group of Baroda placed the figure at about 44 million.

The 1981 census indicated that more than half of India's 159 million children between ages 6 and 14 were not in school. This suggested they could well be involved in some kind of child labour, especially in rural India.

Child labour is employed less in government setups than in private enterprises. Employment of children is very high in the Sivakasi match factory, the glass industry in Firozabad, the brassware industry in Moradabad, the carpet industry in Mirzapur, the lock making industry in Aligarh and the slate making industry in Mandasaur.

Needless to say, these children work long hours with little pay in miserable conditions. With the consolidation of landholdings and mechanised farming in the agricultural sector, hired adults work on other people's strips. They are nearly always accompanied by their children.

The national human rights commission in its annual report has stated it is not the lack of legislations that is responsible for the persistence of this practice. Legislations already exist for the prohibition and regulation of child labour.

Apart from the provisions under the various labour laws like the Factory Act, 1948, the Mines Act, 1952 and the Bidi and Cigar workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1976, child labour is also prohibited in scheduled occupations and processes under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986.

The Constitution provides an impressive set of rights for children. Article 24 prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 years in any factory, mine or other hazardous activities.

Article 39 directs that children and young people should be protected against moral and material abandonment.

Article 45 provides that the state shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children till the age of 14. The failure of the state to pro-

vide free compulsory education for all children within the time mentioned in the Constitution has compelled the Supreme Court to declare the right to education as a "fundamental right to life" under Article 21.

Article 32 of the United Nations convention vis a vis the rights of the child was ratified by India in December 1992. It provides that "the state parties recognise the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to interfere with the child's education and to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual and social development".

A strong political and societal will to enforce these legal and constitutional provisions has been missing.

In June, 1995, an NHRC investigating team paid a surprise visit to Firozabad, where there is a large concentration of

the nature of work a child can do. Further, the survey also points out that Kerala has over the years developed a healthy culture of educating the young. It is this rather than the enforcement of laws which have kept children out of the labour market. There is a lesson in this for the rest of India.

Large families comprise another factor. The size is a direct corollary of poverty and illiteracy. Parents in such families are often compelled to send at least one or more of their children to work since they cannot afford to educate all of them. In such a setup, the girl child is victimised: her brother is sent to school while she is burdened with domestic chores.

Contrary to popular notions, poverty is the consequence rather than the cause of child labour. Children lacking both in skills and education grow up as substandard workers. They, in turn, have large families and

Not mere legislation but a sustained political and societal will would help eliminate child labour in India, writes Sankar Sen

child labour in the region's glass industry.

It appeared the district labour enforcement officer and the assistant director of factories, Kanpur, had already carried out inspections of the various glass producing units.

Though as many as 178 cases were initiated for prosecution, and 54 of them were under way, only one case ended in conviction. The reasons for acquittal in most of the cases were the lack of proof of the children's ages and the non-availability of factory records of names and other particulars of the minors.

In India, there is no one clearcut legal definition of the child. The census of India speaks of persons below the age of 14 as children.

According to the Juvenile Justice Act, 1986, a juvenile is a boy under 16 years and a girl below 18 years of age. Under the Child Labour Act (Provision and Regulation) Act, 1986, a child is one who has completed 14 years.

Perhaps, one of the main reasons for the prevalence of child labour in India is the fact that primary education is not compulsory. Children out of school perform odd duties for long hours and often under sub-human conditions. Also, the parents of these children are too poor to send them to school.

A study in Kerala has revealed that school attendance protects the children from hazardous labour and sets limits on

put their children through the same miserable paces.

Child labour is particularly common in south Asian nations as it is believed to be inexpensive and profitable. A child labourer works the same hours as his adult counterpart and is paid far less than the latter.

Also, a child is easier to manipulate. A majority of the carpet weaving workshop owners in Pakistan admitted that availability of cheap child labour is the determining factor behind selecting a region to start the business.

The NHRC has taken some significant steps for the elimination of child labour in hazardous industries. In December 1994, a high level team from the commission visited Firozabad in Uttar Pradesh. It estimated that out of more than 250,000 workers in organised and informal sectors in the glass industry about 25 per cent comprised children.

They were made to work in a polluted environment, without proper food and health care. In a meeting with the chief secretary of UP, the team advised the state government to formulate a scheme for the elimination of child labour in glass and carpet weaving industries. The talk has apparently led to results.

The UP government has prepared an integrated programme for eliminating child labour in the glass industry. The project aims to rehabilitate some

50,000 children within six years at an estimated outlay of Rs 61 million. The Union ministry of labour has already sanctioned one million rupees to get the project off the ground. The state government is setting up schools with Central support for the purpose of educating the children weaned away from the glass industry. The programme also aims at initiating an awareness campaign.

The results of a survey of child labour in the saree industry of Varanasi were depressing. Thousands of children from the Ansari — weaving community — families work in the saree industry from the age of six.

The children put in nearly 10 hours a day in unhealthy conditions. The wages are abysmally low. Sometimes the parents of these children take a loan on the latter's salary. Thus, the child cannot leave till the loan is paid off. This mindset is passed on from generation to generation.

With India's ratification of the UN convention on the rights of the child 1989, there is renewed concern in governmental circles regarding this issue. In the 1994 Republic Day speech, the prime minister announced a phased programme for eliminating child labour.

As a result, a body called the national authority for the elimination of child labour has been constituted, which proposes to rid India of the abuse by 2000. A sum of Rs 8.5 billion has been earmarked for its implementation. But the exact number of child labourers in India is yet to be determined, as various surveys present different figures.

Now there is international pressure, notably from business collaborators, to eliminate child labour from hazardous industries. In 1993, the Indian-German export promotion project established the "Rugmark" foundation, which would certify carpets made without the help of child labour.

Hence, such a certificate is only granted to those manufacturers who agree not to employ children below the age of 14 in their factories. Though such steps are laudable, their efficacy will continue to remain in question unless an alternative programme is worked out for the child labourers.

Eliminating this social malaise also demands strong political and societal will. State initiatives have to be complemented by those of voluntary and non-governmental organisations. But what will help most is a sustained peoples' movement.

STREET CHILDREN

Rigorous Laws Needed

By N. S. MANI

ACCORDING to Article 1 of the U.N. Convention, a child means "every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law majority is allowed earlier". Crawling and trotting on the pavements, railway and bus station precincts, under the flyovers, parks and other open places of the city are hundreds of thousands of a community called the street children.

Their parentage unknown, and with no future for them in sight, they grow on their own. Most of them are forced to line up near places of worship, near water fronts and other crowded places seeking alms. Their earnings would not be theirs nor do they care.

Right from birth, the children grow with little or no care and affection even from mothers till the time they are able to walk. Even from the day of birth, the mother uses the child as a tool to arouse public sympathy for her profession — begging.

CRIME

When the children are able to walk, they are forced to engage in some kind of profession like rag-picking, begging, cleaning cars and other small-time jobs. Some of the jobs are hazardous too. Eventually many of them get mixed up with illegal activities like stealing, cheating, blackmarketing and even drug trafficking. That is for male children. Females in most cases eventually turn to prostitution. In short, this is the main production centre of criminals and the birthplace of crime.

The problem of street children is of such magnitude that it would seem impossible to eradicate or even reduce it. This has become a national problem as street children are in plenty all over the country. But it appears that Calcutta is one of the cities with the highest number of street children. It is estimated that two million street children roam around happily in the streets of this city but the authenticity of this figure is questionable. To take a census of street children is an impossible task.

There are 57 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) registered with the Social Welfare Department of the State Government and many other unregistered organizations are engaged in the welfare of street children. The work of at least some of the organizations is commendable but the fruits of their labour is unrecognized, because it just is like taking a few drops out of the ocean. But there is one point on which all these organizations unanimously agree: this menace cannot be eradicated unless some rigorous measures and laws are adopted by the Government and enforced sincerely.

The main hurdle is that the street children would like to remain where they belong to — the streets. They do not like the disciplined living style, least of all, the "boring education". Secondly, in many cases, street children are controlled and contracted by anti-socials and rowdy elements for aiding and abetting their illegal activities.

At the same time the earnings

of street children go into the pockets of these anti-socials. For begging, the sympathy generating factor is the street children with their innocent looks. The anti-socials have a great role in converting female street children into prostitutes. Their stranglehold can be broken only by the Government but whether the Government would like to crack down on them remains a question mark. The nexus between politicians and anti-socials is well known.

The recent economic reforms tend to generate high expectations and a secure future for all. India has always displayed its potential to achieve what it sets out to do, despite the interference of politicians.

The convention on the rights of the child adopted by the

THE Planning Commission estimates that there would be around 25 million child workers by the year 2000. Street children, who have no fixed dwellings and whose percentage is often unknown, constitute the bulk of this labour force. A solution lies in the adoption of harsh legislative measures to make primary education compulsory and hiring of child labours punishable, says the author, a freelance writer.

General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1989 has been signed by 159 countries. With India's ratification of this convention in November 1992, more than 90 per cent of the world's children became protected by this most widely ratified Human Rights convention ever in the history of the world. The convention recognizes the exceptional vulnerability of children and declare that children are entitled to special care and assistance.

PRIORITY

It is guided by the principle that the highest priority should be given to the essential needs of children. They should get a fair and equitable deal in society. It emphasizes the importance of the family and the need to create an environment conducive to the healthy growth of children. It advocates concerted public action by all individuals and agencies — Governmental and non-Governmental, national and international — to promote the rights of the child. The child should be able to live securely and realize the full potential of life.

However, back at home, the scene is not so encouraging. According to Article 23 of the Indian Constitution no child below the age of 14 years should be employed in any factory or mine or engaged in any hazardous employment. Recently, there was a report about an explosion in a cracker manufacturing factory killing about 35 children working inside the factory. Such news is common and frequent.

Economic exploitation of children in India is extensive and is always on the increase. According to the 1981 census,

13.17 million children below the age of 14 are engaged in labour. 17.36 million children in the age group of 5 to 15 were engaged in hazardous labour as per the findings of National Sample Survey conducted in 1983.

According to a survey conducted by Operations Research Group (ORG) in 1983 there were 44 million child labourers. But all these three agencies unanimously state that over 80 per cent of these children are engaged in hazardous labour. Some children are "bonded" and are sold to prostitutes. The Planning Commission estimates that there would be around 25 million child workers by the year 2000. Indeed, a majestic entry into the 21st century!

The prevalence of such high levels of child labour is attributable to the fact that primary education is not compulsory in India. Children invariably are made to perform some kind of work either at home or outside at wages that are exploitative and done in clearly harmful conditions.

COUNSELLING

Most of these working children belong to extremely poor families and the parents of such children are themselves devoid of any education. Here counselling is necessary to the parents too. In some cases the parents live on the earnings of their children and they care little about what the children do to get the money. These children therefore are the ones who need education most of all to break out of the poverty and debt trap.

Legislative measures have to be adopted to make primary education compulsory and hiring of children for labour should be made punishable. Creating social awareness of this problem should be considered an important element of public action to ensure the eradication of child labour.

According to Article 12 of the U.N. Convention, the State "shall ensure that no child is arbitrarily detained or subjected to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, capital punishment or life imprisonment. Accused children have the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty in a prompt and fair trial, to legal or other assistance, to be detained separately from adults, to maintain contact with family and to receive a sentence based on rehabilitation rather than punishment".

Street children naturally engage in some kind of labour even at a tender age. Most of them are forced into hard labour and their wages snatched away by those who live on the earnings of the children.

The message of family planning has not reached the pavement dwellers or at least has not made any impact on them, possibly because our family planning is confined only to radio and television, the two things inaccessible to the pavement people. The men on the pavements have only one recreation — sex. The result is an increase in the number of street children.

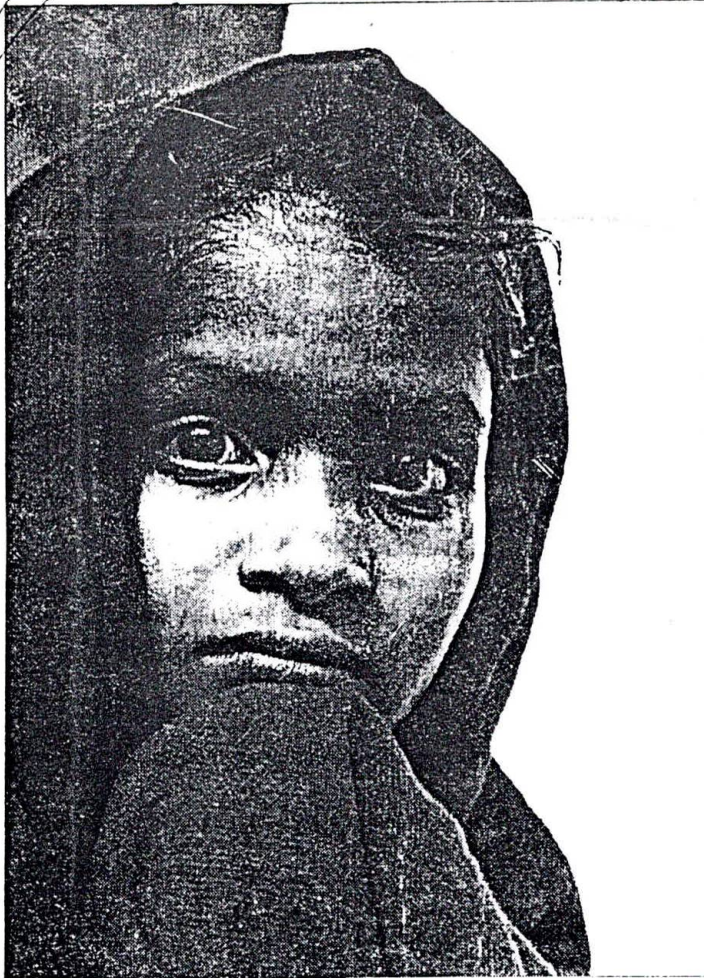
DOMESTIC WORKER - CASE STUDY

Selvy is a 12 year old girl who has been working since the age of 8. Each morning, she wakes up at 6 am to help her mother prepare food for her father and five siblings. By 7:30 am, she leaves with her mother to go to a nursery where she sweeps, cleans, and takes care of children. After leaving the nursery, she continues working, cleaning another house. At 1 pm, she reaches home, where she must care for her younger sisters for the rest of the day.

Each month, Selvy earns Rs. 280, which she uses to buy necessities for the household consisting of 7 members. Her father is an alcoholic who often demands that she give the money to him, but she staunchly refuses because she knows the family depends on her. She gives all the money to her mother.

Selvy finds the domestic employment difficult and monotonous. She states that she suffers from constant back pain, leg ache, and cough due to the arduous labour. She complains that her mother forces her to work even when she feels very ill. Selvy is interested in studying, but she says she has neither time nor support from her parents. She studied until the 3rd standard but left because her mother forced her to work.





Writing on the Wall

COURTESY: CLAUDE SAUVAGEOT

Nobody's Child

In the realm of child welfare or even basic concern for children, India's record is one of callousness and neglect.

Political accountability is the first step towards a healthy democracy. It is expected of the largest democracy in the world to have a framework in which accountability towards its citizens is given top priority. Unfortunately, this is not the case and the adverse fallout of this affect all sections of society, especially children.

Upala Devi is programme officer with Asian Network of Women in Communication, New Delhi

FEBRUARY 1996

CHILDREN



Upala Devi

Though the Indian Constitution is commendable in the sense that all sections of society find a mention — political action, which is a natural corollary of the laws which are enacted, is lacking. India is a country of almost a billion people, out of which 144 million are children (under 18 years of age). It is therefore inevitable that this large section of society would be affected by the implementation of political will and accountability (as well as, the lack of it). Even before the UN Convention on the

Rights of the Child (CRC) was ratified by the government in December 1992, rights of the child found a mention in parts III and IV of the Indian Constitution. Since 1950 and specially after the National Policy for Children in 1974, these rights have been enlarged (on paper) through judicial review. India has also endorsed the 27 survival and development goals for the year 2000 laid down by the World Summit for children.

The ratification of the CRC was a welcome political action. The convention draws attention to the civil, political, socio-economic and cultural rights of every child. These are: 1) the right to survival; 2) the right to protection; 3) the right to development; and, 4) the right to participation. However, over three years have elapsed and the government has yet to review all the laws and make them compatible to the UN convention. Although there appears to be no discrimination between an adult and a child in respect of civil rights and freedom, in actuality, children can enforce their rights only through adults and are dependent on them for access to justice. As Judith Evans from the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development points out, "The convention and other documents can only articulate desirable outcomes. They do not guarantee what will happen in the life of an individual child. It is necessary to develop policies and programmes at the regional, national and local levels to turn the wording of the convention into reality."

Though India has an impressive legal architecture, it has a weak infrastructure and a poor "ability-to-deliver" record, especially in certain key areas. Moreover, bureaucrats and politicians forget that every bill which is passed by Parliament and every policy that is formulated directly affects children. Neglecting of the article on compulsory primary education for every child is a case in point. Lack of resources is often cited as the reason but that is disputable.

Thus, the rights of thousands of children in India are constantly violated (which, I will term as human rights violations), in total contradiction to the provisions of the UN convention. All children are not treated equally, and millions face asymmetric opportunities for survival and development. Torture, ill-treatment in jails, and harassment of children is commonplace. Children who are rescued by child traffickers languish in juvenile homes and are almost forgotten by the outside world due to red-tapism and indifference by the authorities. The nexus between police and child traffickers continues to grow

HUMANScape

unchecked. Much less is known about the extent of deprivation and discrimination faced by street children and children belonging to scheduled castes and tribes.

The condition of children and their rights in India vis-a-vis political accountability especially of the State can be gauged from the following Articles. These Articles are rights which should be available to all children as distinct from the needs of children. It should, however, be borne in mind that rights do not often get enforced because the person/institution on whom the correlative duty rests is not necessarily of the State. It can be the parent or those who have the care and custody of the child. In such cases, tools of the law which enforce rights need to be strengthened. Affirmative action by the State is required.

Article 2 : Equality and Non-discrimination

Though the Constitution guarantees equality of treatment to all citizens, including children, discrimination in opportunities and social status persists. This is primarily due to social stigma and oppression. For instance, both landlessness and low caste reinforce each other and children born in both sections are more likely not to go to school than others. They are also more likely to suffer in times of caste-based violence. Above all, they are the least likely to have access to their rights.

Article 3 : Interest of the Child

The CRC and the Constitution both recognise that in cases involving children, the best interest of the child is universal and must be the primary objective of the State and the judiciary. However, in India, there is a prejudice against the girl-child. Centuries of oppression and male-biased tradition show that the girl-child is always discriminated against. This fact is exemplified in instances of mass burials of babies in Rajasthan, all of whom were girls.

Article 7 : Guarantee a name and nationality to all children

Under Indian law, there is no serious disability suffered by Indian children. However, any disability caused by custom or practice which affects girl-children, orphans and other underprivileged lot needs to be discouraged.

Article 8 : The Right to Identity

As the country is moving towards a casteless society, the convention if interpreted to include a caste identity, is inconsistent with the constitutional

India calls its 144 million children its "resource potential". Of this, 60 million live in acute poverty; one-eighth die before their fifth birthday; and one out of ten are either born or become disabled.

values.

Articles 12 and 13 : Right to Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is guaranteed to all citizens under Article 19 (1). But age-old traditions have abridged this right especially for the girl-child. It is also meaningless for those deprived of their right to education. The enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression assumes the right to education. Society and especially adults within families need to be accountable to guarantee a child this

India has the dubious distinction of having the world's third largest population of malnourished children. It has nearly 75 million malnourished children below the age of 5. India's record on gender equity comes in for short criticism. The latest United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund record released in New Delhi on the eve of Children's Day pointed out that there are nearly 40 to 50 million "missing girls". It reflects the unequal treatment that girls receive in various walks of life, resulting in higher female infant mortality, greater malnutrition among girls, lower female enrollments, and higher dropout rates.

Between 19 to 24 million Indian children in the age group of 6 to 14, (60 per cent of them girls) do not ever get to school according to a recent report of the department of education.

Compiled by : Gitanjali Shahani

right within the parameters set out in the Article.

Article 14 : Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion.

The rights of all citizens, particularly those of minorities are guaranteed in Part III of the Constitution. Article 25 has gone a step further than the CRC Article as it provides all citizens with the right to propagate their religious beliefs. But, many personal laws are not in the best interests of the child. The Law Commission should review these vis-a-vis the rights of the child and recommend a uniform code. The group also felt that a uniform adoption law was necessary

in order to end discrimination among children of different religions. Several gaps in personal laws exist. These include the length of

maintenance (Muslim law); custody available to the mother (Hindu law) and; caste-related identity (Hindu law).

Article 16 : Right to Privacy

With the media explosion in India, many conscious citizens are making documentaries on true and real-life incidents of child exploitation. The faces and names of the victims should be blanked out. The rule that any reportage of juveniles or rape victims should protect the name or address of the victims should be applied to law journals also. Photographs of victims should not be published. The privacy of any child produced in court should be protected. The right to adequate housing was also seen to be implied in every child's right to privacy. This right is especially applicable to children living in urban slums who often have to share a one-room hutment with siblings and parents. Custodial homes run by the State are normally overcrowded. For girl children, the issue of right to privacy is crucial.

Article 17 : Access to information and materials

This article is linked to the right to education which is now a fundamental right. It is of particular significance to all discriminated children, especially girl-children and children suffering from mental, physical or economic disabilities. It is a part of the State's commitment to provide equality of opportunity to all citizens under Article 25. Compulsory primary education for all children is the basis of all civil rights. However, even adult citizens are denied access to information under many guises, such as the Official Secrets Act, the Atomic Energy Act and the Nuclear Energy Act. The intervention of the courts is needed if one wants information. Thus to protect the rights of children, a right to information act is required.

Article 34 : Child Trafficking and Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse and trafficking of children in India is on the rise. Prostitution is rife. Dr Promilla Kapur's book "Girl Child and Family Violence" states that out of 200,000 prostitutes in Bombay brothels 20,000 to 40,000 are estimated to be underage. Girls are also initiated into prostitution under the guise of customs like the "Devadasi" system which is mostly prevalent in Karnataka and Maharashtra. Equally shocking are



Nothing to look forward to.

COURTESY: CLAUDE SAUVAGEOT

cases of young girls, not even in their teens, who are sold off to rich and old men. Ironically, even the custodians of law are involved in such shameful acts.

Article 37, 39 and 40: Which protect every child from torture, exploitation and abuse:

The attempts of the government to protect the human rights of children under these Articles have been abysmal. Parliament passed the Children's Law in 1960 for Union Territories to safeguard young prisoners against abuse and exploitation. But, most states have not enacted it and nearly 40 per cent of the

463 districts in India are without the Children's Law. What prevails there is the Reformatory School's Act passed in 1887. The Juvenile Justice Act of 1986 is not considered adequate to guard children's rights. Thus, torture and ill-treatment of children in police custody is commonplace. The conditions of juveniles in state-run reformatories, especially in West Bengal and Delhi, are deplorable. In the strife-torn areas of Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Punjab, Nagaland and Andhra Pradesh, there is a continuous pattern of "disappearances" at the hands of the armed forces and the

separatists. There are instances where homeless children are abducted, murdered and their organs sold for huge sums of money.

India is believed to have the largest number of street children in the world. Most of them (10.74 to 100 million) are employed for a pittance in hazardous factories at great physical risk. In most cases, employers prefer child labour as they have to pay low wages to them.

Conclusion

India calls its 144 million children its "resource potential". Out of this, 60 million children live in acute poverty; one-eighth die before reaching their fifth birthday; one out of ten are either born or become disabled; and, lastly, 95 of them go blind every day.

Any policy which ignores the needs and interests of children is neglecting a substantial number of citizens and by doing so it is unlikely to be effective anyway. It is also rare that children are consulted or in any way involved in the formulation of policies which affects them.

It is indeed ironical that India should approach the 21st century with so much potential to save lives, while demonstrating that very little will to do so. The best interests of the child are universal. They include the right to survival, to healthy development and to protection from abuse. But, what value do they have in a country which turns its back on hunger, exploitation, torture and rape? The moot point is: "will it change, and if so, when? Children's lives cannot be put on hold while the government mulls over its obligations towards them. Public commitments have been written and ratified. Hence the need for positive action becomes imperative." □

NCERT study highlights plight of girl child

United News of India
NEW DELHI

The girl child is very often an "invisible" worker, is the family drudge and misses out on schooling, according to a study.

Girl workers mostly remain invisible because they are involved in family-based production and do not work in factories or farms outside homes, according to the study undertaken by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

In several states, girls are involved in substantial numbers in hazardous industries like beedi-making, gem-polishing, bangle-making, garments, cotton and groundnut pod shelling, hand embroidery and grain-cleaning.

Exploitation of the female child is directly a result of exploitation of women. Large sections of the girl population are involved in full-time economic activities and comprise half the number of main wor-

kers in rural areas.

The study termed as "ineffective" the legislation on child labour as its implementation lacked seriousness in approach. Socio-economic realities surrounding child workers, especially girls, in rural areas needed to be better documented and understood, it said.

In this context, the study said that under-reporting was widespread in the case of rural girl child workers whose contribution went unnoticed. Most girls in rural areas were engaged in sibling care, cooking, cleaning, fetching water, fodder and fuel, and animal care besides assisting the family in sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting and carrying goods. Girls share 20 per cent of the agricultural work undertaken by women while both women and girls account for more than 50 per cent of the total household energy, the study said.

According to the 1981 census, there were 23.59 million working children in

India. The child labour participation rate in rural areas was 6.3 per cent and in urban areas, 2.5 per cent.

A total of 8.35 per cent of the girls under the age of 14 were main workers, 9.35 per cent were marginal workers. About eight per cent of the male child workers and seven per cent of female child workers under the age of 14 were engaged in household and non-household industries, according to available statistics.

In urban areas, a higher percentage of boys was engaged in non-household industries. Nearly half the female child workers in urban areas were engaged in household industries.

A disturbing trend noted in the study was the increase in female child labour during the period, 1971-81, and a decrease for boy workers.

The percentage increase of female workers under the age of 14 years during this period was 33.23 per cent. The corresponding percentage for males in this age

group decreased by 3.51 per cent.

Poverty pushes children into employment when they should be in school. In poor households, the burden of poverty and male unemployment has shifted onto women and girls who often worked to keep sons and brothers in school.

In the absence of primary and middle schools in the village and poor roads and transport, rural girls are either shut out of the educational system totally or drop out soon after joining, the study said.

It is pointed out that unless rural households are brought above the poverty line it would be unrealistic to think of universal retention of girls in school.

Besides, the economic value of children as income earners leads to higher fertility rates and a larger family size in rural areas.

If working girls are to be drawn to schools, they should be assured of an education which would help them in the future both as individual and as wage earners.

BUSINESS STANDARD

24 APR 1995

UNICEF SURVEY

Gender discrimination against female infants

BOMBAY, March 8. — Every year about 15 million girls are born in India. Five million of them do not survive to see their 15th birthday. A third of these deaths take place in the first year of their life, according to a recent survey conducted by UNICEF, reports UNI.

Every sixth female child death is due to gender discrimination, the survey said.

Gender-based inequities permeate almost every aspect of the growing girl's social and cultural environment. For an average girl in India, the privations of poverty are significantly aggravated by value systems, norms and mores, which define, and not infrequently, disparage the role of women.

Journalistic accounts and some research studies show that female infanticide and female foeticide appear to be having a growing negative influence on the sex ratio statistics in a number of communities and geographical areas. If the pre- and post-birth deselection of females is not controlled in time,

significant demographic imbalances will result, the survey warns.

Girls are at a greater risk of dying during infancy in the States of Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

Overall mortality rates have declined raising the life expectancy for both male and females. At birth, female life expectancy is 57.4 years. However, major gain in life expectancy has accrued to the older age groups.

A girl born in U.P. can expect to live for 54 years — 20 years less than her peer in Kerala, whose life expectancy is 74 years. Thirteen per cent of female deaths before the age of 24 years are due to complications of pregnancy and child birth.

The large number of deaths in early childhood account for the unequal sex ratio. Malnutrition is a significant underlying factor in many of these deaths. There is

abundant research evidence to indicate that gender biases in the allocation of food and health are widely prevalent, the survey said.

According to anthropological studies, girl infants are breast-fed less frequently and for shorter durations, than the boys, a situation that may be exacerbated among the poor for social and economic reasons.

A study in Tamil Nadu found that male children are breast-fed for five months longer than female children on the average, and children in landed families are breast-fed almost ten months more than female children. Another study in Kerala, even where there is no gender bias in the duration of breast-feeding, it is commonly believed that baby girls need less breast milk than baby boys.

Discrimination against female children in the quality of food given has also been shown in cultures as diverse as those of Tamil Nadu and Punjab. Male children receive larger quantities of cereals, fats, milk and

sugar than females.

The findings of a 12-year-long weight-for-age surveillance study of children under five, by the Institute of Health Management, Pachod, in Maharashtra, showed that disparity in nutritional status is highest in the age group of one to three. The Pachod study showed that the percentage of severely malnourished female children is consistently two to three times higher than that for boys. It was observed that a higher percentage of girls suffer from severe malnutrition in every age interval.

Information on differentials between males and females by age, supplied by several small household dietary intake studies, show that nutritional "equity" is lower in north India and improves towards the south.

While in Rajasthan all children under-12 and adult women are deprived of their fair nutritional "shares", relative to adult males, as well as to the applicable recommended daily allow-

ances, the gender differentials disappear among adults in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. However, even in these areas, pre-school girls tend to be worse off than boys, and some gender differentials occur seasonally.

Female literacy varies from 8% in Barmer district of Rajasthan to 94% in Kottayam district of Kerala.

High female literacy States (above 50%) such as Kerala, Goa, Pondicherry and Lakshadweep, have by and large universalized primary enrolment among girls.

In States with medium female literacy rates (40-50%) enrolment is satisfactory at the primary level. But there is a steep fall in upper primary level.

In U.P., Rajasthan, M.P. and Bihar, accounting for 40% of the country's population, the female literacy rate is only 20-40%.

The survey concludes that it is essential to encourage participation of girls at all levels of human development activity to enhance their self-confidence.

DELHI

Deprived' of a son, woman kills 7th daughter

FROM MEHER MURSHED

Jirangachha (South 24-Parganas), Sept. 18: Palani Ghosh's four daughters, aged between one and four, come home at twilight with their cows and fall asleep: they do not know that their mother has been arrested for murdering their one-day-old sister.

Nor do they understand why their father has run away from home.

Palani gave birth to her seventh daughter on Friday and within hours throttled her to death. The little body was thrown into a nearby pond.

The next day villagers found the body floating and returned it to the Ghosh family. Palani's husband, Santosh, then buried the baby.

Villagers, however, suspected foul play and reported the matter to the Bhangore police station. Palani and her eldest daughter, Suchitra, 16, were arrested, while Santosh managed to escape.

The two accused were today produced at the Alipore sub-divisional magistrate's court and remanded to jail custody till September 29.

Today, Palani's four daughters, Gayatri, six, Deepali, four, Sita, two, and Gayatri, one, have



Four of Palani's daughters, aged between one and four, are left to fend for themselves. A Telegraph picture by Kishor Roy Chowdhury

no one to look after them. No one to give them food and no one to reassure them as night falls. They take their four cows and two calves to the fields and

return in the evening. They cry themselves to sleep.

"The girls are young and need nourishment. I give them *muri* and rice often and on, but I can-

not afford two square meals a day. I have a family too," says Lalita Ghosh, who stays next door.

Villagers said the four little

girls do not miss their parents during the day but as darkness descends, fear and loneliness come knocking.

"I can hear their whimpers and cries intermittently. I check on them every two hours through the night. As a mother, how can I turn a deaf ear," Lalita said.

The villagers of Jirangachha said they have been chipping in to look after the four girls, but do not know how long they will be able to part with food. "We, after all, are also poor," they said.

According to them, Santosh and Palani are extremely poor.

They have no land to call their own. Only four cows, which are not very productive, to fall back on.

Santosh does not work because he is suffering from tuberculosis. He has one son from an earlier marriage, who works in a sweet shop at Bishnupur.

Villagers said the couple has six daughters. The four left behind in the village, Suchitra, who has been arrested, and another, Sumitra, 10. Sumitra works as a maid in an adjoining village.

With six daughters, Palani and Santosh longed for a son, who they thought would alleviate their abject poverty.

"Palani would tell me that

she was finding it very difficult to make both ends meet, but if she had a son, all their troubles would be over," Lalita said.

Villagers pointed out that Palani was also under a lot of mental pressure because Suchitra recently had an abortion.

"The girl had an affair, but her lover refused to marry her. There was no alternative and hence Suchitra had to abort. But, in villages, there is always a stigma attached to an abortion and Palani had not come to terms with it," Mujib Sheikh said.

Villagers said Palani had confessed to killing her one-day-old daughter. Though they did not condone the act, they sympathised with Palani.

"She had six daughters to bring up, six daughters to marry off. Life was a drudgery. They had pinned all their hopes on a son. I guess the sight of another daughter made Palani lose her mental balance. She must have killed the baby on the spur of the moment," Mujib added.

Villagers said this was the first case of female infanticide in Jirangachha.

And while they understood Palani's plight, they were overcome with pity when they looked at her four helpless daughters.

4 INTERNATIONAL NEWS

World congress addresses spiralling child sex abuse

Jon Henley in Stockholm

THE numbers are estimates, but if they even approach the truth they are horrifying. No part of the world, from the backstreets of Latin America to the ritziest European capital, can claim to be immune.

There are 70,000 child prostitutes in Zambia, 200,000 in Thailand, 40,000 in Venezuela, 25,000 in the Dominican Republic and 500,000 in India. In America, between 100,000 and 300,000 children are sexually exploited through prostitution and pornography every year.

In eastern Europe the situation is acute: even Estonia, with a population a quarter the size of London's, employs 1,500 minors, some as young as 10, in its sex industry.

Delegates from 122 countries gathered in Stockholm last week for the first World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. The research they brought with them revealed the staggering scale of child sex abuse.

"The commercial sexual exploitation of children has become a global, multi-billion-dollar industry," Carol Bellamy, executive director of

Unicef, said in her opening speech to the conference.

Experts say many factors lie behind the recent global rise of child sex abuse. In some societies, the drive towards Western-style consumerism has combined, disastrously, with traditional beliefs that young children, particularly girls, are property to be traded — families simply sell their children for something they want more.

Fear of Aids increasingly leads men to seek ever younger prostitutes, in the mistaken belief that they are safer. And modern technology has made it easier for paedophiles to produce and exchange child pornography, and far more difficult for police to stop them.

The five-day congress, sponsored by the Swedish government in co-operation with Unicef and non-governmental groups, sought to increase co-operation and harmonise legislation.

Australia has led the way in extra-territorial legislation which allows its nationals to be prosecuted at home for sex crimes against children committed abroad. By contrast, Sweden is almost alone among

European countries in failing to pass legislation outlawing the possession of child pornography.

During the past three years about 160 men, mainly from America, Germany, Australia, Britain, Sweden and Switzerland, have been arrested in Asia for sex offences against children. Sex tourism is no longer promoted as explicitly as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, but men seeking sex with children still go in their thousands to Asia, Latin America and, more recently, eastern Europe.

Campaigners say the travel industry must accept its share of responsibility. Some companies have taken steps to educate tourists. Indonesia's Garuda Airlines distributes a code of ethics for tourists on flights from Australia and New Zealand. The German charter airline Condor shows passengers travelling to Sri Lanka a film which includes a segment on the wretched lives of the "beach boys" who are often the target of foreign paedophiles.

A few national travel agents' associations are co-operating in campaigns: Swedish Save the Children helped tour operators to produce a warning postcard which is now

inserted in all airline tickets to Asia.

But there is a limit to what they achieve in the West. Campaigners agree that pressure from Western tour operators on hotels and tourist providers is probably the only way to stop the flow of child sex tourists.

Many cite a contract that the human rights group Terre des Hommes signed with 12 tour operators in Germany, obliging them to cancel contracts with foreign hotels which allow child prostitution on their premises.

"That kind of thing works, but we need far more of it," said Lilia Arvelo de Fiol, a social worker in Venezuela. "You can't talk to local hotel owners about ethics, they don't have any."

● Taking the lead in a nationwide push to enact tougher sex-crime laws in America, California is set to pass a measure requiring "chemical castration" of repeat child molesters.

The measure mandates that any child-sex offender convicted twice be periodically injected, after release from prison, with a drug that inhibits sex drive — unless the offender voluntarily submits to surgical castration.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND THE GIRL CHILD

UPALA DEVI

4-year old Anuradha was sleeping in her jhuggi when she was picked up by two men. They took her to their house in Daya Basti in Delhi, where they sat down for drinking. After a drink or two, they forced liquor down the child's throat and began thrashing her with an iron rod. When the girl fell unconscious, they pounced on her. She died during the gang-rape. It was a case which should have sent shock-waves through every echelon of a civilised society. It did not. For the police, it was just another crime --- a minor one for that which gets adjourned every day and subsequently forgotten. And, for an equally indifferent public, it was a news which evoked momentary horror and sympathy and nothing else.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by India in 1992, emphasises that the child, by reason of his/her physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection before as well as after birth. Article 34 of the same Convention states that "State Parties" should undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse". International policy and media attention is also focussing renewed attention on the sexual harassment of children, especially the girl child. However, sexual abuse and trafficking of the girl child in India is frequent and on the rise and as recent newspaper articles, magazines and films have served to lift the curtain on the underworld of sexual exploitation of young children, particularly the girl child, we are faced with one of the most poignant and vexing problems in the country today.

A study conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Bombay) in 1985, with a majority of respondents being between 20 and 24 years of age belonging to middle economic strata in Bombay, found that one out of every three girls and one out of every 10 boys had been sexually abused in childhood. According to the "Crime in India (1991)", a publication of the National Crime Records Bureau, cases of sexual acts against children below 10 years of age showed an alarming increase of more than 178% in 1991, with the year recording 1,099 cases as compared to 394 in 1990.

Reports show that there is shocking increase in rape and abuse on children. Ironically, even the custodians of law and family are involved in such horrendous acts.

Rape: A Bangladeshi minor girl has accused two policemen from two North-East Delhi of gangraping her along with two other persons thrice in the second week of June 1993. Neither of the two policemen have been identified.

Six policemen from Pondicherry had gang-raped a 17 year-old girl who went to the local police station to lodge a complaint, she was illegally kept in detention by the Tripuati police, Tamil Nadu.

A 14-year-old tribal girl was gang-raped by forest-guards in Sonebhadra district of Uttar Pradesh in early April 1992.

In Keshavpuram, Delhi, in a local urban school, the teacher Kamruddin, was arrested by the police for raping 16 minor girls, all in the age group of 5-14 years who came to him for studying. Most of the parents preferred to keep quiet, fearing the social stigma which will be attached to their daughters name if the story was out.

A 16-year-old girl had alleged that she was abducted by an Assistant Police Inspector, Ashok Sitaram Gaikwad, in Bombay, and was sexually molested while in his private custody.

District Superintendent of Police, Oommen Koshi had suspended two policemen attached to the Kondotty Police Station, Malapuram, for their alleged involvement in the sexual harassment of a school girl, who was later rescued from a hotel in Bombay.

The cases mentioned above are just a few of hundred related to sexual harassment and abuse of the girl-child in India. A Report issued by the National Commission For Women states that the reported incidence of rape cases in the country had increased from 9,752 in 1989 to 10,068 in 1990. Of the total cases of rape during 1990, the girls below the age of 10 were victims in 394 cases. The number of victims in the age group 10 to 16 was 2,105. In Delhi, the cases had increased from 152

in 1989 to 177 in 1990.

Prostitution: Rape is not the only form of sexual abuse of the girl child in India. Prostitution is rife. A Thailand-based organisation "End Child Prostitution In Asian Tourism" states that there are about 300,000 child prostitutes in India alone.

More recently, "The Asian Age" dated 24 MARCH 1995, quoted the total number of child prostitutes in India at an estimated 400,000. In GB Road, Delhi's prime red-light area, as many as 50 young girls line the grimy roads every evening. Nearly all of them hail from Bangladesh and Nepal and have been coerced into prostitution, some brought to Delhi by conmen, lured into fake marriages, raped and forced into submission. All of them have become mothers at a very young age and are in the flesh trade so that they can feed their little ones. Since cash is a prime concern, any price will do. Studies compiled in a new book, "Girl Child and Family Violence" by Dr. Promilla Kapur, states that out of 200,000 prostitutes residing in Bombay's brothels alone, between 20,000 to 40,000 are estimated to be underage girls. Of the total number of prostitutes, about 20 percent are minors and are found to be initiated into the trade at the tender age of 12 to 13 years.

However much we would like to believe, poverty is not the root cause of prostitution in India. It is coupled with the existing socio-religious status of women, the comatose attitude of the general public and the prevailing caste structure. Moreover, the majority of young girls are forced into this practice by unscrupulous people, poor parents and guardians and other social pressures.

A fundamental reason why the trafficking of the girl-child as a marketable commodity is gaining momentum is due to the increasing demand for younger girls by customers in brothels. The fear of AIDS is turning men to younger prostitutes who they feel would not be exposed to the virus, as yet. Another myth that has served to increase the demand for young girls is that men with venereal disease can be cured by having sex with a virgin.

The constant migration of men seeking employment in big cities like Delhi and Bombay has propelled the trade to greater heights. 80 percent of child prostitutes are found in five major metros -- Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and Bangalore.

The laws which seek to end prostitution and protect children are so ineffective, that they might as well be non-existent. The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1986,

prescribes stringent action against those who procure, induce or take a child to prostitution. These laws are effective only on paper. In reality, whenever a brothel is raided, it is the prostitutes who land up in jail, while the real culprits -- the clients and brothel owners -- go scot-free.

The Juvenile Justice Act, 1986, has elaborate provisions for the care, treatment, education, development and rehabilitation of children rescued from those "procuring, inducing or taking persons for the sake of prostitution". The Act also states that these children ought to be placed with a fit person or institution, failing which they could be brought back into the juvenile homes. However, rescue and rehabilitation of child prostitutes in our country is negligible due to the apathetic attitude of the police.

Pimps and racketeers pose as parents, claim the rescued girl and before they know it, they find themselves back in their hell-holes. The girl lives practically in a state of slavery in the flesh trade, until they are successfully rehabilitated. Not all of them are as lucky though. For the majority, the ordeal goes on and the fall-out usually includes the contraction of Sexually Transmitted Diseases or the AIDS virus. The only contact with the outside world they have is through the brothel-owner. This grim reality of the extreme vulnerability of the girl-child calls for greater attention and effective response from the State and the society.

Social Customs and Traditions: In India, girls are also initiated into the flesh trade through age-old customs and traditions. In the Indian State of Karnataka, for instance, a unique ritual prevails by the name of "Devadasi Pratha" in which innocent girls from poor and illiterate families, mostly illegitimate by birth, are compelled to lead a life of sexual slavery and drudgery. A girl is dedicated to the Goddess Yellamma. She is disrobed of her honour by the priest and initiated into the oldest profession of the world. The next day, she is given to the highest bidder, who would pay anything between Rs.4,000 to Rs.10,000 to keep her for as many months or years as he wants. She is finally sold in the market from where she might end up in one of the many red-light areas. Although the Karnataka Government slapped a ban on the Devadasi system a number of years ago, the evil practice continues on the sly in parts of north Karnataka. On an average, 5,000 women are initiated annually as Devdasis in eight districts of Maharashtra and Karnataka. Of these, 88 percent are dedicated before they are ten years old. According to a study

conducted in the late 80's, the custom accounts for 50% of prostitutes in southern Maharashtra, 15% in Bombay and 10% in Delhi and other cities.

The Devdasi Prohibition Act, 1982, is an Act merely adorning the law books. According to this Act, the abettors are liable to be fined Rs.5,000 and undergo five years imprisonment. But, the damning part is that ever since 1984, when the law was first enacted, not a single case has been booked by the Karnataka police who keep a regular vigil on the Yellamma Hill during the period of dedication!

As we approach the 21st century, nothing can look more degrading or demeaning than "price tags for young girls". Can society sit back and debate whether prostitution needs to be legalised or not while the girl child gets bartered and sold for sexual exploitation?

Sale of the Girl Child Equally shocking are cases of young girls, not even in their teens, who are sold off to rich and old men from the Middle-East. The most volatile of these cases was that of 11-year-old Ameena, who was sold off to a 60-year-old man from Arabia, "Sheikh" Yahya-al-Sagish. The way the Juvenile Justice Board has dealt with the problem shows that it is incapable of handling children's problems sensitively. Though she has already spent several months in a children's home, the Board ordered that she be sent to another remand home in Hyderabad, that too, for three years. Even a criminal court would not send an accused to three years' custody ordinarily. And look, the Board supposed to give juvenile justice is sending her into custody for three years for a crime committed by others. However, if this case had gone unnoticed, the case of 14-year-old Ruksana, married to a 44-year-old Abu Dhabian, Mushaida Hamid in Bombay and of the sale and forced marriage of 16-year-old Kaniz Begum of Hyderabad to an Arab National, would not have surfaced at all. It is estimated that about 8,000 child brides during the last one decade have been sold off in such marriages.

An Overview: Legal experts and social activists believe that the only way to stop this increasing malaise is a strong and deterrent law. The law, at present, does not protect the interest of the victim. The law begins to falter in the beginning itself. The police starts investigation only after an FIR is registered and if there is no information, there is no question of any investigation. This gives ample arbitrary powers to the police. And,

what they can do and not do is proved beyond doubt in the cases stated above.

The accounts above bear testimony to the fact that the largest democracy in the world presents a sorry picture in so far as the rights of the girl-child are concerned. There seems to be little political or social will to stamp out the horrific abuse of the girl child. One reason could be that child-prostitution has become a multi-million rupee industry, and there are many people who make a lot of money -- the procuring agent, the pimp, the brothel owner, the landlord and the police. As a result something truly awful is happening: by design, by wilful premeditation, by conduct unbecoming in a civilized society, we are actually choosing children as targets. It would seem -- as the evidence suggests -- that there is an aggravated moral disintegration underway, that we are assaulting children more than ever before.

The best interests of child are universal. They include the right to survival, to healthy development and to protection from abuse. These rights are agreed upon internationally. But, what value do they have in a country which turns its back to hunger and want, to torture, rape, and the exploitation of children?

The huge question mark is: Will it change, and if so, when? Children's lives cannot be put on edge with the adult society staying away from its obligations towards them. Public commitments have been written and endorsed. The call of the time is to act now.

REFERENCES:

- 1) "The Asian Age", 24 March, 1995.
- 2) Joardar Biswanath, "Prostitution in Historical and Modern Perspectives", Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1984.
- 3) Jeyasing Dr. J.V., "Children in Prostitution" - Papers presented at the seminar on "Women and Crime", Vellore, March 1984.
- 4) Rozario Sr. M. Rita, "Trafficking in Women and Children in India", Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988.
- 5) Sikka K.D., "Sale of Sex: Indian Perspectives and Realities", Department of Criminology and Correctional Administration, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Deonar, 22 September, 1983.
- 6) United Nations, "U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child", 1988.

Upala Devi is working as a Programme Officer in ANWIC.

Rights' body comes to aid of tortured girl

FROM CHANDAN NANDY

Jamshedpur, March 22: A 14-year-old girl, Baby Kumhar, who was tortured and scarred for life by her employers two-and-a-half years ago, is trying to come to terms with her "disfigured body" after the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) took cognizance of her case last month.

Baby was employed as a maid by Rajendra Prasad, senior personnel officer of Indian Petrochemical Company Limited, and his wife, Krishnalata, who took the Harijan girl from Adityapur in West Singhbhum to their home at Nagothane in Maharashtra in January 1991.

"At first it was okay. But when she (Krishnalata) became pregnant, the man would make indecent advances," Baby said, recollecting the nightmare that followed. For days on end, she was raped continuously by Prasad but she kept silent as he always threatened her with dire consequences. However, unable to bear the shame and thinking that the sexual abuse would stop, Baby narrated everything to Prasad's wife.

She was wrong. Prasad's wife refused to believe the girl. She stopped giving her meals and even her salary of Rs 150 per month. The sexual assaults continued and whenever she complained, she would be beaten up and kicked.

Soon the torture took on horrific proportions. Krishnalata would rip and slash Baby's skin with Prasad's shaving blade, inflicting deep cuts each time. "Instead of any ointment, the couple forcibly applied a mixture of red chilli powder and salt on my injuries.

They would beat me if I shrieked in pain," Baby, who finds it difficult to relate her experience, said with her



Baby Kumhar: Scarred for life

head hung in shame but trying hard not to cry.

According to Baby's aunt, Lata, "One day, when Baby reported to Krishnalata that Prasad had raped her brutally, the woman slashed her vagina with a sharp blade. On another occasion, she rubbed hot iron over Baby's pri-

vate parts." Lata also described how Prasad and his wife "forced open Baby's mouth, ripped her lips and ran the sharp edge of a blade over her tongue." The inhuman condition in which Baby lived was noticed by Prasad's mother during one of her visits to Nagothane and she brought her back to Adityapur.

Although the matter was reported to the Adityapur police, Baby's complaint was not registered. "The police had been influenced because Krishnalata's brother was the officer-in-charge of Bistupur police station in Jamshedpur," Lata claimed.

The Adityapur police finally lodged a complaint after the matter was reported to the West Singhbhum superintendent of police. The case was transferred to Nagothane police station in Raigadh district. But by that time, Prasad and his wife had managed to obtain anticipatory bail.

Worse still, Baby has not received even half the amount of Rs 5,000 promised to her by Mr Malkhan Singh, an MLA from Ichhagarh in West Singhbhum. "She got only Rs 1,000 but that was exhausted on her medical bills," Lata said, casting doubts over the "so-called" interest shown by women's organisations and politicians.

On February 22 this year, Mr Shivaji Singh, a superintendent of police from NHRC, visited Baby's one-room thatched house at Majhitolla bustee in Adityapur and encouraged her into joining the school next door.

Now 14 years old, Baby has begun showing marks of adolescence. She applies nail polish, wears bangles and even sports *payal* on her ankles. But all this would not have been possible without the support and encouragement from her maternal uncle, Suresh Barik, and aunt, Lata.

AGI

Madhyam (10/1)

Recd 11/10/98

* At some point, they don't even mind to bring up the child, but when they think of the suffering of the child during & after the marriage, they are forced to kill.

* When the girl is 10 yrs old, we can't send her anywhere - she has to be within the house, only then there is respect.

* The situation has become so bad now that there is a grandma who will kill the child for Rs. 100. That has become her business.



L. Thara Bai

* If we don't have at least one boy child - it is difficult to bring up a girl child or even to survive

The problem of female infanticide is to be considered seriously by all those who are concerned with society.

Usilampatti taluk in the district of Madurai is declared recently as a backward district by the government. Usilampatti taluk constitutes 92 villages consisting of 276,201 population. This educationally backward area has 32.51% female literacy when compared to 56.48% male literacy. 48.8% of people live below the poverty line. Female infanticide is seen mostly among Kallars, who belong to the lower classes. Kallars are a community well known for their bravery and mental strength. This is especially true with Kallar women. The community's 'dowry' practices are oppressive. Even when a woman dies, the husband and his relatives wait till the woman's brothers come and adorn her with new clothes.

Let me briefly explain here the myths surrounding female infanticide in Usilampatti among the Piramalaikallars. In the first place, female infanticide is considered as women's problem. Secondly, this problem is projected as a traditional one and thirdly, it is viewed as a class problem. In Usilampatti area as many as 6000 female infanticides occurred during sixties and seventies. In the last decade there are purposive awareness programmes and as a result of this, the occurrence of female infanticide has been decreasing.

Babies are not properly, not they educated or permitted to enjoy childhood.

Case Study

Thangasam Thokkamma are a happy couple who gave a daughter R...

Rasu in 1985. Though they had no property, they were leading a happy life on daily wages. Rasu's parents were looking forward to a grand son but unfortunately Rakku give birth to a girl child. However, the parents and the grand parents looked after the child hoping that the girl will bring prosperity through a male child. Soon Rakku became pregnant once again. As soon as her in-laws knew that she was pregnant, there was tremendous pressure on her to beget a male child. Rakku was told that if she gave birth to a girl child, the whole family will be ruined. She was ill-treated during her pregnancy and was terribly demoralised. Rakku gave birth to a baby girl. Immediately after delivery, the child was killed in the presence of the mother. Rakku was grief-stricken. However, even as she was trying to cope with her loss, the blame of killing the baby was shifted on to Rakku.

Conclusion

The case study throws light on the social attitudes towards women in the Indian society. The woman who is blamed for this gruesome phenomenon is only a product of a larger patriarchal ideology. Female infanticide is a malady, for which the entire society is responsible.

Tharabai is a professor, Dept. of Sociology, Madurai Kamaraj University. She interacts closely with the people of Usilampatti and has done extensive research on the issue of female infanticide. Her work includes studies on women & girl children.

* Expressions of women from 10 villages in Usilampatti taluk in Tamil Nadu which record the highest rate of female infanticide in India. (From the study conducted by Tharabai)

* We carry the child, but the child is not ours. It is a curse. We are not allowed to have a girl child. If we have a girl child, we will be killed. We are not allowed to have a girl child. If we have a girl child, we will be killed.

* First they were hesitant to kill & later on they started to kill.

* Once when my girl child was born my mother-in-law asked to kill her. I was in such a way that I was not able to do anything. I was not able to do anything.

* The area is dry & the little we produce we have to pay 25% interest. So you expect us to manage our lives. The burden of a girl child.

* We won't put her in the Govt. cradle scheme. A girl is Lakshmi, if we put her there, it is inauspicious & we never know what happens to her - but if we kill her, we are less worried.

* To drink the men have money to squander away, but to bring up a child they say it will be difficult - kill them.

WOMEN AND PANCHAYATS A LOOK ACROSS THE COUNTRY

860

I passionately desire the utmost freedom for our women... women must have votes and an equal legal status. But the problem does not end there. It only commences at the point where women begin to affect the political deliberations of the nation.

— Mahatma Gandhi

Political empowerment of the rural poor is an aim which could possibly be realised through the 1/3rd reservations of seats for women and 1/3 for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Poor peoples concerns specific to their role could bring forth demands that are caste oriented, patriarchial and have the character of a vested interest. In spite of these drawbacks, we have to forge ahead in promoting democratic functioning.

Article 40 of the Indian Constitution provides for the establishment of panchayats in the country. Since it is part of the Directive Principles of State Policy, it was not legally enforceable so far. The 73rd Amendment to the constitution, in 1992, makes the establishment of panchayati raj institutions (PRI) compulsory and legal. It is a step towards political decentralisation, and alternatively, to strengthen people's decision-making powers. Elections once in five years, one-third representation of women, reservation of seats for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes is mandatory. The village panchayats, as outlined in the eleventh schedule of the constitution, will prepare 'area plans for economic development and social justice'. PRI activities have been broadly classified into 8 categories, viz., development of the economy, agriculture, land, education, social, cultural, health and infrastructural facilities. The PRI is supposed to be accountable to the local people on a day-

to-day basis. Development activities have been perceived in a holistic manner, at least on paper. (See South Link on Panchayati Raj.)

The provision of 33 per cent reservations for women invokes mixed reactions. Most feminists fear that reservations per se will weaken the women's movement. Without tackling social issues first such as property rights, women's position in religion, advocacy for uniform laws, elimination of dowry, and economic independence, piece-meal efforts such as reservations will only disempower women in the long run. There is an immediate need to weed out attitudinal, social and structural obstacles to women's political participation. Apart from that we have to take into cognizance the might of the State and its power to disarm women as demonstrated in the recent incidents of physical abuse at Muzaffarnagar and Mussoorie. How do we come to a consensus on the means to achieve political power?

PROFILE OF WOMEN PANCHAYAT LEADERS

There are outstanding representatives of women who are assertive and have leadership qualities. Some examples are as follows :

- In Karnataka : Two of the women *mandal pradhans* in Madapura Mandal Panchayat (Krishnarajpet Taluk, Mandya District) and Kolkonda Mandal Panchayat (Sadam Taluk, Gulbarga District) had contested and won in general constituencies against male candidates. They also served full five-year term as *pradhans*.
- In Maharashtra: Women panchayat in Metikheda, Kalamb tehsil of Yevatmal is an instance of success. Maya Wenkhede, the village sarpanch who met with resistance initially has suspended 2 *gram sevaks* on charges of corruption; has mobilised social schemes like addition of rooms to the village school, created a revolving fund for the benefit of women, and has half-built an auditorium for village social functions.
- In Maharashtra: In Vitner village of Chopada tehsil, Jalgaon district, women have been given property rights by its all-women panchayat.
- In Maharashtra: Sarpanch Ushabai of Nimgaon Boghi village in Ahmednagar district is also an elected zilla parishad member. Her political role has enabled her to identify and implement zilla-parishad schemes for gram panchayats, and take on effective resource mobilisation scheme for village purposes as well. She advocates male representation in Bal Kalyan Samitees and Samaj Kalyan Samitees, and alternatively, female membership in construction of road repairs committees— thus breaking the stereotyped notions of the roles of women and men in society. Her efforts have been fruitful as can be seen in the provision of water tanks to Harijans, smokeless *chullahs*, a room for the *balwadi*, a community T.V., a *pucca* road, and the continuing struggle against alcoholism.
- In Maharashtra: Women's panchayats exist in Ralegan Siddi in Parner tehsil of Ahmednagar district, and Salod of Amravati district.
- In West Bengal: In Bankura district, the initiator of the process of women's effective participation in gram panchayats, it was observed that women rarely attended meetings, and seemed to be unaware of the extent of their involvement in PRIs. The nominated female members had little or no interest in the welfare of the people since they were not accountable to any electorate. Most elected women were unaware of their roles and functions in the panchayat samiti since there was no process to familiarise the elected women members with the panchayat institutions.
- In Karnataka : Chandakawadi Mandal Panchayat, women ex-representatives did not even know the political party which they "represented" when they contested the elections. One had to consult *mandal* records to find out the political party to which they "belonged". They freely admitted that during their tenure as representatives, they hardly had anything to do in the *mandal* except to put their thumb impression at each *mandal* meeting.
- In Karnataka : It is feared that with *mandals* coming under the administrators, virtually all the women and the scheduled caste ex-*mandal* members have no role left, and even their participation in the gram sabhas is becoming non-existent.

Given that elections to the PRIs were among the first elections where women in large numbers had a chance to participate and involve themselves in public life, in the beginning it is natural that they would not have come up to the expectations of the people. What is significant is that a large section of the illiterate or poorly educated got elected, most of them for the first time. As a tradition builds up through regular elections, their experience will result in better performance in the days to come. Indeed, this is the first step, and an important step at that, as no distance can be covered without the first step.

Women's participation in PRIs has to be dealt with

at two levels — one, at the level of representation, and second is the actual effectiveness of such representation. Since the first has been tackled, to a great extent, by the central government, the second is the task of the state government, the bureaucracy, the efforts of the voluntary sectors, the village PRIs and the local people, the interaction of all these bodies that can make effective the functioning of PRIs.

The strategies involved in empowering women involve political education, political training and the effective role of social action groups in rendering support services and education. Identification of specific problems related to women is a must. For

instance, on identifying gram panchayats on the basis of population as opposed to one village, elected women officials will find it difficult in going to another village. Further, a balance of the division of labour (between household chores and panchayat responsibilities) has to be worked out by the villagers themselves.

The agenda for action for rural women's political empowerment has indeed seen a breakthrough in the form of the 73rd Amendment. However, women have to be careful about the trends of liberalisation in the economy which is bound to conflict with the principles of panchayati raj which emphasise the strengthening of small-scale and cottage industries. The entry of multinational companies may hamper the production of local products, and, therefore, rural women's livelihoods.

Political parties have used the PRIs for narrow political gains apart from granting some benefits to the local people. Through the PRIs, the parties have strengthened their grassroots' political base. The CPI(M) in West Bengal, and the Shetkhari Sangathana in Maharashtra are cases in instance. Effectively, in case of liberalisation, the PRIs could be used to promote the interests of the larger companies as well.

The role of political parties in making PRIs effective cannot be ignored. In Maharashtra, the Shetkari Sangathana members, and the CPI(M) in West Bengal, have supported PRI. Workshops on the role of voluntary groups and reservations for women have been organised at State levels in Gujarat (Sakhina Sanidhyama in 1993) and in Rajasthan (Patel 1994). Notwithstanding the role of political parties, and voluntary organisations, one has to bear in mind that the political will of women and men alone can make any legislation effective.

There is a need to train and educate the female elected representatives in management and skill-development before one can count on the successes of the 33% reservations for women. As Susheela Kaushik (1993: 13) puts it, "... by getting this one gate opened, the women's movement can (and must) flood the rural side with the potentialities and political contributions of women".

■ Assistance for this article was provided by Chitra of GPC.

NIPH Hyderabad is conducting training with the help of a large number of NGOs for making people, particularly women aware of the panchayat elections.

STATE OF THE PANCHAYATS AND RESERVATION OF WOMEN

Andhra Pradesh : Reservation for women is minimum of two and maximum of 4 seats (25% of the Gram Panchayat). Elections are overdue at the time of going to press.

Uttar Pradesh : This has been fixed as per the total number of members, i.e. one seat is reserved for women for every 5 members (approximately 20%).

Karnataka : There is 25% reservation for women at Zilla and Mandal Panchayat level.

Kerala : In the four district councils, seats 30% have been reserved for women.

Madhya Pradesh : 20% in Gram Sabhas, 1% of the *sarpanchs* in the Janpada (block-level) panchayat, and 10% in the Zilla Parishad have been reserved for women.

Maharashtra : 30% reservation for women.

Orissa : 30% of the total number of seats are reserved for women. In addition, a post of additional vice chairperson of local bodies is reserved for women.

Tamil Nadu : Although the details are not known; its three tier system allows the co-option of many women members.

Uttar Pradesh : There has been no reservation for women in the past elections, though co-option of one woman is provided for in case of a vacancy. At the Zilla Parishad level, women are coopted in proportion to their population.

Bihar : Elections are overdue.

Punjab : Direct elections are held for only 40% of the seats at the block and district levels. This means that the provision of having 1/3rd women members does not apply to a majority of the Panchayat bodies. Only 15.2% of panchayat members are women.

West Bengal : Women given 39.3% reservation -- above the statutory minimum. One of the states at the lead in giving power to women at the local level. 28,000 women have already been elected.

Tripura : Not only have large numbers of women been elected at the Panchayats, but a very large percentage of these are tribal women. This must surely be the best example for other states to emulate.

Source: Susheela Kaushik, *Organising Women for Panchayati Raj*, Health For The Millions, volume 1, n. 4, 1993, pp. 12-15 and other reports

A34

11 FEB 1996

THE TIMES OF INDIA
(MUMBAI)

Women activists air doubts over quota

A34
T-1

By A Staff Reporter

MUMBAI, February 10.

While supporting reservations for women in the political arena, women's rights activists questioned whether it would lead to their participation in decision-making or change their societal status in the seminar "Women, empowerment and political participation."

The seminar, which started yesterday, was organised by SNDT university's research centre for women's studies (RCWS) and Max Mueller Bhavan.

The delegates discussed whether 30 per cent seats in panchayats would be filled up by women who served merely as figureheads while power was wielded by men. They wondered whether candidates would adequately represent the interests of women. The German delegates shared their experiences on the quota system for women in political parties in their country.

Scholar Neera Desai cautioned that the entry of women in the political arena may diffuse the women's movement. She said, "The onus is now on the women's movement to ensure that the 30 per cent women who are elected to panchayats should be able to represent the interests of women."

The director of the centre for women's studies in Punjab university Pam Rajput agreed that women's groups would have to play an inter-

ventionist role. She added that in India, there was an inverted structure where more women held power at the Centre and state level than at the local level.

In their paper, researchers Usha Thakkar and Rohini Gavankar said they had come across several cases where women panchayat members served as mere spokespersons of men. "We came across a case where the woman's husband attended the panchayat meetings and made the decisions on her behalf," they said.

Ecologist and activist Vandana Shiva, while supporting the panchayat reservation, said it had become futile in the current era of globalisation, which rendered local bodies powerless.

In her keynote address yesterday, she said developments like the new economic policy and the signing of GATT had severely affected the country's sovereignty. "Panchayats must be seen in the context of dismemberment of policy structures. Although you can have representation, public bodies will control nothing," she stated. She added, "All representative structures have lost power. It has moved outward and upward."

Director of the economic and social research institute of the Hans-Bockler foundation Heide Pfarr was among the strong supporters of reservation for women in political life.

13 JAN 1996

A34

Women of India

New laws for higher status

By Sona Khan

TO revive the panchayati raj institutions, the 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution were passed some time ago. Corresponding legislations were also enacted. They are extremely potent instruments of empowerment. These enactments, inter alia, provide for 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in the local, municipal and district bodies. All women including those who have had little opportunity to perform the obligations of representing their fellow beings are required to come out and contest.

Muslims, tribals and dalits need to be encouraged to take such initiatives. None of their traditions need hold them back. For example, if a Muslim woman wants to wear a *burka*, she may do so but must not hesitate to apply her mind to the given issues, sit in the panchayat or in any other elected body. There is no impediment in Islam for men and women to participate in the decision-making process of a secular State.

According to 73rd and 74th amendments, there is no bar for women to contest the general seats as well. For example, taking advantage of the provisions, at the grassroot level in Karnataka, the representation of elected women is even more than 50 per cent in the local bodies. If implemented with the spirit with which these enactments were carried through the legislative process, the new arrangement would facilitate the participation of a large number of women citizens of India in the decision-making process. Given the needed impetus by various States, the democratic forces generated by this particular process of change would revolutionise our society. In the larger interest of the country, this may be a way of ushering in a more sincere, honest, result-oriented, corruption-free and environment-friendly polity.

For growth and development, political stability is important at both policy and implementation levels. We have achieved considerable growth but a lot more needs to be done. Maybe the women of India could, if united, help in providing the impetus for political stability. The 73rd and 74th amendments would eventually decentralise the political system. Women are 49.7 per cent of the total population of our country and can form a determined and solid constituency of their own, reflecting a strong political will. The contribution of Indian women to the economy, visible or invisible, has been a major factor in its upward trend, especially after Independence. However this fact is not reflected in the enjoyment of their economic rights.

The indifference, responsible for the lack of appreciation of the contribution of women by a large section of society, is a primary source of violence and abuse against them. This attitude also undermines our image and economic potential. NGOs do try and make some noises but do not always follow the issues to the end. However, they are not taken seriously as they are considered to be in the business of being self-appointed spokesper-

sons without relating to the women on whose behalf they claim to speak.

The ownership and land rights of women of India are not even 0.5 per cent in spite of the fact that they enjoy the theoretical rights of equality under the Constitution. Most forces, motivated by an agenda of their own, are planning to use women for their ends in the coming general election without really having a definite plan for their upliftment. Christians, dalits and tribals are being organised. Somehow India's Muslim society is still in the process of exploring the ways of making a concerted effort to seek its share of participation.

Muslims in India are the second largest in the Muslim population of the world. The rich (undeveloped otherwise) and poor Muslim countries follow their traditional Muslim laws in such a way that their

would make the exercise complete. The declaration made at Beijing needs to be implemented within the provisions of our Constitution.

The Government needs to consider passing appropriate legislation applicable to all Indians in which (1) All family assets and other properties, like land and cultivation rights, tenancy rights, etc. acquired after marriage would be deemed to be jointly owned by both wife and husband; (2) Every parent would deem to have made a will in which he or she has willed family assets, equally to their beneficiaries, unless a contrary desire has been expressed in writing, giving valid reasons for doing so (Tunisia, a Muslim country has such a law to give daughters an equal share).

These laws would help the society to eventually strike a balance for the enjoyment of the economic rights and appreciation of the role of women in the family. The need to have a code of the nature as being demanded by the opposition parties and others would become redundant in view of these changes. They are demanding the uniform civil code without realising that some of the fundamental rights relating to the freedom of religion would be infringed.

These laws would ensure harmony and strengthening of the institution of the family. Thus our cultural diversity would emerge as a source of great strength. Economic rights are a surer way of empowering and changing the attitudes of society towards needed reforms, cutting across gender-based prejudices. Some years ago, the Akali Dal wanted Sikhs to come out of the definition of being a Hindu (they burnt the copies of the Constitution outside Parliament) to assert their minority status. One of the main reasons was to have different personal laws to deprive their daughters of a share in the parental lands. Haryana also tried to find ways of amending the Hindu Succession Act with similar motives.

Therefore, the proposed amendments in the existing laws would tend to unify the people, especially the women, by ensuring the application of the provisions of equality in real terms. They would also empower both women and children, reducing violence against women and the differences in various levels of well-being of our society. Caste factors would be neutralised at least in this area.

The possibilities of interpreting the Shariat Application Act of 1937 against the interest of the Muslim women would be eliminated under the new dispensation. The Act was passed by British Parliament and is still valid in India whereas Muslim countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh have made appropriate changes in it. The new laws would reduce pressure on the courts since most matters relating to family law would receive the direction and guidance of Parliament. Perhaps even the political parties would finally have the opportunity to show their sincerity for the welfare of women and minorities. The new system should enable India to assume leadership on the issues of women and family law, which is much needed by many new nations like Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics.

The participation of a large number of women in the local bodies would revolutionise our society and perhaps usher in a more sincere, honest, result-oriented, corruption-free and pro-environment polity

women do not get empowered though, more often than not, for reasons other than religious. The Quran gives women more rights than the society is willing to implement and recognise. Maybe India can take the lead and show the way to empower the women in Muslim societies by beginning with our own. Islamic jurisprudence provides for equity and equality for women. Some Muslim countries like Tunisia and Turkey have already relied on such an approach.

In September last year, at the fourth world conference on women at Beijing, India ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women without any reservations. Earlier like many countries, India had cause for reservations, in view of the traditions and customs prevailing in our society. In the areas of marriage, divorce, alimony etc. the minorities are considering suitable amendments, which are in order with the religious rights guaranteed under the Constitution. Appropriate amendments in our property laws

A34
IE

Reservation is not her salvation

9/8/96

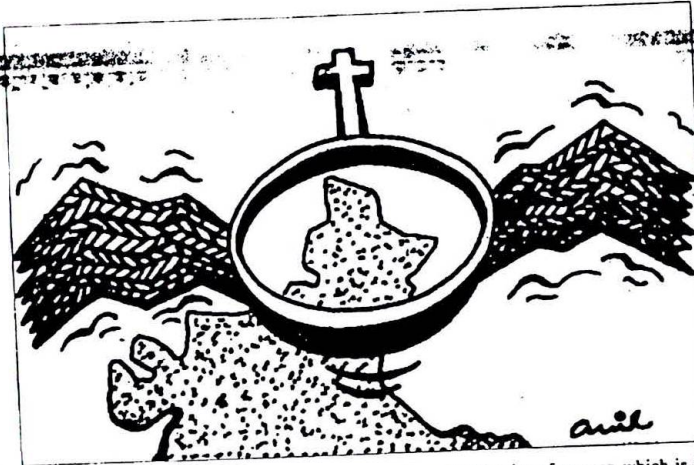
SEEMA ALAVI

THE United Front Government's decision to reserve 33 per cent of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies for 30 per cent government jobs for women reflects the culmination of a general trend to casually push issues concerning women into the so-called "feminine domain". This "feminine" sphere is supposed to look into matters as heinous as rape and as innocuous as an academic interest in "women studies".

Thus if a woman is burnt for dowry women groups alone are expected to shoulder the sole responsibility of making noise. Again, women parliamentarians, even when elected from constituencies where women constitute a minority, are expected to single-handedly represent the "interests of women". It is the extension of the same peculiar logic which often finds women members of university selection committees being expected to "handle" women candidates particularly if the applicants are interested in "gender studies".

The clubbing together of women exclusively with the social and political issues which concern them reflects the patriarchal power play which marginalises women by encouraging their ghettoisation. This forced herding together of women edges them out from the social and political mainstream making it the exclusive preserve of men. The proposed Bill for gender reservation is all set to sanctify this disturbing process.

The socially and economically backward women fall within the purview of the Mandal Commission Report and gender-based reservation should not be confused with this social justice programme and the latter taken as a



rationale for implementing the demand for gender reservation. The proposed Bill defines women independent of the social, economic and political strata or groups to which they belong. It also seeks to isolate their interests from those of their larger social and economic class. This is disturbing. Once women are socially and politically isolated as an unrealistically neat monolithic group the ongoing process of social justice based on social and economic backwardness will be weakened.

The proposal to provide reservation for women on the basis of their gender identity is based on completely ahistorical and simplistic assumption about their identity. The votaries of reservation appear to ignore the multifac-

eted gender identity of women which is in constant interface with their class, caste and community identity, and is informed by their social and cultural context. So being a woman is a different experience for each woman. Levelling the heterogeneity and freezing the flux that women as a social group find themselves in is problematic.

Social and economic backwardness seems to be the only referent which may generate similar experiences in women who are at the receiving end of the developmental iniquities. It is only on the basis of backwardness that some women can be identified as constituting a monolithic social group. This criterion can provide an acceptable rationale for

reservation for women. But the Mandal Report adequately takes care of such women. Unfortunately the protagonists of the demand for reservation for women are projecting the problematic inherent in their case as a mere tactical problem.

Reservation for women is nothing more than a political sop. The policy will only ensure that the educationally, economically and socially better off women corner the benefits of reservation. Such a policy will arouse hostility against women from all sections of society and create more fissures in social life. The valuelessness of the policy is particularly glaring in view of the fact that the general policy of reservation is already running into trouble with increasing privatisation and the shrinking of the public sector. The increasing retreat of the state from the economic sphere in itself will soon make a mockery of the reservation policy.

This is not to deny that the state and society need to take seriously the pathetic statistics of women parliamentarians, academics and bureaucrats, and the near absence of women in the higher echelons of decision-making in both the private and public sector. This gender imbalance needs to be corrected. What may tip the balance in the favour of women is the policy of affirmative action at entry points to jobs, Parliament and educational institutions. This is the only way in which the outright gender discrimination which many women experience at selection boards can be effectively checked.

The author is an assistant professor of history at Jawaharlal Nehru University

Quota for women: Putting the (

Populism has for long been the bane of Indian politics and it is once again parading on the national scene carrying, this time, the banner of 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and in State legislatures. Like every good idea which fails to bring the full bounty of its benefits when effected with less-than-total sincerity, this otherwise laudable piece of affirmative action, too, is rendered weak because of it being polluted with populism.

Every political party has pledged its support to this proposed legislation, a bill for which is likely to be tabled in Parliament. All the major political parties also had this pledge in their manifestoes for the Lok Sabha election. In itself, the idea of greatly increasing women's representation in our elective bodies through a legislative initiative of "positive discrimination" is only to be welcomed. The initiative demonstrates a national consensus for making women substantial, if not equal, partners in the legislative sphere of Indian democracy. To that extent, it highlights the gender dimension of our commitment to republicanism.

The question, however, is: Are we going about this affirmative action in the right spirit and in the right manner? Has there been sufficient national debate on the issue? Has the ground been prepared to make the policy yield the desired result—that is, to enable the female half of our population to have an effective, against nominal or national, participation in the affairs of our elective and governing bodies? Or, is the hurriedly proposed quota policy yet another attempt by political parties to attract women voters in parliamentary and assembly elections?

The answers to these questions should be obvious. There has been no serious and thorough

debate either within the political parties at all levels or in society as a whole. Truer still is the fact that necessary steps have not been taken to significantly increase women's participation in social and political activities, as also in the running of local self-government bodies. Without this preparatory process, it is either naive or disingenuous to claim that the women candidates who will contest the elections in the reserved constituencies will have the requisite knowledge and practical experience of this vital sphere of our democracy. Clearly, the cart is being put before the horse. None of our political parties has set in motion this preparatory process, going by the simple index of the proportion of women members in their committees of office bearers at various levels. Therefore, what is likely to happen—and this apprehension has been voiced by many women activists themselves—is that the wives or daughters or other close female relatives of established political leaders will be put up as candidates in the reserved constituencies.

The right approach

This may be better than nothing—for, at least some of these, "dummy" MPs or MLAs could, over a period of time, emerge as women politicians in their own right—but it does not substantially serve the goal of political empowerment of women.

It now looks certain that the proposed pol-

icy will be legislated soon. Hence, instead of debating what preparatory exercise ought to have preceded this step, it is necessary to seriously discuss the set of measures that need to be put in place *parallelly* both to better implement the new policy and, on a broader plane, to empower women in all walks of life.

First, there is a need for an attitudinal change to realise the imperative of creating equal opportunities for men and women both for self-growth and for contributing to the harmonious growth of society. On the one hand, our national culture has always stood for gender equality, and believed male and female—*purush* and *prakruti*—to be equal interdependent, and mutually empowering principles of creation. Yet, in reality, the *prakruti* half of our society has been subjected to all manner of apathy, injustice, and exploitation which has resulted in all-round *vikruti* (distortion) in our national life.

Second, for empowerment in elective bodies to succeed, women's empowerment within par-



A34
P

27/8/96

SUDHEENDRA KUI

*Critic and
commentator*

M071

Putting the cart before the horse



A34
P

27/8/96

SUDHEENDRA KULKARNI

*Critic and
commentator*

icy will be legislated soon. Hence, instead of debating what preparatory exercise ought to have preceded this step, it is necessary to seriously discuss the set of measures that need to be put in place *parallelly* both to better implement the new policy and, on a broader plane, to empower women in all walks of life.

First, there is a need for an attitudinal change to realise the imperative of creating equal opportunities for men and women both for self-growth and for contributing to the harmonious growth of society. On the one hand, our national culture has always stood for gender equality, and believed male and female—*purush* and *prakruti*—to be equal interdependent, and mutually empowering principles of creation. Yet, in reality, the *prakruti* half of our society has been subjected to all manner of apathy, injustice, and exploitation which has resulted in all-round *vikruti* (distortion) in our national life.

Second, for empowerment in elective bodies to succeed, women's empowerment within par-

ties must significantly increase by consciously elevating promising activists to leadership positions. Such activists, however, are not created from nowhere. They have to emerge out of the political process itself. This in turn calls for greatly increasing women's participation in all types of political and social activity. It is only when a society has a large pool of socially active women that it gets to have a somewhat smaller pool of politically active women. Out of this pool is created a still smaller set of women political leaders who can make for competent MPs or MLAs. It is this bottom-up, rather than the top-down, approach to empowerment which can truly release the immense regenerative power of Indian womanhood.

Pro-women tokenism

Disconcertingly, the present base of socially active women in our society is quite small. The biggest challenge before all the political parties and women's organisations, therefore, is how to expand and deepen this base. This calls for supportive action at the family, workplace and organisational levels. It has been the universal experience of women activists, or those who wish to participate in socio-political or even cultural activities outside the four walls of the traditional Indian household, that they face discouragement and even active resistance from male members of their family. Ironically, this anti-woman attitude is often

prevalent even in the families of well-established political leaders. Political parties and women's organisations must, therefore, devise programmes to get at least one woman in each family involved in some kind of social activity or the other, even if this is of the elementary kind.

Last, supportive action must be vastly increased within political parties themselves. It simply will not do, as is now the case, for our parties to resort to pro-women tokenism by forming a Mahila Morcha and giving its leaders only a marginal role, recognition, and representation in the organisation's decision-making bodies. These party-affiliated women's organisations are normally activated at the time of elections or for mobilising crowds at a visiting leader's rally. Few parties, however, make conscious and systematic effort to enlist the participation of women of all castes and sections of society in regular campaigns which address both women's and general socio-political issues.

To change this sorry state of affairs is primarily the responsibility of the male members of our political parties. They must treat their female colleagues with respect and accept them as their equal partners. They must encourage the latter to fully and freely participate in inner-party debates, express their independent views (even if they are critical ones) and take up responsible assignments. Parties should also consciously groom capable and popular women leaders in their ranks, treating this to be one of their primary organisational tasks. The call for such supportive action may sound condescending to some in our women's organisations, but its importance cannot be overlooked at the present level of our socio-political development.

When on July 8, the United Front Government promised in its common minimum programme 33 per cent reservations for women in Parliament and State Assemblies, the announcement was met with widespread jubilation—markedly so in women's groups and amongst political leaders who had been lobbying hard to push through this legislation for the last several years.

But sceptics hung their head. Do we want 33 Phoolans in Parliament, they mused. Would such constitutionally vested powers (since only a constitutional amendment can allow this legislation to pass through) really reduce gender based discrimination? Would the entry of women into formal power structures really imply their "empowerment", they asked. And above all, are not elected women just decorative props for men, they sniggered.

Feminists and radicals, especially those who have been in the vanguard of the movement favouring reservations, may dismiss these questions as just another ploy to keep women out of sharing power.

Yet at the same time, it would not be too wise to limit the issue to whether or not women in India should be given reserved quotas

Are reservations

Some may say this is the only way out from gender-based discrimination. ^{A34 HT 2} need 33 Phoolans in the Parliament. **Poonam Goel** speaks to a cross-section of the United Front Government's decision of 33 per cent reservations



'I don't trust the politicians at all'

—Usha Albuquerque



'The resistance to muscle power and mafia will come from women themselves'

—Sushma Swaraj



—Poonam Goel

Mohini Giri, Chairperson of the National Commission for Women also believes that this is the only way women will get tickets to run for the elections.

However, even a cursory glance at the 1996 general elections and the women who contested makes it amply clear that the issue is not so simple. Ironically, all articulate and 'politically aggressive' women like Margaret Alva, Mrinal Gore, Promila Dandavate and Renuka

are so many women who have come here on their merit. Rules are not understood by exceptions alone. In any case, Phoolan came without reservations, didn't she? There may be few cases like these in the beginning but with increased participation, the resistance to manipulation, muscle power and mafia will come from women themselves. As far as dummy candidates are concerned, tell me, are there not several 'mauni babas' in the house who have probably never opened their mouths ever?" fumes Bjp spokesperson Sushma Sawaraj, who made it to the Parliament through door to door campaigning and grassroots affiliations.

Evidently, the women who have been successful in politics think alike. Congress MP Girija Vyas put forth a similar view that every movement for social reform has its teething problems but she foresees the need for a time frame till this "reverse preference" should be given otherwise "it will lead to a negation of equality later".

The point these leaders are trying to make is that even if you have a few dummy candidates, once they become conscious of the power vested in their hands, "they use it for greater good because women know what it is to be powerless," Veena Nayyar, President of Women's Political Watch, a Delhi based advocacy group lobbying for more women in public life is reported to have said. "More women in State Assemblies and Parliament means more resources for schools, primary health care, upgra-

es have actually done things to concretely help women.

"Why women, there are wrong men too in politics whose sole aim is to make property or money. But our democracy is maturing and I hope with this kind of a move, there is a collective voice which can fight for women's issues. I sincerely believe that given a chance, women do help in the overall development of the society," says Rajesh Pilot while denying that chances of proxy candidates will increase with reservations.

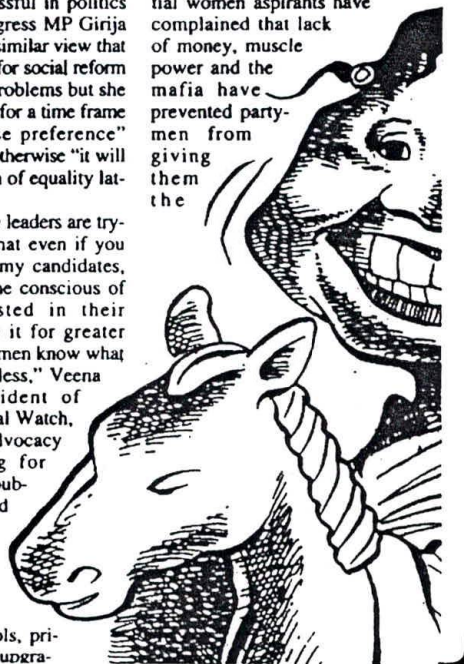
In fact, the pro-reservations lobby enthuses that this will greatly reduce the criminalisation of politics, or at least throw up people who will oppose it. Many potential women aspirants have complained that lack of money, muscle power and the mafia have prevented party-men from giving them the

- * In 1996, out of the 14,274 candidates for the 543 seats in Lok Sabha, only 491 were women.
- * Interestingly, even out of this low figure, two-thirds were independent candidates and this included many women who belonged to a political party but who stood as independents once their parties denied them.
- * In 1952, there were 22 women in the 499-member House.
- * The number rose to a record 44 in the Eighth Lok Sabha.
- * The figure plummeted to 27 in the following 1989 elections.
- * It rose to 39 in the tenth Lok Sabha.
- * In 1996, there are 36 women members in a 544-member House which is a dismal 6.7%.

of seats in the legislatures. The question is no longer whether, but how? Which is why, it is pertinent to ask whether reservations is the best way of achieving equality and redressal for age-old discrimination?

"Yes, it is," asserts the firebrand ex-MP of the JD, Promila Dandavate. "I have been fighting for this cause for decades now. It is a well-known fact that men do not want to share power with women. The criteria in giving a ticket is always, will she win, does she have the funds, will she assert herself. Do all men who fight elections win? And how many of them make it on their own without a godfather? When

Chowdhury were not given tickets. Many women were pushed into the constituencies reserved for SC/ST candidates. So there was a Meira Kumar fighting from Karol Bagh, Sabita Das from Karibganj, Assam, Selja Kumari from Sirsa and many other similar cases. Worse still, many women candidates—merely proxies of the men who rallied behind them—were either the wives, the daughters or widows of politicians. Evidently, it was either by the virtue of being 'in the family' or the star quality—Phoolan Devi's past history and the hype generated by the film Bandit Queen being a point in case—that got the women candidates



s enough?

21/7/96 (2)

n. Sceptics, on the other hand, may say we don't
ection of prominent women for their views on the
is for women in the corridors of power



*'Men do not
want to share
power with
women'*

Promila Dandavate



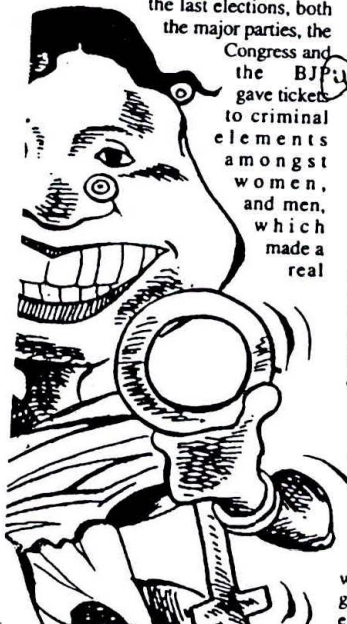
*'Forces of
social
revolution
have set in
which cannot
be reversed'*

-Margaret Alva

tickets. In such a scenario, where
'winnability' of the woman candi-
date is the criteria used by po-
litical parties and 'manoeuvrabil-
ity' is considered her asset, will
there be enough women to fill up
these seats?

"That is why it is imperative
to impose mandatory provisions
on political parties to effect mean-
ingful change since reform with-
in political parties is so painfully
slow," says Brinda Karat of All
India Democratic Women's
Association, "However, reserva-
tions should not only be quantity-
based but quality-based too. It
should be impressed upon the par-
ties through electoral reforms that
some kind of standard is adhered
to in giving tickets. In

the last elections, both
the major parties, the



Congress and
the BJP
gave tickets
to criminal
elements
amongst
women,
and men,
which
made a
real

mockery of democracy."

Showing the same kind of
scepticism, Usha Albuquerque,
well-known newscaster, says,
"Why should there be any kind of
quota. Why can't merit and edu-
cation be the criteria in politics
too? It is a dangerous trend that
people are voting for criminal el-
ements and feel empowered by
them. Reservations may appear
good on the surface because
women have faced the brunt of
injustice for years together, but
will it be effective? I don't know,
I don't trust the politicians at all."

For Khushwant Singh, noted
columnist, minimum qualifica-
tions should not be limited to ed-
ucation but also those who pay
taxes, both for the vote seeker
and the vote giver. That is the
'right' candidate for him.

If the induction of Y.K. Alagh
has proved that academicians and
intellectuals are being taken seri-
ously by Mr Deve Gowda, Sushila Kaushik, HoD Political
Science in DU has a valid point
too when she says, "If there is no
criteria for men, why are we be-
ing extra cautious when it comes
to selecting women? I say there
are enough qualified women who
can be taken in just as Mr Alagh
was. Even with reservation, if
there is not enough political will,
these seats may well remain vac-
ant!"

Though the issue of reserva-
tions has received support from
all parties (as no party would
like to wash its hands off
50 per cent of the elec-
torate), the question
whether there would be
enough women who
would be willing to face the gar-
gantuan problems in contesting
elections becomes important

expect women to emerge inde-
pendent of their shackles.
However, forces of social revolu-
tion have been set in motion
which can't be reversed. We have
done it at the Panchayat level, we
shall do it at the national and state
levels too."

However, experience has
shown that it is only a core of
women, including Mrs Alva her-
self, who are vocal and active on
the floor of the House. Moreover,
barring a general condemnation
of violence against women, very
few women MPs have gone be-
yond their party positions.

As Brinda Karat reflects, "The
politics of a woman in Parliament
should reflect the politics of the
mass of women in the country.
They are not a homogeneous
group in which their identity and
character can be determined by
gender alone. Poor men and
women may find more things in
common than a poor woman and
a rich woman."

Perhaps, the best solution then,
is to let the parties choose half
their candidates from women.
This will automatically ensure a
higher representation for them
even if some of them lose the
elections. And since it will be a
woman to woman fight, "the
chances of muscle power and
character assassination will also
be lesser," according to Promila
Dandavate.

However, those people who
like Mr. V.P Singh are wary of
the political parties, may find so-
lance by the example of backward
castes. The number of OBC can-
didates rose from less than 10 per
cent in 1951 to over 60 per cent in
1989 without a Mandal to ensure
the same. Since simple competi-
tion ensured that, there is no rea-
son why this should not happen in
the case of women too.

There is no doubt that top down
reforms like reservations are nec-
essary but at the same time, it is
imperative to address oneself to
issues like criminalisation of po-
litics and the economic factor
which prevents women from en-
tering politics. Without some
well-meant electoral reforms, the
ground realities will still work
against greater participation of
women in the decision making
process. The answer lies in tack-
ling the root causes of women's
dependence, that is, the question
of her economic rights along with
the cultural and social factors
which make it difficult for women
to break the social veil. Moreover,
instead of crying themselves
hoarse about the benefits of reser-
vations, women bodies could do
better in forming caucuses and
vested interest groups which
could lobby for women's issues

House.

- * The number rose to a record 44 in the Eighth Lok Sabha.
- * The figure plummeted to 27 in the following 1989 elections.
- * It rose to 39 in the tenth Lok Sabha.
- * In 1996, there are 36 women members in a 544-member House which is a dismal 6.7%.

of seats in the legislatures. The question is no longer whether, but how? Which is why, it is pertinent to ask whether reservations is the best way of achieving equality and redressal for age-old discrimination?

"Yes, it is," asserts the fire-brand ex-MP of the JD, Promila Dandavate. "I have been fighting for this cause for decades now. It is a well-known fact that men do not want to share power with women. The criteria in giving a ticket is always, will she win, does she have the funds, will she assert herself. Do all men who fight elections win? And how many of them make it on their own without a godfather? When the 73rd Amendment gave reservation for women at the local level, there were more than ten lakh women who were elected as Panchayat members all over the country. Why can't that formula be replicated at the national level too?"

Chowdhury were not given tickets. Many women were pushed into the constituencies reserved for SC/ST candidates. So there was a Meira Kumar fighting from Karol Bagh, Sabita Das from Karibganj, Assam, Selja Kumari from Sirsa and many other similar cases. Worse still, many women candidates—merely proxies of the men who rallied behind them—were either the wives, the daughters or widows of politicians. Evidently, it was either by the virtue of being 'in the family' or the star quality—Phoolan Devi's past history and the hype generated by the film Bandit Queen being a point in case—that got the women candidates their tickets. Assuming the trend is a manifestation of the degeneration in our democracy, the dangers of having proxy candidates thrice over becomes very apparent.

"Why do you single out a Phoolan or a Kanti Singh? There

Vyas put forth a similar view that every movement for social reform has its teething problems but she foresees the need for a time frame till this "reverse preference" should be given otherwise "it will lead to a negation of equality later".

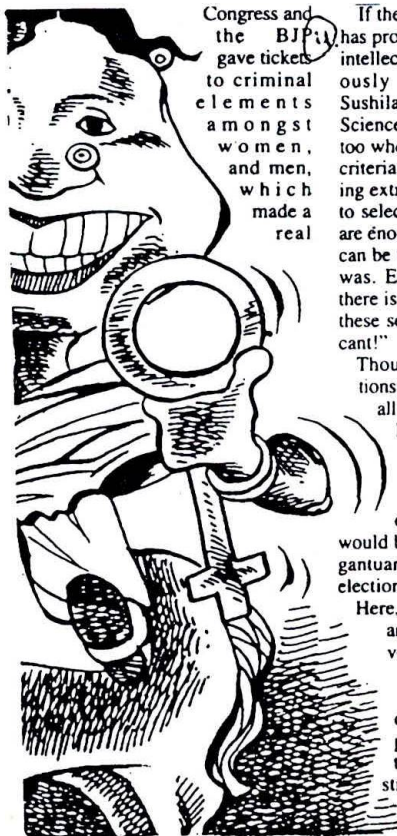
The point these leaders are trying to make is that even if you have a few dummy candidates, once they become conscious of the power vested in their hands, "they use it for greater good because women know what it is to be powerless," Veena Nayyar, President of Women's Political Watch, a Delhi based advocacy group lobbying for more women in public life is reported to have said. "More women in State Assemblies and Parliament means more resources for schools, primary health care, upgradation of skills. Dwindling numbers mean dwindling concern for women," she says while pointing out that in many cases women sarpanch-

of money, muscle power and the mafia have prevented party-men from giving them the



N60-100
296
04356





Congress and the BJP gave tickets to criminal elements amongst women, and men, which made a real

If the induction of Y.K. Alagh has proved that academicians and intellectuals are being taken seriously by Mr Deve Gowda, Sushila Kaushik, HoD Political Science in DU has a valid point too when she says, "If there is no criteria for men, why are we being extra cautious when it comes to selecting women? I say there are enough qualified women who can be taken in just as Mr Alagh was. Even with reservation, if there is not enough political will, these seats may well remain vacant!"

Though the issue of reservations has received support from all parties (as no party would like to wash its hands off 50 per cent of the electorate), the question whether there would be enough women who would be willing to face the gargantuan problems in contesting elections becomes important.

Here, the emphasis on training and special recruitment drives becomes necessary as Margaret Alva, one of the most vociferous champions of the cause points out. "It is not easy to change the existing structures of thousands of years overnight and

son why this should not happen in the case of women too.

There is no doubt that top down reforms like reservations are necessary but at the same time, it is imperative to address oneself to issues like criminalisation of politics and the economic factor which prevents women from entering politics. Without some well-meant electoral reforms, the ground realities will still work against greater participation of women in the decision making process. The answer lies in tackling the root causes of women's dependence, that is, the question of her economic rights along with the cultural and social factors which make it difficult for women to break the social veil. Moreover, instead of crying themselves hoarse about the benefits of reservations, women bodies could do better in forming caucuses and vested interest groups which could lobby for women's issues.

Unless this is done, the legislations claiming to impart justice can only be seen as platitudes mouthed by wily politicians. And as for the common woman, her sense of empowerment will only be limited to a boisterous Salman Khan swinging from the chandeliers singing *Kudiyon ka hai zamaana!*