

The 1984 Elections

United We Fall — Into the Trap of Manipulators

THE new Lok Sabha has 42 women members out of a total of 502. Thus, women constitute about eight per cent of the current total strength. This is an all time high, though not very substantially different from previous Lok Sabhas. The 1980 Lok Sabha had 28 women members out of 542, that is, about five percent of the total strength.

A total of 157 women contested the recent elections. This is also an all time high figure. However, there seems to be little cause for jubilation if, instead of counting the number of successful candidates, we look at the role that women played during the election.

The Congress (I) fielded the largest number of women, 39 out of their total of 485 candidates. Only two women were defeated while 37 were elected. The two who lost were defeated by women candidates put up against them by the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh. Thus, it is clear that the increase in the number of women elected does not reflect an increase in the political strength of women. Most candidates, men or women, put up by the Congress (I) won, primarily because of the sympathy wave that swept the country after Indira Gandhi's assassination.

Very few of the women candidates put up by the Congress (I) or by other parties have a political base of their own. Ever since India went in for the system of parliamentary democracy, women who get fielded as candidates do so largely as a means of extending the political power of the male heads of their families.

Some parts of this article are similar to passages in an article by Madhu Kishwar published in Seminar.

There are hardly any women on the political scene, especially in electoral politics, who are there on their own strength or for their own or women's benefit. This is true not only of women in parliament but even of those who get selected for *village panchayats*. Had Jawaharlal Nehru had a son, it is highly unlikely that Indira Gandhi would have come to occupy important offices of power, first the presidentship of the Congress in Nehru's time, and then the prime ministership after his death.

All the women elected this time on Congress (I) tickets declared, in the most sycophantish manner, as did all the men, that this was not their victory but that of their leader, Rajiv Gandhi. Hitherto, some women MPs did have a history of political activity in the national movement. Even if they were wives or daughters of leading male politicians, some were, at the same time, public figures in their own right. But most of the new women entrants lack such a background. Many of them display remarkable ignorance on women's issues. Some, like Vyjyanthimala, cannot even address press conferences by themselves. She constantly looks to her husband to answer the simplest questions.

Among the opposition parties, Bharatiya Janata Party put up the largest number of women candidates—nine out of a total of 225. This amounts to a mere four percent of candidates fielded. Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party put up six women out of a total of 168, that is, 3.5 percent. Janata Party lagged farthest behind by putting up only four women out of a total of 206, that is, less than two percent. CPI(M) had two out of 59, CPI two out of 61 and Telugu Desam two out of 32.

A1ADMK had no woman candidate even though women constitute the main political base of their leader, M.G. Ramachandran. Of the 32 women put up by the opposition parties, only five got elected. Two of these are from the Telugu Desam, one, Geeta Mukherjee, from the CPI, and one, Vibha Ghosh, from the CPI(M).

Among the women put up by the opposition were a few who have a long record of active involvement with women's issues, both inside and outside parliament. The most notable are Pramila Dandavate of the Janata Party, Geeta Mukherjee of the CPI, Parvati Krishnan of the CPI and Susheela Gopalan of the CPI(M). All four are wives of prominent male leaders of their respective parties. However, they have been actively involved in politics in their own right. All of them play an active role in women's organisations as well as in making their parties somewhat more receptive to women's issues. However, Pramila Dandavate, Susheela Gopalan and Parvati Krishnan lost this election despite the fact that all of them have been effective parliamentarians and were beginning to organise a women's lobby across party lines. Out of 157 women who contested the election, 86 stood as independents. Of these, all except one lost their deposits, that is, they could not even poll one sixth of the total valid votes cast. While it is true that the rate of defeat of independent male candidates is also very high, this has special implications for women. It is an established fact that political parties are male dominated and are averse to fielding women as candidates except as surrogates for male factional leaders or as a token gesture. The women chosen

are usually wives or daughters of male leaders.

Outside the party structures, women have not been able to make an impact because they are not yet an organised political force. That is why even a talented and well known woman writer, Kamala Das, who stood as an independent candidate, could not mobilise women's votes on any significant scale. She did not get many votes despite the fact that she was one of the very few who declared that she stood for election in order to fight for women's rights. She raised some important women's issues.

Nowhere On The Agenda

It is ironical that in this election an increase in the number of women MPs has coincided with an all time low in candidates' interest in women's issues. During the campaign, hardly any candidate mentioned women's rights. In the major electoral speeches of the prime minister and the Congress (I) leaders there was no mention of any programme for women. The opposition too failed to bring women's issues to the fore, just as they failed in general to make this an issue based election. Even the routine formality of paying lip service to traditional women's welfare issues was totally dispensed with this time.

What is remarkable is that in spite of their supposed ideological differences, none of the national political parties, in its manifesto, has anything significantly different to say on women, who constitute almost half the country's population. In most party manifestos, women are given a brief paragraph very far down in the list of promises, after backward classes, Muslims, tribals and others.

The DMK does not mention the word "women" throughout its manifesto. The CPI(M) criticises the Congress (I) for the increase in dowry deaths, desertion of women by husbands, and police outrages on poor and harijan women during its regime. It does not say how these problems should be dealt with. It

promises to enforce marriage and divorce laws, ensure equality in admission to professions and services, equal pay for equal work, property inheritance and action against atrocities on women. The CPI promises in one sentence an end to atrocities on women, equal wages for equal work and inheritance of parental property. No details are given of how these promises will be implemented.

The Janata Party promises to implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Status of Women, to draw women into public life, provide them employment (mainly in the handloom sector), implement the Equal

They provide nothing but a statement of a pious intention.

Further, there is no specific mention of women when talking of elimination of poverty or illiteracy or unemployment although women constitute two thirds of the country's illiterates and suffer from a higher degree of unemployment. Janata Party does mention "structural integration" of women's issues in planning but no sign of it is visible in the rest of its manifesto. For instance, how will a particular economic or industrial or health programme affect women? If this is not taken into account from the start and women are not part of the decision

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Remuneration Act, remove social taboos and customs that work against women, and to provide smokeless *chulhas* and sanitary latrines in rural areas. The BJP assures property rights, action against dowry, and provision of hostels for women.

The Congress (I) mentions only action against dowry, an education programme, and employment opportunities for women. It shows not the slightest recollection that in its 1980 manifesto it had promised to ensure women's safety in public places, protection against atrocities and violence. This promise has not been redeemed since streets and even homes are, if anything, more unsafe now than then. The convenient shelving of the issue of women's safety and replacement of it by "national safety" works in the interest of the party. Any woman can judge how safe she is by her own experience of walking on the street but when it comes to judging the nation's safety we are forced to believe the exaggerated accounts given by our rulers.

It is also noteworthy that none of the parties tells us how it proposes to go about implementing its programmes.

making process, the programme may well turn out to be detrimental to women, as often happens. The manifestos accurately reflect the attitude of our politicians towards women—one of patronising manipulation—when they remember women at all.

Some Factors In The Victory

Why is it then that not only men but women as well voted so enthusiastically for the Congress (I)? Even more amazing is the fact that by some accounts women were more enthusiastic in their support for Rajiv Gandhi than were men.

This time, more than in any previous election, the opposition was completely outstripped in propaganda by the ruling party. Even in the capital city, the opposition was hardly visible or audible as a presence. Everywhere on the streets, one saw Congress (I) flags, posters, graffiti. Their ads dominated newspapers, their slogans bombarded the ears through loudspeakers and over the radio and television. Such blitzing was made possible by sheer money power. The Congress (I) is reported to have spent Rs 300 crores on the election. All the opposition parties and independents put together could spend a bare fraction of that fantastic amount

and it is thus no wonder that they were made so invisible.

The unprecedented, unfair and illegal way Rajiv Gandhi was ushered into power immediately after his mother's death meant that his face and voice were constantly projected over radio and television in the months preceding the elections. People had already gotten used to thinking of him as the prime minister, and could hardly distinguish between him as a candidate soliciting votes and him as an august representative of the government.

Another important factor in the Congress (I) victory was its careful silencing of sections of the people who were likely to vote against it. Who took the decision not to hold elections in Assam and Punjab? Were the people of these states consulted? The government pretended that they anticipated a law and order problem in Punjab. That this was a blatant lie is proved by the fact that Delhi, where thousands of Sikhs had been massacred a month before the election, was considered fit to go to the polls even though the Sikh community was too traumatised and scattered to be able to vote en masse. Yet Punjab, which had remained peaceful by the government's own admission, was considered unfit to have elections.

Wherever the Congress (I) was already in power, it made use of its money and its intimidation tactics to ensure that its voice was the only voice heard, singing its own praises. Also, this time, there seemed to be much more fear of voicing opposition to the Congress (I). The opposition seems to have stayed very low key and not to have highlighted important issues such as Congress (I) involvement in the anti Sikh riots, for fear of inviting brutal reprisals.

For example, when a group of us, all women, went electioneering in Delhi, highlighting the Congress (I) involvement in the riots, and asking people not to encourage such criminals by voting for them, we were repeatedly warned that our activity could be very

dangerous for us. When one of us, on one occasion, got into an argument with some Congress (I) supporters who were raising communal slogans in a market place, she was later approached by a couple of policemen who quietly advised her to be careful as Congressmen were dangerous thugs. These policemen had not said a word while the slogans were being raised and the argument was going on. Thus, the police too seem to have been intimidated by the gangster tactics of the Congress (I). Similarly, many shopkeepers and autorickshaw drivers we spoke to acknowledged that they were flying Congress (I) flags because they dared not refuse when Congress (I) volunteers asked them to put up these flags.

Another factor in the Congress (I) victory in some places was the large scale disappearance of names from voters' lists, particularly names of Sikhs and of known supporters of opposition parties. We came across many instances of hundreds of names having disappeared from lists, although the persons concerned had been residing and voting in these areas for 10 to 25 years.

Sacrificing People

However, even though we should take these factors into account, it still remains true that people did vote overwhelmingly for the Congress (I)—some with the feeling that there is no alternative since they are the only ones who can provide a united government, some with sympathy for the poor son who had lost his mother, some with hysteria whipped up by Congress (I) propaganda that the country was in imminent danger of being broken up by separatists and by that familiar bogey, the "foreign hand."

This time, the Congress (I), in its mass propaganda, did not bother to make many promises or to boast of its past performance. In fact, the effort was to get people to forget all the problems that the Congress (I) had made much worse, such as the Assam situation, the attempts at toppling non-Congress governments

such as those in Andhra Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, as well as most people's deprivation of basic necessities such as sufficient food, clean drinking water, decent housing, health facilities, adequate employment and wages. The Congress (I) virtually appealed to people to forget their own interests, overlook their own miserable condition, and vote for a larger cause—that of national unity.

No wonder that the electorate, especially women, fell victim to this appeal to them to sacrifice themselves and to vote for a "higher cause." Women are only too accustomed to being told that they should sacrifice their own individual interests in order to prevent the family from splitting up. They are encouraged to bear insult, oppression and personal pain so that the family may stay together. For centuries, women have been used as the chief preservers of family unity.

The same authoritarian patriarchal ideology is extended to argue that the country is a big family and the rulers are like parents who must keep everyone well behaved. In the course of doing so, they are entitled to punish the children. They may even burn a few thousands to death!

Family Melodrama

The Congress (I) made extremely clever use of this traditional ideology. The Nehru family was, as it were, identified with the aspirations of the family that is India. After all, did not an earlier slogan proclaim that Indira was India and that Sanjay was the Son of India?

Now, we were constantly reminded that the death of Indira Mata had bereaved not just Rajiv but all Indians. One after another, Congress (I) leaders expressed the feeling that they were orphaned. The implication of all this emotional family drama was that it was only right and proper for the son to take over from the mother.

People were repeatedly reminded that an attack on the Nehru family, that family of martyrs (who have also managed to adopt Mahatma Gandhi as one of their

ancestors) was an attack on the family that is India.

Not only was Rajiv's image projected as that of a dutiful son but also as that of a suitable father figure. He is not the grandfatherly type, he is the young male head of the household, modern enough to lead the country into the new technological age. His family was constantly projected over the media and it looked straight out of a Hindi film or a family planning documentary. It has all the right ingredients and the media has been presenting them with gusto—the beautiful, homeloving, docile wife who submerges herself in her husband's life and who was also a dutiful daughter-in-law, the two pretty children, one boy, one girl.

The family also presents the right mixture of superficial "modernity" with all the conservative values. Thus the wife is educated, English speaking, but more *pativrata* than many Hindu wives.

This reactionary note was repeatedly struck in the campaign drama staged by the Congress (I) even by actors other than the chief ones. For instance, Jaya Bachan, campaigning for her husband in Allahabad, posed as the daughter-in-law of the city and asked for *muhdikhayi*,

the traditional gift given to the bride who enters her husband's home. She asked for votes instead of money as a gift. She also appealed to the young men as her younger brothers-in-laws, asking them to "take out all the women from the home and see to it that they go and vote. Not one woman should remain indoors."

Votes Can Kill

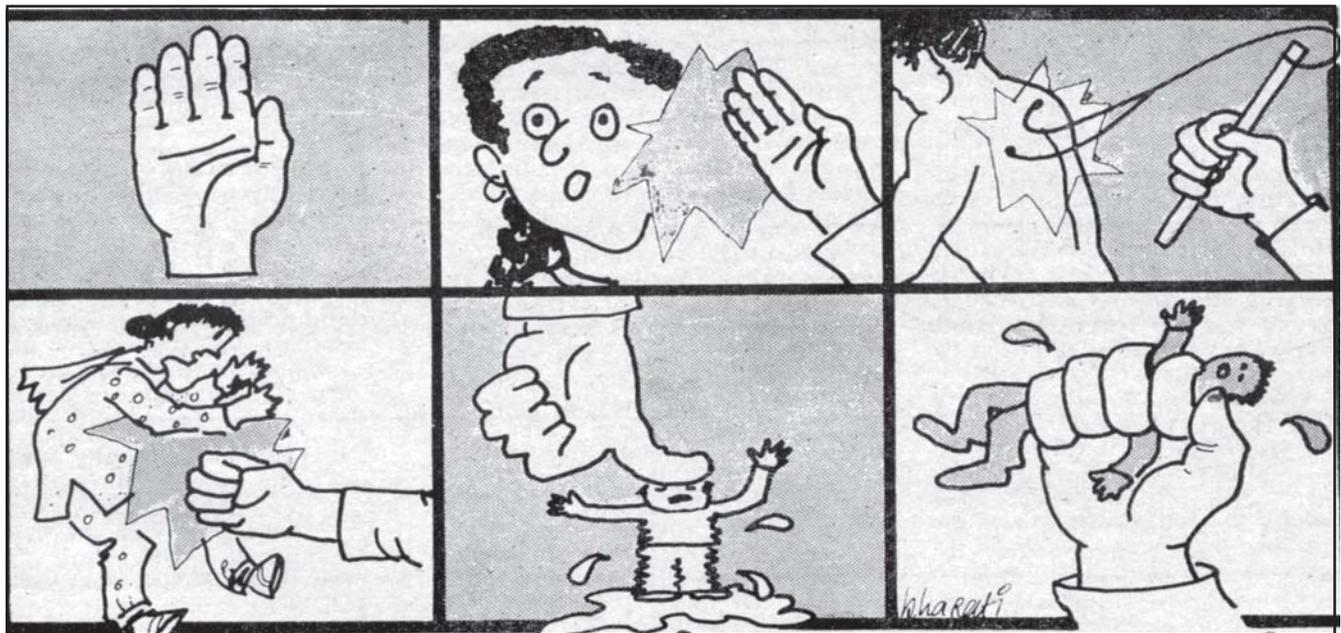
Apart from this pious sentimentality, the appeal had its bloody aspects too. The slogan "*Khun ka badla khun se lenge*" was not televised by an oversight. The "nation" demanded blood, and as is invariably the case with chauvinist nationalists who propagate the politics of hatred and mistrust, Congressmen preferred to shed the blood of others rather than their own. And those who were not privileged enough to shed the blood of others were asked to use their votes as weapons. "Do not just defeat the opposition—wipe them out" was the message Rajiv Gandhi carried to the electorate.

Many of the votes cast for the Congress (I) were votes for the politics of hatred and vindictiveness. Many traditional RSS supporters swung over to the Congress (I) simply because this time the Congress (I) came out openly

as a party which would keep the minorities "in their place" and teach them the lesson which the Hindu majority is so eager to teach everyone, namely, that minorities can stay in India only on the terms dictated by the majority.

The vote for the Congress (I) was also a vote cast in fear. The Congress (I) skilfully played upon the fears of the electorate. Two months earlier, people had seen how Sikhs had been massacred, and in places like Delhi it was an open secret that Congress (I) leaders had actively organised those massacres. The hidden fear that similar violence could explode over the head of anyone and everyone was fanned by the Congress (I) which made out that it was the only party that could provide security.

It seems that the logic by which many people operated was that of "*Nadi mein rehkar magarmach se vair kyon*"—if the ruffians are too strong for you it is wiser to shelter under their wing, for to stand opposed to them is to commit suicide. One scooter driver we spoke to said he had voted for Congress (I) and in the same breath said that everyone knows Congressmen are hoodlums and cheats. In fact, he said, they had cheated



The Exploits of the Hand

him when they hired his scooter for electioneering.

Congress (I) advertisements warned voters that if the ruling party was not returned to power, people's shopping lists would have to include acid bulbs and other deadly weapons which they would need to defend their families from attack by antinational elements. The vision of violence and civil war played on the fears evoked by the riots. Not just in India but the world over, women tend to be more opposed to war, blood-shed and violence than are men. Many voted for Congress (I) in the mistaken belief that it would bring harmony and unity to the country.

The government stranglehold over radio and television and its skilful propaganda machinery ensured that many voters, particularly in parts of India that had not been affected by the riots, did not realise that the ruling party had been the primary organiser of the riots. It also helped cover up the fact that the Congress (I) way of bringing about unity is to crush all dissent and use force and fraud against whoever stands opposed to its power.

Unity By Force ?

Normally, when people express a desire for unity, what they mean is that different groups of people in society should live together in peace and harmony. This humane desire forms the basis of a certain minimum social equilibrium. Most people ordinarily prefer to be left in peace than to be plunged into fighting and bloodshed.

However, when governments and ruling powers talk in exaggerated terms of threats to national unity, from inside or outside the nation, they usually do so, first, to distract people's attention from real survival problems, and second, to make people acquiesce in violent repression of minorities and eventually of the whole population.

It is no coincidence that apart from the supposed threat from the Sikhs, Rajiv Gandhi keeps harping on the supposed threat from Pakistan. Anyone who knows

the elementary facts of Indo-Pak relations knows that Pakistan is in no position to pose a military threat to India because India's military might is far ahead of that of its neighbours. Why then the constant bogey of Pakistan ?

The real purpose of the Congress (I) propaganda against Pakistan is to whip up communal sentiments against the Muslims in India. The anti Pakistan sentiment invariably becomes indistinguishable from anti Muslim sentiment. Hindus begin to see Muslims as antinational, as Pakistani spies, and to demand that a strong government keep the minorities under control. The result is that a Bhiwandi or a Delhi massacre can be seen as a necessary lesson being taught to unruly minorities. It is no coincidence that soon after the Congress (I) victory in Delhi was announced, we heard jubilant crowds shouting the slogan "*Hindu ekta zindabad.*"

Thus, at its worst, the vote for the Congress (I) was a vote to strengthen an authoritarian and repressive rule. At its best, it was a vote for a myth. This myth is that the country is composed of an undifferentiated mass of people, all of whom have identical interests. It is indeed a myth that in all cases, the interests of peasants are the same as those of government bureaucrats, the interests of industrialists the same as those of consumers, the interests of urban workers the same as those of landless labourers, and the interests of women identical with those of men.

Who Is In Power In Women's Lives?

It is in the belief that women would best represent the interests of women that the demand is often raised for more women in powerful positions, for instance, in parliament. But are the larger number of women legislators in parliament today representatives of the majority of women in India ? In one sense, yes. Not in the sense of having come into power on the strength of women as a constituency, not in the sense of being

spokespersons for women or of being able to fight for women's interests. Only in the sense that, like the majority of women, these women legislators too have their lives determined by the men of their family.

A wife is supposed to help her husband to further his life's ambitions and prospects. If he is a peasant, she must work unpaid on the farm which is owned by him, if he is an artisan, she must prepare the raw materials and do most of the work unacknowledged, if he is an executive, she must host parties to boost his career, if he is an intellectual, she must type his manuscripts, and if he is a politician she must work on the women's front of his party, campaign for him, or herself stand for election or do both, depending on which may seem most advantageous to him.

Politics is mainly a question of which group of people has power over other groups. A political relationship is a power relationship. Thus we talk of class politics, caste politics, communal politics, regional politics and so on. Each group struggles to get more power or influence so that its members are enabled to take more decisions in their own interest.

Relations in the family are supposed to be mainly mutually advantageous and altruistic but in reality they also involve power relations. Just as the prime minister may be called the mother or the son of the nation but is actually the one who takes decisions which blight many people's lives, so also the male head of a family has the power to decide the lives of women and children, for better or worse.

For the vast majority of women, the most important power relations are those within the family. Whichever party may be in power, the limits of the average woman's freedom or servility are decided by her family. This is true whether she is urban or rural, educated or uneducated. Whether or not she will work for a wage, what kind of work she will do, whether she may go out of the house or not, how

far she may travel on her own, whose house she may visit, whom she may meet and talk to, how far she may be educated, who she will marry, how many children she will have, all these and many other decisions, major and minor, are controlled by her parents and afterwards by her husband and in-laws. A woman may not fully realise this. She may think that she is by and large free to do what she wants. But every family draws the line of women's freedom somewhere. Only when a woman oversteps this line does she realise its existence. As long as she remains within it she may not be aware that it exists.

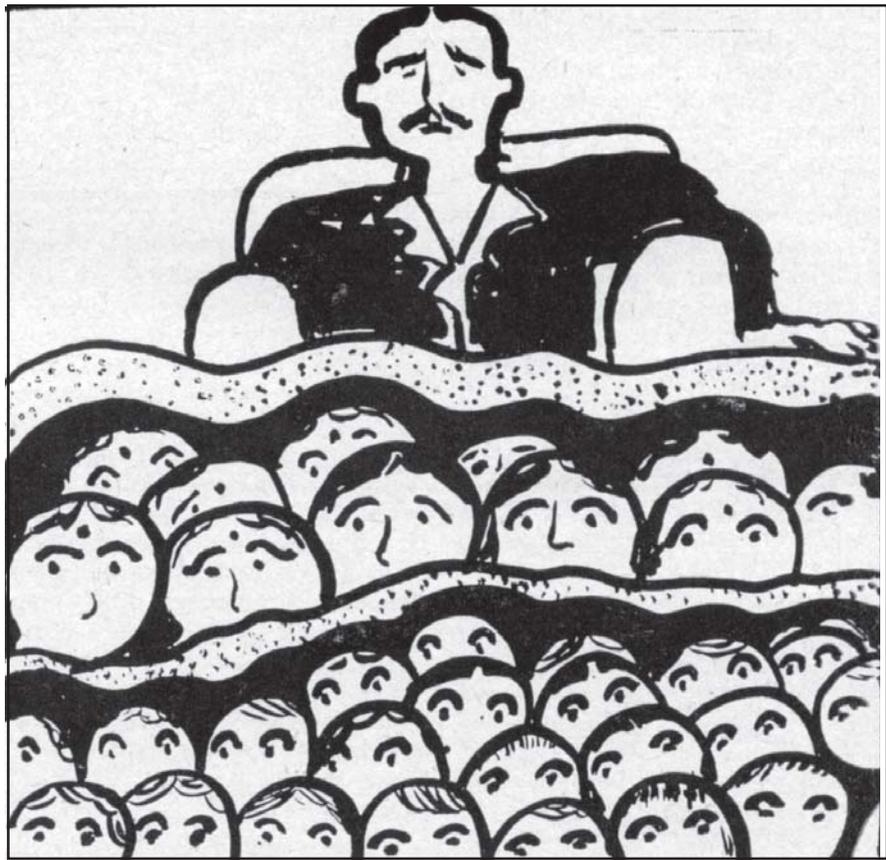
Within the family, it may appear as if older women, mothers and mothers-in-law, have a voice, even the deciding voice, in laying down the law. But when we examine family regulations closely we find that they curb the freedom of all women, not just of daughters and daughters-in-law. For example, if a mother-in-law forbids her daughter-in-law to go out, this is not just the oppression of one woman by another. As a rule enforced on most women, including most older women, it operates to make the outside world the exclusive domain of men and to restrict all women to the domestic sphere. Thus, the mother-in-law may think that she has won a victory over the daughter-in-law by restricting the movements of the latter. In reality, the mother-in-law has only upheld a rule made by men which contributes to the power of men as a group. This is true of most rules enforced by women on other women.

Where It All Begins

The family structure wherein elders dominate youngsters and men dominate women is the most crucial structure of power for women because it sets the norms for their role in society. Just as a daughter defers to her father, a wife to her husband, so also women defer to men in the workplace, in public places, in *panchayats* and in parliament. And this family structure does not change when the ruling party changes or when more women enter parliament.

This is one reason why most women, when they vote, do not think it necessary that a candidate promise to work to help women. Women have come to see their problems as unchangeable facts of life. For instance, one highly educated young woman who had voted Congress (I) was asked whether she thought the problem of sexual harassment which she faced every day on the buses would be solved by Rajiv Gandhi. She said: "No government can solve that problem." In other words, she took for granted that

Perhaps, therefore, work for political change for women has to begin at the family and the community level. Every woman does struggle in her own way for more rights and decision making powers in her own family. But because she struggles alone she expends far too much energy and gains far too little. She has to wage conflicts over what should be minor issues, such as how often she can meet her natal family or what proportion of her income she can control. Even if she does, over years, win for



Unity in servility

the power of men in the society to harass women every day of their lives cannot be affected by any change of power at the political level. Thus while women put all their energy into struggling for survival, grappling with violence perpetrated by men, in and outside the family, they see these struggles as irrelevant to the question of who they vote for and why.

herself more respect and more rights in her family, as many women do, this is a purely individual victory which does not bring more rights to women as a group or even necessarily to other women in her family.

In one sense, it is much easier for a few women, with the backing of their families, to get into parliament than it is for women to have a say in their own

communities or families. The empowerment of women needs to be based at the local and familial level. For a rural woman, real participation in the kinship *panchayat* or in the *biradari* would be far more effective in ensuring her rights than having a token woman representative with no programme or influence on women's issues or even several such women in the parliament or in the state assembly.

If women are to be empowered within the family and the community, their individual struggles need to be given a collective shape. Only in the process of such struggle can genuine social change come about.

So far, we have only been taught to expect that those who have power should use it benevolently. We cannot look further than the hope for a good husband, a good boss, a good prime minister. That hope has not proved meaningful on any substantial scale, either at the familial or at the national level. This is because the situation of one or more persons having unchecked power over others is bound to lend itself to abuse. Therefore, we need to go beyond the search for candidates who make tall claims about what they will do for us. We need to take action ourselves to improve our lives through our own self organisation.

However, the changes in family structure are intimately related to the availability of social options for people, particularly for women. This is where the government claims to take responsibility but does very little. It promises employment, education, housing and protection for women but delivers very little.

We Should Monitor Government Performance

At every election, the political parties make big promises. For instance, the Congress (I) promised long ago that they would eradicate poverty. They are still promising the same thing. Particularly on women's issues, their promises lack

meaning since they repeat the same phrases with no performance to show for them. They do not feel called upon to explain why it is that these promises are not yet fulfilled. They are rarely confronted with their betrayal of their commitments.

This is partly because we are not in possession of the facts and are therefore not able to refute their lying claims.

Let us take the example of women's education. The Congress (I) promised in its 1984 manifesto to "initiate a big programme to improve the educational status of women." In his speech the

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president reiterated this promise. It was his only mention of women's issues in the speech. The Congress (I) made a similar promise at the last election but today we are not in a position to judge how they implemented it because we are dependent on the government for facts and figures, which are usually distorted and misleading.

A government which seriously intended to provide education for women would have to tackle the problems which prevent girls from going to school and women from attending literacy classes. It would need to :

1. Allocate a larger budget to literacy classes for women and primary education for girls. At present, primary education is neglected and given a disproportionately small share of funds which is one reason for its inadequacy.

2. Take steps to ensure full attendance, and to check the heavy dropout rate of girls from school. Since most poor families consider girls' education unimportant, and prefer to channel girls into housework and childcare, special incentives will need to be provided to families to let girls study. This could be in the form of a stipend paid to the girl for as long as she stays in school. This is one potentially helpful way

to encourage low income families to send girls to school.

3. Schools should be within easy reach of the girls' homes, or free transport should be provided to them. Girls should get free meals, clothing, books and stationery. This kind of support should be available throughout their school career.

4. Women attending literacy classes should also be given stipends to make it seem worth-while to their families. They should be given free meals, and childcare arrangements should be made available at the literacy centres.

5. What we need is special teacher training and retraining programmes, recruitment of literacy volunteers, mobilisation of the literate to help educate the illiterate through political campaigns which will spearhead all this activity.

Has the Congress (I) taken any of these steps or does it plan to make them part of its programme of women's education ? More important, are we in a position to check whether it will actually implement any such measures ?

Today, if the government claims that a certain percentage of the population is literate, we are not in a position to check those claims against the reality. We do not even know whether, when people are defined as literate, it means they can only sign their names or that they can actually read and understand at least a newspaper or add up a grocery bill or calculate their wages. What standard is used to define them as literate ? Unless literacy means the ability to do simple arithmetic and absorb simple written information, it is of no use to a person.

Therefore, what we need to do is measure the government's performance against the literacy campaigns and successes of countries that are no richer than us. We are in a position to confront

them with a picture of their performance and to demand change. For example, over the next few years, we should consistently check the situation in our localities, and find out what proportion of girls actually attend school, what proportion of illiterate women go to literacy classes, what the dropout rates for girls are in different areas among different groups in primary schools.

If we undertake this kind of information collection and monitor the progress or non-progress of various government programmes relating to poverty alleviation, education, employment, supply of drinking water, health facilities and so on, we shall be able to counter claims and myths with facts, and suggest what changes are necessary to make the programmes actually work. We will also be able to explain in concrete terms why this ruling group is not likely to make very much progress in fulfilling its promises.

Collection and dissemination of such information will be one essential step towards ensuring the building of an informed electorate which need not be carried away by "waves" of sympathy or antipathy but which participates in political processes, keeping its own interests in mind.

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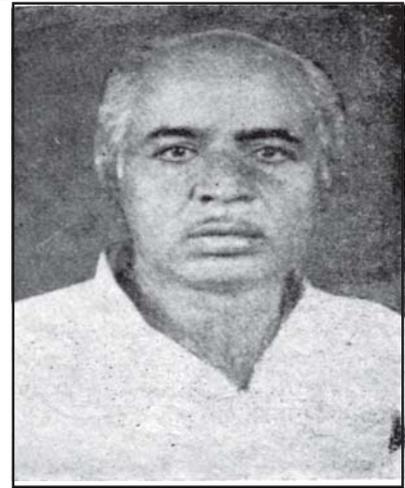
A Ray of Hope- in the Midst of Hatred

IN the midst of looting, murder and hatred that prevailed in Delhi and other cities during the three days following Indira Gandhi's assassination, Prabhu Dayal, of Baljit Nagar, died in the process of helping three women escape death by burning.

Prabhu Dayal's wife says that on November 1, he had gone to his employer's house in Wazirpur. The family lived on the first floor and the ground floor was used as a factory. When he reached there, only three women were at home—a middle aged woman, her daughter-in-law and granddaughter. Just then, a mob approached, and Prabhu Dayal tried to reason with them to prevent them from burning down the house. But they set fire to the house and went ahead. Prabhu Dayal helped the three women to climb down. While he was coming down, the support gave way and he fell in the midst of machine tools on to the ground floor. He was taken to hospital only after the police were informed. He died in hospital on November 8.

It would have been perfectly in keeping with the general mood of those days if Prabhu Dayal had run away, leaving the Sikh women to face the crowd on their own. In fact, three armed guards stationed to guard the house by the Sikh owner of the house did in fact run away. But Prabhu Dayal decided, in that instant, to stay and face the crowd.

Prabhu Dayal has left behind his wife, Atam Devi, two daughters and a son. Atam Devi works in an export factory as a thread cutter and earns Rs 317. The older girl is in first year BA and the two younger children in school. They live in a rented house. With difficulty, Prabhu Dayal had managed to start construction of a house in Uttam Nagar, on which he had



Prabhu Dayal

spent Rs 20,000. Now it stands incomplete. Atam Devi has received the compensation money of Rs 10,000 from government.

Even while praising her husband for his noble action done in the cause of humanity, she feels that he should have thought of his family before he faced the crowd. This ambivalence is understandable since her relatives have done little except blame Prabhu Dayal for her plight.

By acting as he did, even at the expense of his family's welfare, Prabhu Dayal kept alive that important element, hope, which many people lost after witnessing the November carnage.

—Prabha Rani

An Appeal

Manushi is collecting funds to contribute towards the support and education of Prabhu Dayal's children. We appeal to readers to donate generously. All contributions will be put in fixed deposit in the name of his wife and daughter. Please send money in the name of Manushi Trust with a covering letter stating that this is for the Prabhu Dayal fund.

It would also be of great help if anyone can help Atam Devi get a better paid job. She has knowledge of tailoring and is also prepared to work as a school attendant.