Jawaharlal Nehru and the Emergence of Modern India

THE RESURGENCE OF INDIAN WOMEN

The Resurgence of Indian Women

ARUNA ASAF ALI

In association with
G.N.S.Raghavan

under the auspices of
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"Men and women, like plants and flowers, can only grow in the sunlight and fresh air of freedom; they wilt and stunt themselves in the dark shadow and suffocating atmosphere of alien domination.

"For all of us, therefore, the first problem that presents itself is how to free India and remove the many burdens of the Indian masses. But the women of India have an additional task and that is to free themselves from the tyranny of man-made custom and law."

From Jawaharlal Nehru's message to the Prayag Mahila Vidyapitha, Allahabad, 12 January 1934.

Foreword (1947)

I find it a little difficult to write a Foreword to this little book. The difficulty is not the book but the author of the book. How am I to deal with her and her writings? They do not require any commendation from me, and I would dislike to criticise over much.

It is easy to criticise any set of views in this complicated world that we live in. And Aruna Asaf Ali often says and writes something that is liable to criticism. But that criticism, however justified, would be poor stuff, for it would deal with some superficial aspect of a living, vibrant and challenging personality, who has shaken up many a sleeping person and become in many ways a symbol of these changing times.

Symbols are often disturbing and challenges are disconcerting. And so Aruna is both a disturbing and disconcerting individual to many. She does not fit in easily into the usual pattern, and perhaps she deliberately avoids doing so. She feels that she has a mission and is anxious to live up to it. The real crusaders are always few in number and there is something of the crusader, to a cause to which she is passionately attached, about her.

A crusader produces varying reactions on different people. The very force of personality and will attracts, and charms, and compels attention. And yet many people, afraid of this very compulsion of a personality or feeling uncomfortable because they are continually reminded of the crusade which might have the effect of upsetting their lives, do not like this impact. They prefer the normal routine of their lives.

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*This Foreword was contributed by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1947 to *Travel Talk*, a collection of Aruna Asaf Ali's articles in the *Janata* weekly of Delhi, brought out by the Aundh Publishing Trust. A testament of Jawaharlal Nehru's faith in and high hopes for the women of India, it is reproduced here as an equally appropriate Foreword to this book on the resurgence of Indian women.

Most of us go through that routine untouched and uninfluenced by external events or by the attraction of a great purpose. Some feel that attraction intellectually and try to work to that end, though without upsetting the even tenor of their lives. Yet others, few in number, feel in addition to the intellectual attraction a powerful emotional urge which drives them incessantly to action. That emotional urge comes usually not by the reading of books but by the impact of events.

During the last quarter of a century or more events have often moved fast in India bringing in their train shock and surprise, frustration and exhilaration. Many amongst us have been so affected by this shock of events that our lives and even our inner being have undergone a transformation.

That was the effect in 1919 and 1920 on a very large number of persons as a result of Gandhiji's leadership in the national movement. Ten years later another wave passed over the land sweeping thousands of men and women and influencing millions. Yet again, in the early forties India was convulsed and out of this convulsion new symbols arose, stern and unbending and with something of iron in their souls. Aruna Asaf Ali was no new-comer on the political scene. But 1942 transformed her and made her different from what she had been. She stood out as an extraordinarily courageous fighter for India's freedom and because she was a woman and daughter of India, she struck even more the imagination of the Indian people.

Among the many strange things that have happened in India during this quarter of a century, perhaps the most notable is the emergence of Indian womanhood. Large numbers of Indian women have played an important role in our struggle for freedom. Many of them have stood out by their ability, capacity for organisation and self-sacrifice for a cause. Some of them can be ranked very high in any assembly of women all over the world. This fact, more than any other, demonstrates the renaissance of the Indian people and the strong foundations on which we have built our movement for freedom.

This little book mirrors this remarkable personality, not only in ideas but in the vigour of its style. It is good writing but it is something much more than that, for it compels attention and forces people to think. Any book that does all this is a worthwhile book and the reader is the better for having read it, though he may feel a little

uncomfortable in the process. It matters little whether one agrees with its main thesis or not. But it does matter whether our minds are static and closed or dynamic and receptive.

For these reasons I commend this book and hope that there will be many to read it. In the reading of it they will have some glimpse of that passionate urge which moves India and which will ultimately take India far. What that new India is going to be, none of us can say. But whatever form or shape it may assume, it will consist of vital persons moving forward with dynamic urges. And it is well for a Nation when this is so.

Preface

It was a few years ago that I agreed to write on the theme of the resurgence of Indian women as part of the publications programme on the occasion of the Jawaharlal Nehru Birth Centenary. However, it seemed to me as I delved into the subject along with my collaborator in this project, G.N.S Raghavan, that it would be appropriate to place before the present generation a picture of Jawaharlal Nehru the man as a prelude to the discussion of his contribution to the empowerment of Indian women. This was attempted in the little book *Private Face of a Public Person* which was published under the auspices of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in 1989.

In the present volume we have tried to consider the subject in the wider framework of the position of women in various parts of the world through the ages. We were struck in the course of this survey by the cyclical recurrence in the course of Indian history of comprehensive movements of social reform which affirmed human equality irrespective of race, caste, creed or other circumstances of birth, and repudiated the tendency to regard woman as inferior and subordinate to man. This humanist strand in our heritage should be of interest to young people of both the sexes who are active in the movements for women's emancipation and for social justice. Many of today's college-educated youth tend to see little good in India's past, and tend to derive their ideas from "women's lib" and other movements in the West. Recognition of indigenous sources of inspiration for women's emancipation and for an egalitarian economic order is important because our unlettered sisters and brothers are more likely to respond if the call for social restructuring is voiced in the language and idiom of our own tradition. The historical survey in the first part of the book is interlaced with the analysis and comments of Jawaharlal Nehru and the perceptions of Mahatma Gandhi.

The second part of the book discusses the role of Indian women in the successive rounds of the struggle against British colonial rule

Beginning with participation on a comparatively small scale in the agitation against the partition of Bengal in the first decade of this century and the non-cooperation movement of the twenties, women of all classes took part in large numbers in the civil disobedience movements from the thirties onwards culminating in the Quit India struggle. In fighting for the country's freedom under the leadership of Gandhiji and Nehru, Indian women won their own emancipation. They secured adult suffrage along with men under the Constitution of free India.

The third and final part of the book surveys the social and economic changes in the post-independence period. Prominent among these was the reform of Hindu personal law in the mid-fifties, at the initiative of Jawaharlal Nehru, to enforce monogamy on the male, permit divorce on specified grounds and to give the daughter and widow a share in succession to property. A further major step, during the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi, was the enactment by Parliament in 1976 of an amendment to the Hindu Marriage Act to permit divorce by mutual consent. The time was ripe for the extension of these reforms to the rest of Indian citizens through a uniform civil code as envisaged in the Directive Principles of the Constitution. This was unfortunately not attempted.

In the early years of freedom, non-interference with the personal laws of the minority religious communities was understandable. It was designed to assure them, specially the Muslims, that though the sub-continent had been partitioned at the Muslim League's insistence, India was not a Hindu State and that the identity of the minorities would be respected. But, over the years, political parties have come to treat the minorities as vote banks to be wooed through their traditional leaders even if they are conservative and male chauvinist, rather than through work at the grassroots to meet the common problems of the economically deprived masses of both the majority and minority communities. This tendency reached a climax when the Indian Parliament passed the Muslim Women Act in 1986. The law nullified the effect of a unanimous judgement by a five-member bench of the Supreme Court which had held in the Shah Bano case that, like other Indians, Muslim males were liable under the Criminal Procedure Code to pay maintenance to a divorced and needy wife.

The women's movement and progressive sections of public opinion will doubtless continue to press for the enactment of a

uniform civil code to govern all citizens. But there are problems of human relationship which it is beyond the power of laws to solve. No law can bring about that mutual respect, tolerance and forbearance which are vital for the success of the man-woman relationship in marriage. Individuals must cope with the problems of human relationship on the strength of their own perceptions and ethical values. Even Jawaharlal Nehru encountered some difficulties in his relationship with Kamala and his self-reproach on this count is discussed in *Private Face of a Public Person*. So did Gandhiji vis-a-vis Kasturba. The problems of adjustment between the two are discussed in the course of the present work.

The times have changed. Young people today embark on adult life in a social environment that is much freer, at any rate among the educated middle class and the well-to-do. In the scope for autonomous choice of wife or husband, in the acceptance at least in principle of equality between man and wife, and in the opportunity for the young couple to lead their own lives rather than being subservient in a joint family run by elders, men and women now enjoy greater freedom than in the past. But non-dependence is not without its problems. Indeed, the challenge to the young today is greater because the responsible exercise of an individual's autonomy is more demanding than compliance with restrictions. Freedom has its burdens no less than subjection.

Also discussed in the third part of the book are disparities in educational and economic opportunities as between men and women, as well as disparities among women themselves. Though the country has made considerable progress since independence towards self-reliant economic growth, the gains of development have been appropriated largely by men and women of the burgeoning middle and upper classes. They have gained access to an ever-increasing range of luxury goods and services, while only crumbs have fallen to the majority of the population living at subsistence level. Parallel to this elitist pattern of economic growth, the women's movement, like the trade union movement, has tended to reflect mainly the concerns of the urban middle class. Illustrative of this tendency is the talk of reservations for women in legislatures and in public employment. Prior to independence the women's movement was opposed to reservation in principle, on the ground that women could and should compete with men as equals. Reservation will make no difference to the central problems of poverty and illiteracy faced by the majority

of Indian women, as by the majority of men.

We have attempted to explore the reasons why Jawaharlal's grand vision, of combining the advantages of democracy with social justice and equality of opportunity has not been realised. Possible ways of recovering the lost direction of the development process are discussed, including the need for the women's movement to become broadbased among our sisters living in squalour in the country's villages and urban slums.

The book is really a joint effort though at several places it is in the form of a reminiscential narrative by me. I am thankful for the cooperation received in the course of this project from Professor Ravinder Kumar and Dr Hari Dev Sharma of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. The Jawaharlal Nehru Papers and other collections preserved at the Library yielded valuable information and insights. So did the transcripts of the interviews conducted by the Library as part of its Oral History project. Kiran Devendra, the theme of whose Ph.D. thesis was the status and role of Indian women, worked as a Research Associate on deputation from her post of Lecturer in the Department of History, Punjabi University, Patiala. She proved herself useful by studying and culling relevant extracts from part of the source material.

Now that the writing is done, howsoever imperfectly, I feel grateful to the friends who insisted on my taking up this assignment. It has enabled me to relive in memory the golden moments of the freedom struggle. I trust that the glimpses of the Gandhi-Nehru era which the book provides will induce young people to read more about these two principal architects of India's independence and social renewal. The inspiration has faded over the years; even so, persons of my generation recall those heroic years with nostalgia.

Ebb and tide in the values that move a nation are perhaps inevitable, as my husband used to remark as we walked along the beaches of Puri in Orissa. They are like the troughs and peaks in the lives of individuals. In any case, it will strengthen us in meeting the challenges of these troubled times if we can recapture something of the spirit of the Gandhi-Nehru years. I shall feel rewarded if the book contributes to that end.

New Delhi
30 April 1990

ARUNA ASAF ALI

Part One

Heritage of History: Glory and Burden

"The word patriarch comes from the Latin 'Pater' or father. He was the leader and father of his tribe or people. 'Patria' which means fatherland, or one's own country, comes from the same Latin word. You know that in French it is 'Patrie'. In Sanskrit and Hindi, we think of our country as the mother or... the motherland. Which do you prefer?"

Jawaharlal Nehru in a letter to his daughter Indira.

**Letters from a Father to his Daughter*, Children's Book Trust, New Delhi, 1985 (p. 50). First published in 1929.

1 Women's Status in Various Traditions

In Bernard Shaw's *Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God*,[1] a slender volume full of insights, the girl does not take the white woman missionary's Christianity with docility but raises unexpected questions. Why not address our prayers, she asks, to "our Mother which art in Heaven," rather than Father?

The spirited black girl was repelled also by the subordination of woman to man in the cultural tradition of another Semitic religion, Islam. She encounters an Arab who tells her: "Until he (a man) has known many women he cannot know the value of any; for value is a matter of comparison. I did not know what an old angel I had in my first wife until -- I found what a young devil I had in my last." "And your wives?" said the black girl. "Are they also to know many men in order that they may learn your value?" Cornered, the Arab exclaims piously: "...injustice to women is one of the mysteries of Allah, against whom it is vain to rebel."

Vedic India and Ancient Greece

Bernard Shaw's black girl would have found more agreeable the pantheistic worlds of Vedic[2] India and ancient Greece. The cosmic religion of both saw godhood in natural phenomena and, in contrast to the monotheistic religions, celebrated goddesses as well as gods. The association of shame and sin with sex, underlying the Christian doctrine of Virgin Mary's immaculate conception, is unknown to the ancient Hindu ethos.[3]

The gods and goddesses of ancient Greece and ancient India were symbols of the elemental forces of nature and of life and death. Such are Indra the Indian god of the firmament and Apollo the Greek sun-god; Usha the dawn goddess of India and Aphrodite the

Greek goddess of love; Yama the Indian god of death and Pluto the Greek god of the underworld. Jawaharlal Nehru was attracted by pagan pantheism. He says in *The Discovery of India* (p. 28): "The diversity and fullness of nature stir me and produce a harmony of the spirit, and I can imagine myself feeling at home in the old Indian or Greek pagan and pantheistic atmosphere...."

Several -- not all -- thinkers of the pantheistic age, both in Greece and India, recognised the unity of life. They gave women a position of equality and dignity, unlike the theologians and law-givers of the institutionalised religions of later times -- whether Brahmanical Hinduism, Christianity or Islam -- who lacked the wisdom to acknowledge the common humanity of man and woman.

In all civilisations and religious traditions there have been two streams of thought, one humanistic and egalitarian and the other illiberal, justifying the subordination of some to others, including the subordination of woman to man. The history of Europe and India furnish striking examples of both these tendencies. As early as in the 5th century B.C., the Greek dramatist Sophocles makes a woman, Antigone, stand up to King Creon and affirm the law of love as a morality higher than man-made laws. The king, in order to set an example against treason, had ordered the denial of burial to the rebel Polynices, brother of Antigone. Ismene lacks her sister's bold spirit, and expresses the self-image as the weaker sex inculcated in women by men:

> O think, Antigone; we are women; it is not for us
> To fight against men; our rulers are stronger than we,
> And we must obey in this, or in worse than this.[4]

But Antigone fearlessly gives burial to her slain brother, and when brought before the king, hurls defiance at him:

> I did not think your edicts strong enough
> To overrule the unwritten unalterable laws
> of God and heaven, you being only a man.

When Creon asks how the right of burial could be given both to Eteocles, who had died in the defence of Thebes, and to his rebel brother Polynices, who had attacked the city along with outsiders, Antigone replies that her way is to share her love. Creon

says:

> Go then, and share your love among the dead.
> We'll have no woman's law here, while I live.

Another Greek dramatist of the same age, the comedian Aristophanes of the 5th century B.C., had the courage -- and Athens of that time had the tolerance to permit him -- to call for an end to the prolonged internecine strife among Greek city states known as the Peloponnesian War. He was concerned in particular about what war meant to women. In *The Achamians*, written before he was twenty, Aristophanes lampoons the war party. In it occurs a significant line: "She is a woman, and not to blame for the war." The theme is developed in *Lysistrata* ('She who disbands armies'), a hilarious and ribald play in which the heroine summons representatives of women from all over Greece to combine in stopping the Peloponnesian War. In an early anticipation of the technique of non-cooperation and satyagraha, she proposes to force the men of all the Greek states to make peace, by refusing them sexual intercourse till they stop fighting.

"Anything but that," says one of the delegates. Another expresses the doubt: "How can women perform any wise or glorious exploit? We sit about with our golden curls, dressed in becoming shades, made up to charm, wearing dainty shoes and frocks from abroad that show off the figure." But finally they recite the oath and the delegates from other Greek states depart from Athens to spread the sex strike all over Greece. Athenian women seize the State treasury. They had been snubbed hitherto but now they mean to take public affairs in hand. When Lysistrata is asked by a man what concern she, a woman, had in the war, she replies: "What, you villain? We endure twice our share of it, nay more. First, women bear sons who get sent out as soldiers. In the prime of life, women sleep alone because of all the expeditions. And young girls grow old indoors, watching for omens; a man can marry a girl even if his hairs have turned gray, but a woman's day is brief, and if she lets it slip no one seeks to marry her." The play ends with Lysistrata bringing the Spartan and Athenian envoys together to agree on peace.

Socrates and Plato, outstanding among the philosophers of ancient Greece, affirmed the equal status of women with men. They held that those of both sexes having the requisite aptitude should be

Guardians in the ideal republic. Both men and women of promise were to receive the same education and training for Guardianship, including military training. These are part of the demands of the women's movement of our time.

Plato went so far as to advocate abolition of the system of the family and of private property with their distracting loyalties, affections and interests which divert men and women from service of the community. There was to be eugenic breeding -- an anticipation of today's sperm banks. The state would take responsibility for the upbringing of children, who would never know who their parents were. In a later work, *The Laws*, Plato concedes monogamic marriage with a two-child norm for controlling population growth but he adheres to the principle of women's participation in public affairs. He also concedes the holding of private property, but with the disparity in land ownership limited to a maximum of four-to-one.

Writing of 'The Glory that was Hellas', and of how Socrates preferred to die rather than give up his philosophical discussions which the rulers regarded as subversive, Jawaharlal Nehru says: "It is strange and fascinating how in the lives of nations such periods of brilliant life come and go. For a while they brighten up everything and enable the men and women of that period and country to create things of beauty. People seem to become inspired. Our country, too, has had such periods. The earliest of these that we know of was the period which gave birth to the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*[5] and other books."[6]

The central teaching of the *Upanishads* is Advaita or non-duality. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan points out,[7] the *Upanishads* proclaim the identity of the macrocosm (*Brahman*) with the microcosm of the human self or *Atman*: *Tat tvam asi* ('That art thou'). This early intimation of the unity of all that exists is confirmed by science in our space age. In the words of Professor Yash Pal:

> [It has become clear from science that] myself, all my cells, all my constituents and those in this match-box or in this table, or in a piece of stone -- that all this material at some time past was cooked together in the same star. Does not this have any implications for questions like our essential relatedness, about ecology? And does it at all conflict with the very beautiful, holistic inspiration of all the great religious teachers?[8]

There could be no derogation of women by the early Indian seers who affirmed the unity of all being. Prominent in the Vedic pantheon is the goddess Usha, personification of Dawn. She is celebrated in a hymn of the *Rig Veda* of which the following lines are from A.A. Macdonell's translation:

The light has come, of all the lights the fairest,
The brilliant brightness has been born effulgent,
Urged onward for god Savitar's (sun's) uprising.
Night now has yielded up her place to morning.
Daughter of heaven, she has appeared before us,
A maiden shining in resplendent raiment.
Thou sovereign lady of all earthly treasure,
Auspicious Dawn, shine here today upon us.

This Rig Vedic goddess presages the feminine deities of later Hinduism. The inclusion of femininity in the concept of divinity is in striking contrast to the denigration of women in the traditions of the three Semitic religions.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam

In Judaism from which Christianity sprang, it was Eve who brought death into the world by eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and persuading Adam to do likewise. God pronounces the following punishment on Eve: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."[9] A curse is thus laid on women in the very first Book of the Old Testament.

In the New Testament we find St. Paul saying in I. Corinthians, 11. 3-7: "I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to

cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man."

How far removed this Pauline Christianity is from the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, who looked with equal compassion on men and women! When asked by the Pharisees whether it was lawful for a man to put away his wife, and being reminded by them that Moses had permitted the writing of a bill of divorcement, Jesus said: "For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept." (Mark, 10.5) On another occasion, when the Pharisees produced before Jesus a woman taken in the act of adultery, and reminded him of the law of Moses that such should be stoned, Jesus said: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." And all the men, "being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one beginning at the eldest, even unto the last." (John, 8. 7-9)

Under the Islamic law or Shariat as interpreted by orthodox Muslims, the evidence of two women is equal to that of one man. The male may take more than one wife, up to four, but a woman can be married to only one man at a time. The husband may divorce his wife by pronouncing *talaq*, but the wife cannot in like manner administer divorce but must seek it by appeal to a court. After the man has divorced a wife, he is not responsible for her maintenance beyond a short period of a few months, even if she should be economically incapable of supporting herself.

In Mythology and the Epics

In the two national epics of India, as in religious mythology, women occupy places of honour. Translated from Sanskrit into all the regional languages of India and retold in innumerable versions in poetry, song and discourse, the epics have become an integral part of the Indian psyche. Jawaharlal Nehru has remarked: "The Ramayana and the Mahabharata were woven into the texture of millions of lives in every generation for thousands of years. I have often wondered that if our race forgot the Buddha, the Upanishads and the great epics, what then will it be like? It would be uprooted and would lose the basic characteristics which have clung to it and given it distinction throughout these long ages. India would cease to be India."[10]

However, the epics carry much interpolated material derogatory of women and of the so-called lower castes. After the decline of the

Vedic religion and rise of Brahminical Hinduism, women came to be regarded as inferior, as in the traditions of the Semitic religions. This anti-humanist tendency found its most obnoxious expression in the *Puranas* compiled from about 200 B.C. to 1000 A.D.

Composed after the end of the Vedic period, and expanded over several centuries including the Puranic period, the epics carry something of the flavour of Vedic religion, and also reflect the mores of the earlier Dravidian society and of aboriginal groups. In addition, they contain massive Brahminical interpolations -- adding to the inordinate length, in particular of the *Mahabharata* -- which seek to justify the inequitous caste hierarchy and the subordination of women. S. Sitaramayya in the preface to his narration of *The Mahabharata Story* (1943) says:

> If we open the book at random, the chances are, I fear, four to one that the contents of that page will have no direct connection with the main story, or that they will not interest the general reader; there is a slight chance that they may be even repellent. The fact is that the great, fine poem that Vyasa composed has unfortunately paid a heavy penalty for its popularity. Any author who, in later times, composed some essay or story or some other kind of literary matter, managed, if possible, to smuggle it into a Mahabharata manuscript and pass it on as Vyasa's composition. Plagiarism we can understand, but this was a process which was the opposite of plagiarism. The Mahabharata interpolators did not want fame for themselves, all they wanted was that their compositions should pass on to posterity, safe under the sheltering wings of the Mahabharata.

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* had as their historical substratum the southward expansion of the Aryans and the struggle between Aryan tribes for land and power. The Aryans started entering the subcontinent from about 1800 B.C. in successive waves from central and western Asia. They encountered and overcame an urban civilisation (named by modern archaeologists as the Indus Valley or Harappan civilisation) which had been developed by the brown-skinned Dravidians who had entered the subcontinent earlier. The dark-skinned Australoid and Negrito aboriginals of the subcontinent were no match either for the Dravidians or the Aryans. The Aryans called their new home the country of the river Sindhu (the Sanskrit

name of the Indus, from which are derived the terms Hindu and Hindustan). From the racial mixing and cultural interaction of the patriarchal Aryans and the matrilocal Dravidians (who worshipped goddesses associated with fertility and the control of disease) emerged the Hindu religion as we know it, with its crowded pantheon of gods and goddesses.

The epics reflect the social and economic ramifications of the time when they were composed. The Aryan social order was based on four classes: priests and scholars (Brahmins); rulers and warriors (Kshatriyas); landowners and traders (Vaisyas); and agricultural labourers and artisans (Sudras). Though the Sudras consisted predominantly of persons of Dravidian stock, they also included -- as Dr. Ambedkar has shown[11] -- members of defeated Aryan tribes who were reduced to the status of serfs. The three upper castes included a large proportion of persons of mixed Aryan-Dravidian extraction. The aboriginals known as Adivasis (original dwellers) lived as food gatherers and hunters. They were not assimilated into the four-fold caste order and were referred to as Mlechhas. Treated as barbarians outside the pale of society, they were designated as untouchables and their very sight and shadow were supposed to be polluting. These prejudices were probably based on the dirty and foul-smelling occupations assigned to the Mlechhas, such as scavenging, removal of carcasses and the skinning of animals. A thin line separated the Mlechhas from some of the Sudra sub-castes. All the great social reformers in India down the centuries -- from Buddha to Gandhi -- have affirmed human equality as against the inequity of caste hierarchy and the subordination of women to men.

The leading characters in the epics include women of heroic mould such as Draupadi, Kunti and Gandhari of the *Mahabharata*. The core of this epic is believed to have been compiled around 150 B.C. by Vyasa,[12] though didactic treatises and Brahminical interpolations continued to be added right up to 400 A.D. Draupadi, of great beauty, is the wife of the five Pandava brothers (sons of king Pandu). The eldest of them, Yudhishthira, is the personification of righteousness (Dharma) but has the tragic flaw of addiction to gambling. When he has staked and lost all -- his territories and wealth, his younger brothers and himself -- in a game of dice loaded against him, he finally makes a stake of Draupadi and loses her. Duryodhana, eldest of the unrighteous cousins of the Pandavas, now claims her as a slave who must serve as a maid in his palace.

Draupadi raises some searching questions which the sages in the Kaurava court -- whose bowed heads signify that they are 'kept intellectuals' -- cannot answer. Did Yudhishthira have the right to stake her after he had staked himself, lost, and become a slave with no rights? Is the act valid, does it bind her? Having been dragged by her hair by Dussasana to the court of Duryodhana, Draupadi does not bind her tresses again till they are washed, after the Kurukshetra war, in the blood of Dussasana.

It speaks for the richness and continuity of India's cultural heritage spanning several millennia that a creative artist of the dance form, in our time, like Mallika Sarabhai finds inspiration from the *Mahabharata* character of Draupadi for depicting modern woman's indignant rejection of subservience to man.

If Drapaudi is imperious and unforgiving, her mother-in-law Kunti is a kindly figure. Of the five Pandavas only the first three were born of her womb. The youngest two were the children of Madri, the second wife of King Pandu. When the king dies, the main argument advanced by Madri for her accompanying the husband into the land of the shades is, as Krishna Chaitanya points out in his study of the epic,[13] significant: "Madri admits that if she survives, she just does not have the character and temperament to be able to bring up Kunti's children as her own, along with her children, without discrimination; but she feels that she can safely entrust her children to Kunti."

The third of the triad of great women in the *Mahabharata* is Gandhari, wife of the blind king Dhritarashtra of the Kuru country who is the brother of Pandu. Dhritarashtra's physical blindness is symbolic of his moral blindness arising from excessive attachment to his avaricious son Duryodhana. Not wishing to have an advantage that her husband lacked, Gandhari blindfolds herself. But her inward vision enables her to see the ruin that will be wrought by her son. During Krishna's peace mission she tries in vain to persuade Duryodhana to give to his Pandava cousins their share of the kingdom and to live in harmony. On each of the eighteen days of the war, when Duryodhana comes in the morning to seek his mother's blessing, she only says that where righteousness is, victory will be.

In the other epic, the *Ramayana*, the central character is Sita as much as her husband Rama. Though popularly regarded as the symbol of a devoted and obedient wife, Valmiki's Sita is not a wholly docile creature. The first time she speaks in the epic is to urge that

she should be allowed to accompany her husband during the fourteen years of exile in the forest. When Rama demurs and speaks of the dangers and difficulties of forest life, she says that had her father, King Janaka, known that Rama was so timid, he would not have given her to him in marriage. That settles the matter. Again, when Hanuman -- the long-tailed primate who serves Rama -- locates her in captivity in Ravana's realm and offers to carry her on his shoulders from Lanka back to her husband, she replies spiritedly that it will not be proper for her to run away from Ravana secretly in the same manner as she was carried off by him. The right course would be for her husband to defeat Ravana in open battle and to free her.

The creation of the highly evolved women characters of the epics could have been possible only in a society which had women with cultivated minds, sensibility and courage. And there is historical and literary evidence of several such women right from Vedic times. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan[14] recalls some examples of the active part played in intellectual and social life by women in ancient India: "Brahmin girls were taught Vedic wisdom, girls of the Ksatriya community were taught the use of the bow and arrow. The Barhut sculptures[15] represent skilful horsewomen in the army. Patanjali[16] mentions the spearbearers *(saktikis)*. Megasthenes[17] speaks of Chandragupta's bodyguard of Amazonian women. Kautilya[18] mentions women archers... In the houses as well as in the forest Universities of India, boys and girls were educated together. Atreyi studied under Valmiki along with Lava and Kusa, the sons of Rama." In *Malatimadhava*, Bhavabhuti[19] makes Kamandaki study along with boys.

The concluding line of a catechism composed by Sankara (788-820), the renowned philosopher of Advaita or non-dualism, reads: "Who is the seen god? One's mother." In truly civilised homes, the lady of the house is referred to as *Griha Lakshmi*, or the goddess of wealth and well-being. The other two major goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are Saraswati, symbolising learning and the arts, and Durga, symbol of power. It is noteworthy that the imagination of the ancient Indians visualised as feminine deities all these three major objectives which impel human endeavour. These deities are worshipped by men and women alike, and are celebrated in song, sculpture and painting besides innumerable devotional texts.

A remarkable figure in the Hindu pantheon is the manifestation of godhood as Ardhanariswara, half man and half woman. The sig-

nificance of Ardhanariswara is reinforced by such appellations as Sitarama and Umamaheswara, Lakshminarayana and Radhakrishna, in which the divine consorts are compounded inseparably into one entity. "Half of one's own self is she, the wife," says the Satapatha Brahmana, a prose commentary on the *Yajurveda*.

The mutuality of man and woman in the Indian tradition strikes one as an early intuition of the finding of modern science that masculinity and femininity are matters of degree rather than bipolar; that human beings are bisexual, possessing both male and female hormones and characteristics, though distributed differently.

It is being increasingly recognised by modern students of human personality that it is a combination of what are generally regarded as masculine characteristics (such as strength and self-confidence) and the feminine virtues (like patience, forgiveness and self-effacing service) that makes the finest human beings. The feminine traits in Gandhiji are thus analysed by B.R. Nanda:

> The strongest formative influence on young Mohandas, however, was that of his mother Putlibai... When there was sickness in the family, she wore herself out in days and nights of nursing... Something of her maternal love he came to possess himself, and as he grew, it flowed out in an ever-increasing measure, bursting the bonds of family and community, until it embraced the whole of humanity. To his mother, he owed not only a passion for nursing which later made him wash leper's sores in his *ashram*, but also an inspiration for his techniques of appealing to the heart through self-suffering -- a technique which wives and mothers have practised from time immemorial.[20]

Alva Myrdal, the Swedish writer, recalls[21] Jawaharlal Nehru remarking to her: "I think the world would be much better off if men became a little bit less masculine."[22]

Given the acknowledgement and glorification of the feminine principle in Indian mythology, it is not surprising that the greatest of India's life-giving rivers should be worshipped as Mother Ganga (in contrast to Egypt's Father Nile), and that the country itself should have been regarded as *Bharat Mata* (Mother India). In an article in *Asia* magazine of New York (June 1936), Jawaharlal said: "It is curious how one cannot resist the tendency to give an anthropomorphic form to a country. Such is the force of habit and early associa-

tions. India becomes *Bharat Mata*, Mother India, a beautiful lady, very old but very youthful in appearance, sad-eyed and forlorn, cruelly treated by aliens and outsiders, and calling upon her children to protect her." Also remarkable is the merging in Jawaharlal's mind of the picture of India as a woman with the personality of his wife Kamala: "She (Kamala) became a symbol of Indian women, or of woman herself. Sometimes she grew curiously mixed up with my ideas of India, that land of ours so dear to us, with all her faults and weaknesses, so elusive and so full of mystery." (*The Discovery of India*, p. 43)

From the beginning of the national movement, a powerful rallying cry was *Bharat Mata ki Jai* ('Victory to Mother India'). At public meetings, Jawaharlal recalls, "... a great roar of welcome would greet me: *Bharat Mata ki Jai*.... I would ask them unexpectedly what they meant by that cry, who was this *Bharat Mata*... My question would amuse them and surprise them, and then, not knowing exactly what to answer, they would look at each other and at me. I persisted in my questioning. At last a vigorous Jat, wedded to the soil from immemorial generations, would say that it was the *dharti*, the good earth of India, that they meant. What earth? Their particular village patch, or all the patches in the district or province, or in the whole of India? And so question and answer went on, till they would ask me impatiently to tell them all about it. I would endeavour to do so and explain that.... mountains and rivers of India, and the forests and the broad fields, which gave us food, were all dear to us, but what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over this vast land. *Bharat Mata*, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people. You are parts of this *Bharat Mata*, I told them, you are in a manner yourselves *Bharat Mata*, and as this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery." (*The Discovery of India*, pp. 60-61).

It was as a contemporary manifestation of Durga, symbol of feminine power, that the common people of India saw Indira Gandhi when she accomplished in December 1971 the liberation of Bangladesh from occupation and exploitation by the army-landlord-capitalist regime based in West Pakistan. The perception of Durga as a symbol of feminine strength is not confined to the Hindu imagination. In 1975, when the government proclaimed a state of inter-

nal emergency in order to contain forces of disruption, it seemed perfectly natural to the renowned Muslim artist, F.M. Hussain, to depict Indira Gandhi, in a celebrated painting of his, as Mahishasuramardini (Durga as slayer of the demon Mahishasura). It is the concluding panel of a triptych, the first depicting Janaki (another name of Sita of the *Ramayana* epic) seated high, morally above the reach of four accusing hands pointing at her; and the second showing Mother India torn by forces of turmoil.

All this, however, is one side of the story. There is another and inglorious side. About this negative aspect Jawaharlal wrote in *The Discovery of India* (p. 36): "The burden of the past, the burden of both good and ill, is overpowering, and sometimes suffocating, more especially for those of us who belong to very ancient civilisations like those of India and China. As Nietzsche says: 'Not only the wisdom of centuries -- also their madness breaketh out in us. Dangerous is it to be an heir'."

In ancient Egypt some of the Pharaohs arranged to have their queens buried alongside so as to have continued enjoyment of them in after-life. In contrast to this barbarism, an Egyptian sage of about 900 B.C. by name Ani, advises man to treat his wife well, and instructs his son: "Double the bread that you give to your mother, and carry her as she carried you. She had a heavy load in you, and never left it to me. When you were born after months, she carried you yet about her neck, and for three years her breast was in your mouth. She was not disgusted at your dung.... When you are a young man and take to yourself a wife and are settled in your house, remember how she brought you up. May she not lift up her hands to God and may He not hear her cry!"

As in ancient Egypt, so in ancient India there were contrasting attitudes towards women. Despite the celebration of femininity in Indian mythology there are instances of injustice towards women even on the part of divinities and sages. Rama, who is an *avatar* or incarnation of God, after freeing his abducted wife Sita from ten months of captivity makes her go through an ordeal by fire to prove her chastity.

In the south there are countless temples to Amman, the feminine deity worshipped by the non-Sanskritised common folk. And the sayings of an 11th century woman sage, Avvai, are regarded by Tamils as the quintessence of wisdom. There is an ethical injunction of Avvai by which to teach children the vowels of the alphabet: '*aram*

seyya virumbu', ("Yearn to do right"); *'aaruvadu sinam'*, ("Cool your anger"), and so on. But the worship of Amman and the universal esteem in which Avvai is held have not prevented the wide prevalence of sayings in Tamil extremely derogatory to women, such as: 'Even a fifty-year-old woman must bow before a five-year-old boy'; and 'Should one get a licence from anyone to beat one's own wife?' Even while women deities and sages have been venerated, many women have been treated heartlessly in real life. The paradox calls to mind Jawaharlal Nehru's remark that Indians despite their general philosophy of non-violence towards animals are often singularly careless and unkind to them: "Even the cow, that favoured animal, though looked up to and almost worshipped by many Hindus and often the cause of riots, is not treated kindly. Worship and kindliness do not always go together."

Puranic Age: Goddess and Slave

The position of women was reduced to degrading depths during the age of the *Puranas*. These books of mythology and of social injunctions, eighteen in number, were written by Brahmin scholars from about 200 A.D. till 1000 A.D. and even later.

Puranic Hinduism exalted feminine deities, but it reduced women in real life to the position of a domestic slave or plaything. Rejecting both these roles, Chitrangada, in Rabindranath Tagore's play of that name, tells Arjuna: "I am Chitrangada. Neither a goddess nor a mere object of dalliance. Not to be worshipped on a pedestal, nor to be ignored and tamed to follow behind. Not for me that. But if you keep me by your side in the path of danger, if you let me share your daring in thought and deed, be your comrade in life's hazards, your mate in joy and sorrow, then only will you come to know me."[23]

Chitrangada's affirmation was in the spirit of the Rig Vedic verse recited at the *Saptapadi*, or the taking of seven steps together by the bride and the bridegroom, symbolic of a joint journey through life, which completes the Hindu sacrament of marriage. The man says to his bride:

> Having taken seven steps with me, become my friend;
> may we two, who have taken together these seven steps

become companions; may I have your friendship;
may I not be separated from your friendship, nor you from mine;
with utmost love to each other,....
with mutually amicable minds, and enjoying together
our food and invigorating things, may we walk
together and take our resolves together; may our minds
be united, of the same vows and of same thoughts;
I am the Rik (the text), you are the Saman (the tune);
I am the Saman, you are the Rik.[24]

Verses like these, with a humanist message, are recited on the occasion of marriage only in Sanskrit, which has unfortunately become a 'dead' language. They have not been translated into locally spoken languages, possibly because the officiating Brahmin priests did not want their incantations to be demystified. To the couple who are getting married, the verses recited by the officiating priest are so much gibberish. If the meaning were understood, men might be ashamed to violate, as many of them so often do, the equality and mutuality commended in the *Saptapadi* verses. Likewise women would hold their head high instead of accepting subservience as their lot.

In negation of the spirit of Vedic literature, some of the *Puranas* denigrated women. One of the most offensive passages in Puranic literature concerning women occurs in the *Padma Purana*, written around 750 A.D. It lays down the following rules of conduct for married women:

> There is no other god on earth for a woman than her husband. The most excellent of all the good works that she can do is to seek to please him by manifesting perfect obedience to him. Therein should lie her sole rule of life.
>
> Be her husband deformed, aged, infirm, offensive in his manners; let him also be choleric, debauched, immoral, a drunkard, a gambler; let him frequent places of ill-repute, live in open sin with other women, have no affection whatever for his home; let him rave like a lunatic; let him live without honour; let him be blind, deaf, dumb, or crippled; in a word, let his defects be what they may, let his wickedness be what it may, a wife should always look upon him as her god, should lavish on him all her attention and care, paying no heed whatsoever to his character and giving him no cause whatsoever for displeasure.[25]

This obnoxious injunction influenced upper and middle class society over the centuries, and conditioned women to put up with injustice and cruelty at the hands of their husbands.

In the degenerate phases of Indian history, women of the higher castes were the counterparts, within the home, of the 'low caste' Sudras and Mlechhas. Women were equated with Sudras as unfit for learning. To women were assigned -- as they largely continue to be -- all the drudgery and the unpleasant work: fetching fuel and water, cooking, sweeping, washing clothes and cleaning up the excreta of children and of the ailing.

Men of the Brahmin caste were the most bigoted in imposing on their women such cruel and superstitious customs as tonsure of the widow and observance of the menstrual period as one of ritual impurity. However, in the matter of Sati (immolation of the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband), Kshatriyas were to the fore.[26] Even among them the practice was not universal. Sati was suicide when it was voluntary, like the frenzied self-immolation, in our day, of some film fans on learning of the serious illness or death of an adored star.[27] In the many cases where the widow was dragged to and dumped on the funeral pyre by her relatives, and prevented from fleeing, it was plain murder. Its one-sidedness makes the custom of Sati specially vicious. There is no instance of a husband immolating himself on the funeral pyre of his wife.

The social customs of the labouring castes, who constitute the great majority of the population, have been more humane. Widow remarriage, as well as divorce in the event of a marriage proving unhappy, have always been sanctioned among them.

Manu-smrti, the code of ethics and law attributed to Manu which has been held in great reverence by orthodox Hindus, was not the work of one person. Believed to have been compiled over a period of four centuries beginning from 200 B.C., it reflects the varied social practices that were prevalent. On the subject of women's status the *Manu-smrti* is a liberal document in comparison with the *Padma Purana*, referred to earlier. One of the verses reads: "Where women are honoured, there the gods rejoice; where they are not honoured, there all sacred rites prove fruitless." On the other hand, an oft-quoted verse says that a woman is dependent on her father, husband and son in the successive phases of her life, and goes on to conclude that she is unfit for independence. The *Manu-smrti*, like the epics

and the *Puranas*, includes many interpolations by men of small minds. It is for us to separate the grain from the chaff in the mixed bag of our cultural heritage.

The position of women in Indian society was not always and everywhere the same but differed in various parts of the country and at different points of time. In the early part of the 19th century, when the French missionary Abbe Dubois closely observed the social scene, specially in South India, the role of women was largely confined to the home but was quite important inside it. In his 'Letters on Christianity in India' he says that to the women in a well-to-do Hindu family "belong the entire management of their household, the care of their children, the superintendence of the menial servants, the distribution of alms and charities. To their charge are generally entrusted the money, jewels and other valuables. To them belongs the care of procuring... wives for their sons, and husbands for their daughters; and, in doing this, they evince a niceness, an attention, and foresight, which are not certainly surpassed in any country; while, in the management of their domestic business, they in general show a shrewdness, a savingness, and an intelligence which would do honour to the best housewives in Europe."

About women belonging to the toiling classes, the Abbe says: "Besides the management of the household, and the care of the family which are under their control, the wives and daughters of husbandmen attend, and assist their husbands and fathers in the labours of agriculture.... Many females are shopkeepers on their own account; and *without a knowledge of the alphabet*, or of the decimal scale, they keep by other means their accounts in excellent order, and are considered as still shrewder than the males themselves in their commercial dealings.... In short, there is no kind of work, no kind of trade, in a civilized society, in which the Hindoo females are not seen actively engaged, and occupying a conspicuous place."

NOTES

1 (London: Constable, 1932).

2 The *Vedas* are the four hymnals known as *Rig, Yajur, Sama* and *Atharvana* composed by the Aryans from about 1500 B.C. in an old form of Sanskrit.

3 M. Asaf Ali, in the course of his foreword to a monograph on the sculpture of Konarak, said of the figures locked in passionate embrace: "Whoever it was who spelt the accents of a bygone culture in this unique monument did not suffer

from the inhibitions of subsequent generations. The adoration of the eternal principle of creation was not masked by mystified make-believe. It was a matter for everyone's intimate knowledge, and to leave it to meretricious curiosity and socially guarded ignorance might have been considered both dangerous and also an insincere denial of an inescapable reality."

4 The lines are quoted from the translation of *Antigone* by E.F. Watling (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

5 Composed around 500 B.C., they are regarded as the culmination of the Vedas and are therefore known as Vedanta.

6 *Glimpses of World History*, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1982, pp.44-5; first published in two volumes (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1934-35).

7 Charles A. Moore, ed., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton, 1957).

8 From remarks at a seminar, quoted by J. Bhagyalakshmi in an article on "Science, Religion and Development", *Indian and Foreign Review*, 1 October 1980.

9 Genesis, 3: 16.

10 *India Today and Tomorrow* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1959, p. 4).

11 *Who were the Sudras*? (Bombay: Thacker, 1946).

12 Literally meaning compiler, it has come to be used as a personal name.

13 *The Mahabharata: A Literary Study* (New Delhi: Clarion Books, 1985).

14 *Religion and Society* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1947).

15 Of the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. in Central India.

16 Writer of the 2nd century B.C.

17 Greek ambassador to the court of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya in the 4th century B.C.

18 Counsellor of Emperor Chandragupta and author of the *Arthasastra* or Science of Polity.

19 Sanskrit playwright, c. 700 A.D.

20 *Gandhi: A Pictorial Biography* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1972), pp. 9-10.

21 Oral History transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi.

22 In the West, the novelist Virginia Woolf expressed a similar thought: "For anyone who writes... it is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman manly or man womanly." *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

23 Rendering by Krishna Kripalani from the original Bengali of Rabindranath Tagore, in the course of an article on "Gandhi and Womanhood" in *Indian Horizons*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, 1975.

24 V. Raghavan, *The Indian Heritage* (Bangalore: Indian Institute of World Culture, 1963), pp. 47-8.

25 Quoted in Abbe Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, translated by Henry K. Beauchamp (Oxford University Press, 1943).

26 It was in a family of the Kshatriya caste that the gruesome incident, which attracted wide notice, took place, in September 1987, of the burning of Roop Kanwar, a young and educated woman, on the funeral pyre of her husband at Deorala in Rajasthan, a part of India in which feudal traditions persist.

27 When M.G. Ramachandran, ex-actor and the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, underwent a kidney transplant in 1984, "at least 24 youngsters, boys and girls, unable to bear the agony of their hero's ailment, killed themselves." S.K. Anantaraman in an article, "After MGR Who?" *Indian Express* (Delhi), 4 September 1987. Subsequently when M.G. Ramachandran died on 24 December 1987, several persons in Tamil Nadu committed suicide.

2 A Long Line of Reformers

Jawaharlal Nehru remarks in *The Discovery of India* (p. 118): "Bad as the legal position of women was in ancient India, judged by modern standards, it was far better than in ancient Greece and Rome, in early Christianity, in the Canon Law of medieval Europe, and indeed right up to comparatively modern times at the beginning of the nineteenth century."

In ancient Rome women were treated as imbeciles unfit to sign a contract or to bear witness. More than a hundred thousand were burnt as witches in medieval Europe.[1] In the modern period, the women of Switzerland did not secure the right to vote till as late as 1971.

Egalitarian Sages and Saints

If, in contrast, Indian women did not fare too badly over the ages, it was because there were 'springs to replenish the well' so that it did not dry up. This is the image used by Jawaharlal while discussing India's remarkable capacity for renewal.

Not all Brahmins were greedy exploiters of credulity. Many led a simple life and applied themselves to their prescribed calling of scholarship, and acted as wise counsellors to kings and commoners. There have been a long line of sages, and men and women of religion, who affirmed human equality irrespective of differences of sex, colour, caste, class or creed. Theirs was a comprehensive view of human liberation in contrast to Martin Luther's limited view of religious reform merely as freeing the Christian church from the abuses of papacy while retaining an unjust social hierarchy.[2] The sages and egalitarian saints of India commended by precept and example an internally consistent humanism. Women's equality was

part of it, alongside rejection of caste inequality, of superstition and exploitative priestcraft.

The earliest of the *Vedas*, the *Rig*, has a passage which counsels man to be compassionate to his kind: "Fortune, like two chariot wheels revolving, now to one man comes nigh, now to another. Who has the power should give unto the needy. One who feeds all by himself sins all by himself." The seers of the *Upanishads*, which marked the culmination of Vedic literature, were profound humanists. The *Mundaka Upanishad* commends inner sacrifice rather than external ritual as the path to enlightenment. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, Svetaketu is advised by his father: "... live the disciplined life of a student of sacred knowledge. No one, indeed, my dear, belonging to our family, is unlearned in the Vedas and remains a Brahmin only by family connections as it were."[3]

Some of the early social reformers who denounced priestcraft were atheists or agnostics. Among the heterodox schools of classical Indian philosophy, which rejected the authority of the *Vedas*, was *Lokayata* or materialism. The materialists had no belief in an afterlife and had no use for ritualistic sacrifices: "If a victim slain at the Jyotishtoma will go to heaven, why is not his own father killed there by the sacrificer? Funeral ceremonies for the dead were ordered by the Brahmin as a means of livelihood." The writings of the materialist philosophers have unfortunately been lost. Jawaharlal Nehru says in *The Discovery of India* (p. 97): "We have then to rely on the critics and persons interested in disparaging this philosophy.... Yet their very eagerness to discredit it shows how important it was in their eyes. Possibly much of the literature of materialism in India was destroyed by the priests and other believers in the orthodox religion during subsequent periods."

Social reform movements on a large scale were initiated in the 6th century B.C. by Vardhamana Mahavira (599-527 B.C.), on whose teachings the Jain religion is based, and by Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 B.C.), better known as the Buddha (Enlightened One). Neither was a Brahmin; both were born in warrior clans. They were concerned with the ethics that should govern human action in this life, and were indifferent to speculations about afterlife or an extra-cosmic creator of the world. It is a different matter that both came to be deified later by their followers.

The Jain orders, both of ascetics and of householders, were open to women as well as to Sudras. Among the women disciples of

Mahavira were Malintha and Mrigavati. A Jain scholar of the 7th century, Yakini Mahattara, is reputed to have defeated in debate a Brahmin scholar, Haribhadra, who thereupon became her disciple. Shantala of the 12th century was the wife of a Hoysala ruler in the south, who changed his faith from Jainism to Vaishnavism. But she remained a Jain, and built a tank and a garden at Sravanabelgola.

Among the sayings attributed to Buddha are: "No Brahmin is such by birth. No outcaste is such by birth. An outcaste is such by his deeds. A Brahmin is such by his deeds." Women were admitted to the Order by Buddha, who said to his favourite disciple Ananda: "Women are competent, if they retire from household life to the homeless state under the doctrine and discipline, to attain to the fruit of conversion, to attain to saintship." But Buddha is also said to have remarked to Ananda that the *Sangha* (Order) would have endured for a thousand years, but now that women had been admitted, it was likely to decay after five hundred years. The ascription of this derogatory remark about women to Buddha is doubtless the handiwork of a small-minded interpolator.

Among the women disciples of Buddha were Amrapali, originally a wealthy courtesan of Vaishali, who gave away her mango grove with its building for the *Sangha*; Visakha, who built a great monastery; Kissa Gautami who, distraught by the death of her child from snake-bite, sought its revival by Buddha who consented, and asked her to bring him something from a home which had never been visited by death - and thus enlightened her; and, in the 3rd century, Sanghamitra, daughter of Emperor Asoka who along with her brother Mahendra led a mission to Sri Lanka at the invitation of King Tissa. This mission is believed to have led to the conversion of the people of the island to Buddhism.

During the centuries that followed, science flourished on the one hand and superstition on the other. There are many instances of both decadence and vitality during the Puranic age. The teachings of Charaka, the physician, and of Susruta, the surgeon, both of whom lived before the Christian era, were systematised into standard texts by the fourth century. During the period of the Puranas with their prescription of sacrificial ritual and pilgrimages emerged the 5th - century astronomer Aryabhata, credited with the invention of algebra; the mathematician Brahmagupta of the 7th century who expounded the laws governing *shunya* or zero in mathematics; and the astronomer Bhaskara of the 12th century. Jawaharlal Nehru has

remarked about Bhaskara: "His book on arithmetic is known as 'Lilavati', which is an odd name for a treatise on mathematics, as it is the name of a woman. There are frequent references in the book to a young girl who is addressed as 'O Lilavati' and is then instructed on the problems stated. It is believed, without any definite proof, that Lilavati was Bhaskara's daughter. The style of the book is clear and simple and suitable for young persons to understand." (*The Discovery of India*, p. 219.) Lilavati's case is in contrast to the cruel fate of Hypatia of Alexandria (d. 415 A.D.). An apt pupil of her father who was a mathematician and astronomer, Hypatia did significant work in algebra and geometry, and designed several scientific instruments. But the Christian establishment disliked her neo-Platonic views. They "angered Cyril, the fanatical patriarch of Alexandria. As a result she was pulled out of her chariot, stripped naked, dragged to a church, her flesh scraped from her bones with sharp oyster-shells and her quivering limbs delivered to the flames" by a Christian mob.[4]

Alongside the pathfinders in science there were a succession of religious and social reformers. In south India the poet Kaniyan Pungunranar of the Sangam age of Tamil literature (2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.) affirmed: "Every city is my city; all people are my people." A great Tamil poet after the Sangam age is Thiruvalluvar of the 5th century, born in a so-called low caste. One of the verses in his Kural, a string of ethical verses, reads: "He alone lives who knows that he is one with all; the rest have their place among the dead." The Vaishnavite devotional poets in Tamil, known as the Alwars, included a woman saint, Andal of the 9th century. In her adoration of the deity as Krishna, she was the precursor and southern counterpart of Mira of Rajasthan and Chaitanya of Bengal. Andal's verses in the *Tiruppavai* are widely sung in Tamil Nadu, specially by young women, to this day. In Karnataka there was, between the tenth and twelfth centuries, a rich crop of saint-poets who have been described as "great voices of a sweeping movement of protest and reform in Hindu society."[5] Drawn from every caste and class, they included women, notable among whom was Mahadeviyakka. Their *vachanas* (literally 'sayings') were lyrics which affirmed the possibility of every individual, irrespective of sex or social origin, attaining spiritual realisation without priestly intervention. These propagators of humane values spoke and wrote in the colloquial form of the regional language. The Bhakti or devotional movement appealed to the artisans and cultivators who were ranked low in the Brahminical

hierarchy. Basava said:

> To the servant of God, who could eat if served, they say, 'Go away'; but to the image of God, which cannot eat, they offer dishes of food.
> Sweet words are equal to all prayers. Sweet words are equal to all penances. Good behaviour is what pleases God. Kindness is the root of all righteousness.[8]

Bridal mysticism is found in Bhakti literature, as in the tradition of Sufism in Islam and some Christian saints. Mahadeviyakka in one of her poems uses homely imagery to describe the release she seeks from Maya (illusion) and from attachment to things worldly:

> I have Maya for mother-in-law;
> the world for father-in-law;
> three brothers-in-law, like tigers;
> and the husband's thoughts
> are full of laughing women: no god, this man.
> And I cannot cross the sister-in-law.
> But I will give this wench the slip
> and go cuckold my husband with Hara, my Lord.

Some of the Bhakti saints made light of the difference of sex. Basava wrote:

> Sometimes I am man,
> sometimes I am woman.
> O lord of the meeting rivers
> I'll make war for you
> but I'll be your devotees' bride.

And Devara Dasimayya:

> If they see
> breasts and long hair coming, they call it woman,
> if beard and whiskers
> they call it man:
> but, look, the self that hovers
> in between

is neither man
nor woman.

The Impact of Islam

When the Bhakti movement travelled to the north, it found a counterpart in the soft face of Islam which revealed itself in India with the coming of the Sufis. This was a happy change from the early circumstances of Islam's advent in India with sword in hand: the marauding raids by Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad Ghuri who destroyed temples.

Islam brought to India both positive and negative values. On the negative side was the sanctioning of polygamy. The restriction of the permissible number of wives to four had been an improvement on the practice prevalent in Arabia at the time of Prophet Muhammad. In India, on the other hand, polygamy had been largely confined to monarchs.

Another unfortunate contribution of Islamic culture to social practice was the introduction of the *purdah* in India. Jawaharlal Nehru says in *Glimpses of World History* (p. 148) that though Arab women did not observe *purdah* in the beginning, "success made the Arabs imitate more and more the customs of the two old empires on either side of them -- the Eastern Roman and the Persian. They had defeated the former and put an end to the latter, but they themselves succumbed to many an evil habit of these empires.... Gradually the *harem* system begins, and men and women meet each other less and less socially. Unhappily this seclusion of women became a feature of Islamic society, and India also learnt it from them when the Muslims came here."

Both Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru campaigned vigorously against the custom of *purdah*. "Chastity", Gandhiji said, "is not a hothouse growth.... It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the *purdah*. It must grow from within.... It must be a very poor thing that cannot stand the gaze of men. Men, to be men, must be able to trust their womenfolk, even as the latter are compelled to trust them.... Let us then tear down the *purdah* with one mighty effort."[7] Again: "I am of opinion that the *purdah* in India is a recent institution and was adopted during the period of Hindu decline.... Gargi could not have held her discourses from behind the *purdah*.

Nor is the *purdah* universal in India. It is unknown in the Deccan, Gujarat and the Punjab. It is unknown among the peasantry...."[8] Jawaharlal wrote in *Glimpses of World History*: "Whenever I think of the women in *purdah*, cut off from the outside world, I invariably think of a prison or a zoo! How can a nation go ahead if half of its population is kept hidden away in a kind of prison?"

On the positive side, Islam preached brotherhood and equality. It is a pity, however, that this noble concept is often popularly understood to apply only among Muslims. Also, Islam gave the right of inheritance to daughters, though their share was less than that of sons. The ancient Indian lawgiver, Manu, had also prescribed a share in inheritance to the daughter but custom eroded this injunction. A great gift that came from West Asia was Sufism at its philosophical best (as distinct from the self-flagellation and other perversions of some Sufi sects). According to the Sufis, the Ulema learned from books while the mystics learned from intuition.

A woman mystic of the 14th century was Lallesvari, popularly known as Lal Ded, of Kashmir who has been held in reverence by both Muslims and Hindus. She deprecated idol worship: "An idol is but stone and a temple is but stone." Lal Ded also denounced animal sacrifice, calling it folly to "offer a living sheep to a lifeless stone."

Kabir, born in the weaver caste in Banaras, was claimed on his death in 1518 by Hindus and Muslims as one of their own. The devotional verses he composed drew freely from both Sanskrit and Persian vocabularies, even as the content reflects strong Sufi influence on traditional Hindu belief. His teaching is summed up in the following verse:

> Hari is in the East; Allah is in the West.
> Look within your heart, for there you will find both Karim and Ram.
> All the men and women of the world are His living forms.
> Kabir is the child of Allah and of Ram.

Four centuries later, Mahatma Gandhi invoked the same Bhakti-Sufi strain in the Indian ethos when he popularised the verse: "Iswar and Allah are both your names. Grant us all concord."

The co-existential and interactive Bhakti-Sufi movement, in which the most sensitive minds among Hindus and Muslims reached out towards each other, culminated in the emergence of a new

religion, Sikhism, based on the teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1539). The compilation known as the *Adi Granth* includes a large selection from Kabir and other Hindu Bhaktas and Muslim Sufis whose message was in consonance with Guru Nanak's. Like the founders of the two other reformist religions, Jainism and Buddhism, Nanak was born in a non-Brahmin family. He affirmed the equality of humankind and rejected notions of high and low based on caste, sex or wealth, deprecated idol worship, and stressed the importance of good conduct. Nanak wanted women to be treated by men as equals: "Within a woman is a man conceived, from a woman he is born; he is married to a woman and with her he goes through life.... Why call her bad, she gives birth to kings. None may exist without a woman. Only the one, true God is exterior to woman, says Nanak."[9]

The wise and tolerant Mughal emperor Akbar, who consciously pursued a policy of conciliation towards the Rajputs and relied as much on Hindus as on Muslim ministers during his long reign of nearly fifty years from 1556, admired the saintly lives of the Sikh gurus of his time. He saw no conflict between the new religion, which was gathering recruits from both Hindus and Muslims, and either Islam or the State. The tradition of Akbar's statesmanship and benevolent interest in all religions (he invited a group of Jesuits from Goa to expound their faith at his court) was continued, by and large, by his successors Jehangir and Shah Jahan. But a reverse trend was to set in with adverse consequences both for the country politically and for the status of women in Indian society.

Akbar's great grandson Aurangzeb was a fanatic who turned the Mughal empire into an Islamic instead of a national state. He was very different in temperament from his eldest brother Dara Shikoh (1615-59) who was friendly to Sufism and translated some of the *Upanishads*. According to Dr V. Raghavan,[10] the West owes its first knowledge of the Hindu *Upanishads* to Dara's Persian rendering, *Sirr-i-Akbar*, which was translated in turn into Latin and French. Dara expounded the fundamental unity of the teachings of Hinduism and Islam -- observing that the difference was only in terminology -- in his *Majma-ul-Bahrain*, the Mingling of the Two Oceans. It has been preserved in the Persian as well as in the Sanskrit version known as *Samudra-sangama-grantha*.

No wonder that my husband used to remark on the difference it would have made to the course of India's history if Dara Shikoh had

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succeeded Shah Jahan! As it actually happened, Aurangzeb imprisoned his father and had Dara Shikoh condemned as a heretic and executed. Aurangzeb reimposed the *Jiziya* or poll-tax on the Hindus who were the great majority of his subjects. There was constant warfare once again in the south and north between the Muslim kingdoms and the Marathas, the Rajputs and the Sikhs -- conflicts which made India vulnerable to creeping conquest by European powers.

In these unsettled conditions the Hindu and Muslim communities withdrew into the shell of their respective orthodoxies and became, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, 'closed systems' with little interaction. Upper-caste Hindus became even more rigid in their observance of orthodox customs as a means of preserving their identity. Priestcraft flourished, and untouchability was rigorously observed. Child marriage became the vogue, as it had been during every period of foreign invasion and disturbed conditions.

The triumph of the East India Company's forces over their European rivals and Indian princes made the British the virtual masters of the country by the second half of the 18th century. The Mughal emperor in Delhi continued merely as a figurehead.

In the Modern Period

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British rule brought about many painful changes such as the decimation of Indian weavers by officials of the East India Company in order to create a captive market for cloth of British manufacture. This shameful action was acknowledged even by a British governor-general. Lord Bentinck remarked in 1834: "The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India."

However, British rule brought an unintended benefit in the form of modern education. Unlike the reform movements of the medieval period which had been inspired by religious fervour and mysticism, a new movement began in the first half of the 19th century based also on rational and scientific thought derived from English education.

The British were initially reluctant to introduce modern education but some far-sighted Indians learnt English privately in order to gain access to the new scientific knowledge and political ideas of the West. Foremost among these was Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), who has been rightly described as the father of India's

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Nehru Memorial Museum
and Library

modern enlightenment. He saw the need to revitalise Indian society by removing evil practices like the denial of education to women, polygamy, Sati and discrimination against the lower castes. Rammohun Roy was not a nationalist in the 20th-century sense of wanting the immediate end of foreign rule. But he was confident that India would be able to achieve political progress by acquiring modern knowledge through English education. Rammohun Roy's sturdy self-respect is evident from his spirited protest against the ways of the early British missionaries who, with policemen at their back, ridiculed the religions of India at street corner meetings. "It is true," he wrote, "that the apostles of Jesus Christ used to preach the superiority of the Christian religion to the natives of different countries. Were the missionaries likewise to preach the Gospel and distribute books in countries not conquered by the English, such as Turkey, Persia, etc., which are much nearer England they would be esteemed. In Bengal, where the English are the sole rulers and where the mere name of Englishman is sufficient to frighten people, an encroachment upon the rights of her poor, timid and humble inhabitants and upon their religion cannot be viewed in the eyes of God or the public as a justifiable act."

The introduction of English education in India in the first half of the 19th century owes mainly to its vigorous advocacy by Rammohun Roy. He was opposed to the perpetuation with official patronage of the then prevalent scholastic and theological education in Sanskrit and Arabic. Modern education, he believed, would open the doors to scientific knowledge of the kind that had enabled Europe to make rapid strides in industrial civilisation, and to contemporary ideas of national freedom, democracy and equality of the sexes. It was through the English language that successive generations of Indians including Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru became acquainted with the best Western minds: Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln; Voltaire and Rousseau; Marx, Engels and Lenin; women suffragette leaders on both sides of the Atlantic; the nationalist revolutionaries of Ireland; Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau; and such stimulating thinkers as George Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell. This intellectual interaction with the West helped to enrich the content of Indian nationalism.

In the sphere of social reform Rammohun Roy is best known for his successful campaign against Sati. There is a widespread misapprehension that this evil custom is peculiar to India. Anthropologists

have found that it has been prevalent in many primitive communities including some Red Indian tribes of North America; in Dahomey and among the Bafiote of Africa; and in many Pacific islands. Jawaharlal Nehru says in *The Discovery of India* (p. 315): "Probably the practice was brought to India originally by the Scytho-Tartars, among whom the custom prevailed of vassals and liegemen killing themselves on the death of their lord. In early Sanskrit literature the *suttee* custom is denounced. Akbar tried hard to stop it, and the Marathas also were opposed to it."

The writer of a scholarly work[11] on the Hindu sacraments cites the *Rig Veda* (X 18.7), the *Atharva Veda* (XVIII 3.1-2) and other texts to show that they indicate only a "ritualistic survival of the Sati custom. During the earlier period, gifts to the dead were buried or burnt with the corpse -- including sometimes slaves and even wife. Atharva calls it 'the ancient custom'. This inhuman practice was discontinued in the Rigvedic time though the formality of the widow lying on the funeral pyre was retained. Thus the *Grhyasutras*, which deal with domestic rites, prescribe ritualistic substitution for the real burning of the widow. The chief mourner, or he who was to set fire to the pyre, should then address the dead, saying,

> 'O mortal! this woman (your wife), wishing to be joined to you in a future world, is lying by the corpse. She has always observed the duties of a faithful wife. Grant her your permission to abide in this world, and relinquish your wealth to your descendants.' A younger brother of the dead, or a disciple, or a servant, should then proceed to the pyre, hold the left hand of the woman and ask her to come away: 'Rise up, woman, you lie by the side of the lifeless; come to the world of the living, away from the husband, and become the wife of him who holds your hand and is willing to marry you.'

But the Sati custom never entirely ceased, and later on it was revived in certain tribes and families. It was mostly prevalent among the Rajputs."

Following Rammohun Roy's campaign, Sati was abolished by law in 1829. Though prohibited, the practice did not cease altogether. Indeed sporadic instances continue to occur even now, underscoring the need to build up public opinion and social sanctions to bridge the gap between reform legislation on the statute book and realities on

the ground.

The anti-British uprising of 1857, largely confined to upper India, did not spring from the forward-looking impulse generated by Rammohun Roy. The revolt was fuelled by a variety of grievances: the anger of the Indian sepoy in the East India company's forces at the racial discrimination he suffered ("Though he might give the signs of the military genius of a Haider, he knew he could never attain the pay of an English subaltern," wrote a British officer, Lt. Col. J. Holmes); the anger of princes and princesses dispossessed by the British; and the resentment of the upper classes and castes at being treated on a par by the British, in law courts, with lower caste Indians. The 1857 revolt was, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, the last flicker of feudal India: "Not by fighting for a lost cause, the feudal order, would freedom come." (*The Discovery of India*, p. 324)

Though the movement was in some respects backward-looking, it threw up some heroic figures. "One name stands out above others", Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, "and is revered still in popular memory, the name of Lakshmi Bai, Rani of Jhansi, a girl of twenty years of age, who died fighting. 'Best and bravest' of the rebel leaders, she was called by the English general who opposed her."

The suppression of the 1857 uprising did not affect the continuation of the process of intellectual reawakening and social reform initiated by Rammohun Roy. In Bengal it was carried forward by persons nurtured in the Brahmo Samaj founded by Rammohun in 1828. Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), father of Rabindranath, led the Brahmo Samaj after Rammohun Roy. He preached a lofty theism which was a blend of Upanishadic and Christian teaching, and opposed both the idolatry of popular Hinduism and the tactics of brash Christian missionaries. "We are in and of the great Hindu community," he said, "and it devolves upon us by example and precept to hold up as a beacon the highest truths of the Hindu Sastras. In their light must we purify our heritage of customs, usages, rites and ceremonies and adapt them to the needs of our conscience and our community. But we must beware of proceeding too fast in matters of social change, lest we be separated from the greater body whom we would guide and uplift."

The women of Bengal took a hand in improving their own lot. R.C Majumdar[12] cites as an example of the new spirit among Bengali women the numerous letters they wrote to local journals, as early as in 1835, asking for the spread of women's education. They also

demanded the removal of evils from which they had been suffering for long, such as the prohibition of widow remarriage. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar played a leading part in the campaign to legalise remarriage. It resulted in the enactment of the Hindu Women's Remarriage Act in 1856.

The significance of this measure will be evident from the following words of Pandita Ramabai which, written towards the close of the 19th century, continued to be a largely true description of the plight of the widow in Hindu society, specially among the so-called higher castes, till the 1930s:

> Throughout India widowhood is regarded as the punishment for horrible crimes committed by the woman in her former existence. But it is the child-widow upon whom in an especial manner falls the abuse and hatred of the community.... Among the Brahmans of the Deccan the heads of all widows must be shaved regularly every fortnight. The widow must wear a single coarse garment. She must eat only one meal during the twenty-four hours of a day. She must never take part in family feasts. A man or woman thinks it unlucky to behold a widow's face before seeing any other object in the morning. In addition to all this, the young widow is always looked upon with suspicion, for fear she may some time bring disgrace upon the family by committing some improper act.... Her life, then, destitute as it is of the least literary knowledge, void of all hope, empty of every pleasure and social advantage, becomes intolerable, a curse to herself and to society at large.

The usual benediction when a married woman bows respectfully before elders is: "Long may you remain unwidowed." There is a widely observed tradition of the wife fasting and praying on certain days of the year for the long life and well-being of her husband. The man does not reciprocally fast or pray for his wife. Becoming a widower was no great hardship. He could, and usually did, marry again.

Another social evil which women protested against was polygamy, practised by certain classes. The Kulin Brahmin in Bengal would marry numerous wives, some of whom he never met again after the nuptial ceremonies. The efforts made by English-educated persons for legislation to stop this practice did not succeed. The en-

forcement of monogamy on the Hindu male had to await legislation pressed through parliament after independence by Jawaharlal Nehru.

In the second half of the 19th century every region of the country was swept by reform movements which aimed at the cleansing and renewal of society. Narayana Guru (1856-1928) of Kerala exemplified social regeneration in south-west India. Born in a humble family of Ezhavas, an oppressed community that was denied access to educational institutions and to temples, he overcame the handicaps and became proficient both in Malayalam and Sanskrit, making a special study of Advaita or non-duality. Thus equipped, Narayana Guru gave fight to the forces of orthodoxy. He consecrated temples in various parts of Kerala which bore the inscription: "The ideal house, where all live in full fraternity without distinction of caste or prejudice of creed." Narayana Guru's teaching is summed up in the words: "One Caste, one Religion, one God for all mankind."

Other pioneers of reform in the south included Ananda Charlu of Madras (1843-1908) who fought for the right of women to education and property and supported the remarriage of widows; Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu (1848-1919), the renowned Telugu writer and social reformer who worked tirelessly to overcome the prejudice against widow remarriage; and C. Vijiaraghavachariar (1852-1944), a prominent lawyer who campaigned against prepuberty marriage and against untouchability, and advocated a share for the daughter in the father's property. Among women pioneers in the south was Venkamamba, a well-known Telugu poet born early in the 19th century in an orthodox Brahmin family who refused to have her head shaved when she became a widow.

One of the earliest social reformers in western India was Jotirao Govindrao Phule, popularly known as Mahatma Phule (1827-90). Born in a family of humble caste whose occupation was gardening, he took up, after his own schooling, the cause of education of women and the poor. Since women teachers were not available those days, he taught his wife Savitribai and made her a teacher in a school he opened in 1848 for women of the lower castes. He went on to start a night school for adults, a widows' home and an orphanage. Phule received encouragement both from the local authorities, who made a grant of land, and from the enlightened Maharaja of Baroda. "Nobody", Jotirao Phule held, "is sacred by birth. Everybody has virtues and vices as a human being."

Another early reformer was Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-95), who on graduation from the Deccan College, Poona, decided to lead a frugal life and apply himself to social service. Along with Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) Agarkar founded the nationalist weekly *Kesari* in Marathi. But he relinquished the editorship of the journal when he found that Tilak's views were at variance with his own on subjects like child marriage. Tilak was a radical in his nationalist fervour but a conservative in social matters. On one occasion he performed penance after taking tea in a Christian missionary school. On 24 March 1918 he attended and spoke at an all India Depressed Classes Conference under the presidentship of the progressive Maharaja of Baroda but could not bring himself to sign a personal pledge against observing untouchability in day-to-day life.

Agarkar started his own bilingual journal *Sudharak* ('Reformer') in which the English columns were contributed by Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915). Gokhale was the founder (in 1905) of the Servants of India Society and the mentor of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Both Agarkar and Gokhale campaigned against caste inequalities and the practice of untouchability, and in favour of women's education and widow remarriage.

Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), quoted earlier, was the daughter of Anant Padmanabha Dongre, a Vedantic scholar who was persecuted by his Brahmin kinsmen because he had educated his wife Lakshmibai and made her a Pandita. Dongre left his village of Malheranjee near Mangalore, and set up an ashram in the hills of Gangamul where Rama was born. After her parents died in poverty during the famine of 1874, Rama along with her sister Krishna and brother Srinivasa Shastri went on a pilgrimage, walking several thousand miles. She learnt Sanskrit from her brother and after reaching Calcutta in 1878 she was honoured with the titles of Pandita and Saraswati for her mastery of the language. Ramabai earned a little money by 'telling Puranas' but began to lose her faith in her ancestral religion when she saw the corruption of the system. After her brother's death Ramabai married Bipin Bihari Das Medhavi, a lawyer who was a Sudra by birth. He died within two years, and Ramabai went with her baby daughter to Poona. She was welcomed there by the progressive group including Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade and Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar. They were members of the Prarthana Samaj which propagated women's education and campaigned against caste oppression and child marriage. Pandita

Ramabai founded the Arya Mahila Samaj which worked for the deliverance of women from the cruel practices imposed by tradition. The Samaj was active at many centres including Ahmadnagar, Sholapur, Thane and Bombay.

In 1883 some Christian missionary friends helped Ramabai, who wanted to improve her knowledge of English, to go with her daughter Manorama to England. She stayed with the Sisters of St. Mary the Virgin at Wangate and was greatly impressed by the Christian missionaries' attitude to 'fallen women'. (The term signified the victims of the male's sexual hunger. No one speaks of 'fallen men'.) Ramabai embraced Christianity in September 1883. She visited the U.S.A. in 1886, learnt Froebel's kindergarten system and prepared a series of lessons for children in Marathi. Pandita Ramabai was among the earliest women to participate in the Indian National Congress. She 'slept in Jesus' on 5 April 1922. Sarojini Naidu described Ramabai as a foremost Christian, worthy to be enrolled in the calendar of saints. Thus did one great daughter of India greet another.

Pandita Ramabai exemplifies the conversion of some upper-caste Hindus, in Bengal and elsewhere, who were attracted by the intellectual and spiritual appeal of Christianity. But the bulk of the conversions to Christianity, as to Islam, were from the castes ranked low and exploited in Hindu society. It is a different matter that caste discrimination has continued to dog most of them despite the change of faith. For instance a butcher by trade, even after conversion to Islam, continues to be looked down upon by fellow-Muslims as a *qasai*.

Another Ramabai played a notable part in women's awakening. She was Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924), wife of Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901), who was himself a leading social reformer. Barely twelve when she married the considerably older widower, she took pains to educate herself and worked alongside her husband for women's education. She was active in the Seva Sadan at Bombay which trained women workers for educational and medical relief work. Branches of the organisation were soon established at Ahmedabad, Surat and Poona. Ramabai Ranade's autobiography in Marathi is a well known literary work.

Dhondo Keshav (popularly known as Maharshi) Karve (1858-1962) was a crusader against injustice to women. After his first wife died in 1891 he married a widow, Godubai, in 1893. He founded in the same year the Vidhava Vivaha Pratibandi Nivarak Mandali (Society for the removal of obstacles to widow remarriage) to help

needy widows and look after their children's education. In 1898 he established a widows' home, and in 1908 the Nishkama Karma Math to train volunteers for selfless work. His greatest achievement was the establishment of a women's university, for which he collected funds in England, America and East Africa. Established at Poona in 1916, it received a munificent donation of fifteen lakh rupees in 1920 from Sir Vithaldas Thackersey and was named as the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University in memory of the donor's late mother. A notable feature of the university, which moved to Bombay in 1936, was the employment of Indian languages for instruction at a time when a foreign language was being used for imparting even elementary knowledge in arts and science. But English was taught as a compulsory subject.

In Gujarat, Vithalbhai Patel (1873-1933), elder brother of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, was a pioneer social reformer. As a member of the Bandra Municipality and subsequently member and president of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, Vithalbhai Patel promoted free and compulsory education and gave special encouragement to education among the so-called untouchable castes. Subsequently as an elected member of the Imperial Legislative Council he introduced a Bill to validate marriages between Hindus of different castes. It was opposed by orthodox members of the Council led by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, but was supported by Tej Bahadur Sapru and V.S. Srinivasa Sastri among others. The Bill lapsed with the dissolution of the Council. The reform had to wait till 1949, when the provisional parliament of free India passed the Hindu Marriages Validity Act. This was an early instalment of the legislation for reform and codification of Hindu law which Jawaharlal Nehru sponsored as Prime Minister.

A women pioneer in Gujarat was Vidyagauri Nilkanth (1876-1958), who educated herself after marriage and became one of the first women graduates. She formed the Mahila Mandal at Ahmedabad in 1914, and helped to found the Lalshankar Umashankar College for Women. Awarded the *Kaiser-i-Hind* medal by the British authorities in 1926, she returned it during the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930.

Dayanand Saraswati (1824-83), a Gujarati by birth who initiated a comprehensive reform movement. He denounced the belief in short cuts to salvation through fasts and pilgrimages, or through listening to medieval texts. Taking his stand on the very Vedas which

were invoked by Hindus, Dayanand campaigned against idol worship, untouchability, child marriage and the relegation of women to inferior status. He advocated women's education, free choice of husband, and the right of every person to study the Vedas. Dayanand founded in 1875 the Arya Samaj which did much good work in and around the Punjab in the spread of education, specially among girls, and in improving the condition of women and of the so-called lower castes.

Among those who were attracted by Dayanand's teaching was Munshi Ram (1857-1926) of the Punjab, who came to be known as Swami Shraddhanand after he took *sanyasa*. When the Arya Samaj split in 1893 he led the section which stood for the traditional Gurukula system of education as against modern colleges. In 1902 he became the founder-director of a Gurukula at Hardwar which awarded the degrees of *Vidyalankar* and *Vachaspati*. Shraddhanand took part in the agitation in 1919 against the Rowlatt Bills. Muslims of Delhi did him the honour of carrying him bodily into the Jama Masjid where he spoke on Hindu-Muslim unity for ending foreign rule. However, a Muslim fanatic shot the Swami dead in 1926. Shraddhanand consistently opposed child marriage, and championed women's education, widow remarriage, and improvement of the social status as well as living conditions of the so-called untouchables.

Another prominent leader of the Arya Samaj was Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928). He was deported to Burma for taking part in the movement for agrarian reform in the Punjab in 1907, and was associated with trade union work as well as the students' movement.

In Bengal, the second half of the 19th century saw the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission. It was founded by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86), the saintly mystic who saw God in a variety of manifestations -- as the Divine Mother, as Rama and Krishna, as Muhammad and as Jesus Christ. Vivekananda addressed himself particularly to the youth: "I want sappers and miners in the army of religion. So, boys, set yourselves to the task of training your muscles. For ascetics, mortification is all right. For workers, well-developed bodies, muscles of iron and nerves of steel! So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them." Among the women who joined the Ramakrishna Mission was Margaret Elizabeth Noble, renamed Sister Nivedita (1867-1911). She had been power-

fully influenced by Vivekananda's teaching when she heard him in England, and came to India in 1898. Even after Vivekananda's death she was engaged in social and political work in India, supporting the Swadeshi movement and the young revolutionaries of Bengal.

A parallel movement of reform began subsequently in the Muslim community. First and foremost among the advocates of social reform and modernisation among Muslims was Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-98). The Muslim community had been slow in taking to modern education through English. He urged his co-religionists to come out of the isolation which was keeping them backward, and to acquire scientific knowledge: "The adoption of the new system of education does not mean the renunciation of Islam. The Prophet said that knowledge is the heritage of the believer, and that he should acquire it wherever he can find it. He also said that the Muslims should seek knowledge even if they have to go to China to find it. It is obvious that the Prophet was not referring to theological knowledge in these sayings. China was at that time one of the most civilised countries of the world, but it was a non-Muslim country and could not teach the Muslims anything about their own religion. Islam, Islamic culture and the Muslims prospered as long as the Prophet was followed in respect of these teachings; when we ceased to take interest in the knowledge of others, we began to decline in every respect. Did the early Muslims not take to Greek learning avidly? Did this in any respect undermine their loyalty to Islam?"

Syed Ahmed Khan founded in 1875 the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, which was raised to the status of a university in 1921 as the Muslim University of Aligarh. He attacked the *purdah* system, and the tendency to attribute supernatural powers and miracles to the Prophet and to saints.

The Committee on the Status of Women in India notes in its report[13] that the emancipation of Indian Muslim women was delayed "partly because modern education entered the Muslim community much later, and partly becuase the seclusion of women was defended by leaders of the community more persistently." Hakim Ajmal Khan (1868-1927) was a staunch nationalist and a believer, in principle, in women's emancipation. Yet, as noted by Jawaharlal Nehru in his autobiography (pp. 169-170): "In his domestic habits Hakimji was extraordinarily conservative; he could not, or his family people could not, get out of old habits. I have never seen such amazingly strict *purdah*, or seclusion of women, as existed in his family." Dr. Syed

Mahmud (1889-1971), a close friend of Jawaharlal Nehru, is another example of social conservatism on the part of even a highly educated Muslim nationalist. Dr. Mahmud studied in England and took a doctorate from Germany, but he would not send his daughters to school. Kamala Nehru wrote several letters to him during 1926-27 from Europe, where she was undergoing treatment at different sanatoria, earnestly pleading with Dr. Mahmud to put his daughters to school. This shows how limited was the success of the campaign for Muslim women's education that was launched in the closing years of the 19th century by, among others, the Begum of Bhopal, Sheikh Abdullah of Aligarh, and Justice Karamat Hussain of Lucknow.

The spread of education, delayed and slow though it was, together with reduced material prosperity led to a decline in the practice of polygamy among Muslims, according to the historian R.C. Majumdar. Reformers tried also to revive widow remarriage which had become taboo among the higher classes of Muslims, perhaps in imitation of the corresponding layers of Hindu society. Denial to daughters, in practice, of a share in the father's property was also criticised by the reformers as being contrary to the tenets of Islam.

These various strands of the reform movement which began in the 19th century gained strength from, and in turn reinforced, the struggle for political self-government. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi from 1919, Swaraj and social regeneration became two faces of the same coin.

NOTES

1 Article on "Women, Status" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Macropaedia, Vol. 19, p. 910.

2 On the uprising by poor German peasants in the 16th century, Jawaharlal Nehru writes in *Glimpses of World History* (p. 284): "And Luther, the great reformer, what was his attitude? Did he side with the poor peasants and support their just demands? Not he! On the peasants' demand that serfdom should end, Luther said: 'This article would make all men equal and so change the spiritual kingdom of Christ into an external worldly one. Impossible! An earthly kingdom cannot exist without inequality of persons. Some must be free, others serfs, some rulers, others subjects.' He curses the peasants and calls for their destruction. 'Therefore let all who are able hew them down, slaughter and stab them, openly or in secret, and remember that there is nothing more poisonous, noxious and utterly diabolical than a rebel. You must kill him as you would a mad dog....' Pretty language this, especially coming from a religious leader and reformer."

3 Theodore de Bary, et al, comp., *Sources of Indian Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963), p. 33.
4 Bindu T. Desai in a review of 'Hypatia's Heritage: a history of Women in Science', *Indian Express* (Delhi), 23 November 1986.
5 A.K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva* (Penguin, 1973), p. 12.
6 The translated passages are mainly from *Speaking of Siva*.
7 *Young India*, 3 February 1927.
8 *Ibid*, 24 March 1927.
9 Quoted by R. Chimni in *Bhavan's Journal* (Bombay), 1 July 1981, p. 11.
10 *The Indian Heritage*, pp. 47-48.
11 Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras* (Banaras: Vikrama Publications, 1949).
12 *History of the Freedom Movement*, Vol. 1, p. 303.
13 *Towards Equality*, Government of India, Department of Social Welfare, New Delhi, (1974), p. 53.

3 Women's Movement: Three Scenarios

As a student in England for seven years till 1912, Jawaharlal Nehru was influenced by the thought currents and emancipation movements in Europe of that time. He recalls in the autobiography (p. 25) that, at Cambridge, he was "vaguely attracted to the Fabians and socialistic ideas, and interested in the political movements of the day. Ireland and the woman suffrage movement interested me especially. I remember also how, during a visit to Ireland in the summer of 1910, the early beginnings of Sinn Fein had attracted me."

On a visit to Europe after he had become a prominent participant in India's freedom struggle, Jawaharlal attended the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities held at Brussels in February 1927. This conference resulted in the formation of a permanent organisation, the League Against Imperialism which had among its patrons such distinguished persons as Albert Einstein and Madame Sun Yat-sen. Jawaharlal met many communists at the Brussels Congress. His interest in Marxism was further stimulated by a visit to the Soviet Union in November of the same year. Clara Zetkin, the veteran communist and women's leader of Germany, was among those he met at an international women's conference in Moscow.

During subsequent visits to Europe in the thirties, Jawaharlal won the friendship and respect of a wide cross-section of the British intelligentsia. These included women prominent in public life such as Ellen Wilkinson,[1] Lady Astor,[2] and Jennie Lee.[3] Jawaharlal must have been struck by the points of similarity and of contrast between the women's movement in the West and in India. Women in the Western countries had little support from men in their struggle for recognition of their political, economic and social rights. In India, on the other hand, improvement of women's status was an integral part of the process of national regeneration that began early in the 19th century with Rammohun Roy. The Indian National Congress ac-

cepted the principle of equal political rights for women as early as in 1918. Women fought side by side with men in the mass struggle for national liberation that began soon afterwards under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

European Enlightenment: For Men Only?

The crass male chauvinism of many among the thinkers of the European 'Enlightenment' is incredible in retrospect. It matches the worst doctrines of India's dark ages. To Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), the French philosopher of democratic sovereignty, women were not part of the social contract or the 'general will'. Kumari Jayawardena writes in *Feminism in Europe*:[4] "In his famous discourse on education, the boy (Emile) had to be educated for liberation from oppressive structures, and had to be trained to be independent, strong, unselfish, able not only to assert his equal rights, but also to expose the corruption in society. The girl (Sophie) had to be educated in a totally opposite manner. According to Rousseau only man was rational and capable of thinking rationally and abstractly, therefore women, lacking these qualities, could not be given freedom and equality. On the contrary, they had to be subjected and controlled as their passions were a source of danger. Therefore Sophie's education should be based on the view that 'it is according to nature for the woman to obey the man'; a woman should be taught to be chaste, obedient, alluring and dependent, with qualities of shame and modesty and an ability... to *put up with injustice*. Woman's obedience to man was necessary... since women had physical disabilities (e.g. childbirth) and because only by controlling women could a man be sure of the paternity of his children."

Rousseau's view was vigorously refuted by Olympe de Gouges, a French radical. She drew up in 1791, on the model of the Declaration of the Rights of Man adopted by the National Assembly of revolutionary France, a Declaration of the Rights of Woman. This document demanded not only better education, equal rights for women in access to government employment and equal property rights, but reform of the law to introduce a 'social contract' on marriage. The proposed contract envisaged that property would be held in common by the husband and wife, and that marriage would last for the duration of their affections.

The most vigorous English critic of Rousseau's thesis was Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97), best known among the early women writers on the rights of women. Herself forced by circumstances -- her father was given to drunkenness and could not support his family -- to earn her own living as a teacher and a journalist in London, she came to know some leading non-conformist thinkers and writers of the time. Among them were the priest Richard Price, the political philosopher William Godwin, the writer Thomas Paine and the poet William Blake.

Following the publication of *Vindication of the Rights of Man* by Thomas Paine (he was, though an Englishman, a friend of the American Revolution which began in 1776 and of the French Revolution of 1789), Mary Wollstonecraft wrote the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Advocating the same education for boys and girls, she said: "Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, *outward* obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives.

"How grossly do they insult us who thus advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes!... It is time to... restore to them their lost dignity and make them as part of the human species."

Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments had little effect on Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), a pioneer of bourgeois democracy in England. He opposed feudal privileges and advocated political and legal reforms in the interest of the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'. But Bentham excluded women from 'the greatest number'. He criticised Blackstone, the conservative British jurist, on many grounds but was in agreement with him on the subordinate status of women. Blackstone had written in 1758: "... the husband and wife are one person in law... by marriage the very being or legal existence of woman is suspended or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of her husband, under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything." Bentham, too, held: "The wife should submit to the laws of the husband."

A counterpart of Bentham's in France was Proudhon (1809-65) who, despite his radical views on other matters, believed that a woman's intellectual capacity was one-third of a man's. He said that

there were only two roles for a woman -- to be a housewife or a prostitute. Here are echoes, in 18th and 19th century Europe, of the worst attitudes towards women that were prevalent in India of the medieval Puranic age.

It was only in 1870 that married women in Britain were allowed to retain the earnings and property acquired by them after marriage. And until the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 the married woman lost to the husband the control of whatever property she held at the time of marriage. The following is from a satire published in 1868 by a woman writer, Frances Cobbe Power, under the title 'Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors'. A man from another planet engages in conversation with an Englishman on the subject of marriage and property:

"Ah! What a pretty sight! A sweet young woman in
white giving her hand to the good-looking fellow--all
the company decked in holiday attire and joy
bells ringing. She is receiving some great honour,
the Prize of Virtue perhaps?"
"Yes, she is being married."
"I notice her husband has said, 'With all my worldly goods I thee
endow.' Does that mean
then she will henceforth have the control of his money?"
"Not exactly. By law it is *her* goods and earnings,
present and future, which belong to him."
"Your criminals -- do they forfeit their entire
property on conviction?"
"Yes, for the worst of crimes -- murder, for example."
"Excuse me, I must seem to you so stupid. Why
is the property of the woman who commits murder
and the property of the woman who commits matrimony
dealt with alike by your laws?"

Another grossly discriminatory law related to prostitution. Under the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864, applicable to military garrison towns, if a woman was believed to be a prostitute she could be compulsorily examined medically, hospitalised and imprisoned if she refused treatment. The Ladies National Association criticised the double standard of morality: "It is unjust to punish the sex who are the victims of a vice, and leave unpunished the sex who are the main

cause... we consider that liability to arrest, forced medical examination and... imprisonment with hard labour... are punishments of the most degrading kind." The Acts were eventually repealed in 1886.

Contraception was another issue on which women had to fight, and they were supported by men of radical views. Two advocates of free thought, Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, were tried for republishing a book on methods of birth control. Though they were acquitted, Annie Besant subsequently lost the custody of her child on separation from her husband, as she was deemed unfit to be a mother.

The biggest battle that British women had to wage was for suffrage. An early and rare male advocate of women's right to vote was John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). In collaboration with his wife Harriet Taylor he wrote an essay on 'The Enfranchisement of Women' (1851). In a subsequent work on 'The Subjection of Women' (1869), he said that "one of the chief hindrances to human improvement" was the subordination of women which "ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other."

However, it was not till the militant movement launched by the Women's Social and Political Union, formed in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), that the demand for women's suffrage began to be taken seriously. The Union demanded that instead of the question being left to private members' bills (seven such bills were defeated in the House of Commons when the Liberal Party was in power), the Cabinet should formulate its policy. The Liberals were divided on the issue, with the opponents of women's suffrage having the upper hand.

Women's militancy took the form of marches on Parliament during which the demonstrators were stopped and arrested. There were hunger strikes in jail and forcible feeding of the strikers by prison authorities. To relieve the congestion in jails, a law entitled the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act was passed, and came to be popularly known as the Cat and Mouse Act. Militant women organised window-smashing raids on shops and on elite men's clubs. There was breaking of street lamps and damage of train seats and golf greens. Telephone wires were cut and fuse boxes destroyed. This was in line with Emmeline Pankhurst's declaration in 1912: "There is something that governments care for more than human life, and that is the security of property and so it is through

property that we shall strike the enemy." Hundreds of women were arrested and roughed up by the police, Emmeline herself being imprisoned repeatedly.

The movement was at its peak when the First World War broke out in 1914. Emmeline and her daughter Christobel stopped the agitation and joined the war effort. This showed how the ruling classes can invoke national solidarity to override protest movements against domestic oppression. Only a tough mind like George Bernard Shaw's could see the imperialist war as what it was, and he opposed it. He wrote in *Common Sense about the War*, published as a supplement to the *New Statesman* of 14 November 1914:

> Militarism must not be treated as a disease peculiar to Prussia. It is rampant in England. I see both nations duped by their Junkers and Militarists.... Will you now at last believe, O stupid British, German and French patriots, what the socialists have been telling you for so many years: that your Union Jacks and tricolours and imperial eagles are only toys to keep you amused, and that there are only two real flags in the world henceforth -- the red flag of Democratic Socialism and the black flag of Capitalism, the flag of God and the flag of Mammon.

For expressing such views Bernard Shaw had to face obloquy and social boycott by fellow-writers.

Another person who saw the First World War clearly as an imperialist war was Emmeline Pankhurst's other daughter, Sylvia. She had already formed an East London Federation of Suffragettes and tried to forge a link between the women's movement and socialist struggles. Sylvia Pankhurst visited Moscow soon after the Bolshevik revolution, and attended the second congress of the Third International.

During the First World War many British women enlisted in the women's wings which were established in all the three armed services. They worked not merely as cooks and stewards but as radio mechanics, meteorologists and cinema operators. This won them some limited recognition. Women's suffrage was conceded in principle by the Representation of the People Act of 1918. But the right to vote was confined to certain categories like married women, and women university graduates of age 30 and above. Shortly afterwards women were allowed to sit in the House of Commons as members.

(This was in happy contrast to the position in 1839. Flora Tristan, an early French socialist, on a visit to London that year, disguised herself as a Turkish male in order to watch the proceedings of the House of Commons since women were not even allowed to enter its precincts). Peeresses could not sit in the Lords even after women had been allowed to sit in the Commons as members. Lady Rhondda petitioned the Committee of Privileges in 1922 for a "seat, voice and place" but her claim was disallowed. (It was as late as 1958 that the Life Peerage Act allowed peeresses to sit in the House of Lords). In 1928 the minimum age of women electors was lowered to 21, corresponding to that of males. Universal adult franchise for women came in gradual steps thereafter.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the war for independence of the American colonies from Britain, which began in 1776, was a bourgeois democratic movement that ignored both women and the Negroes. Following vehement discussion at the Philadelphia convention after the Revolutionary War, it was left to each State of the Union to lay down its own qualifications for voting. Abigail, wife of John Adams -- one of the architects of the U.S. Constitution -- urged her husband in vain to 'Remember the Ladies' and not to give unlimited power to husbands. She warned: "We will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation." Alarmed by this assertiveness, Adams wrote to a friend that it would open the floodgates: "New claims will arise; Women will demand a vote,... and every man who has not a farthing, will demand an equal voice with any other..." To his own wife he said: "We have been told that our struggle has loosened the bonds of government everywhere. That children and apprentices were disobedient, that colleges were grown turbulent, that [Red] Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their masters. But your letter was the first intimation that another tribe more numerous and powerful than all the rest were grown dicontented."

Even among white men who campaigned for abolition of slavery, some did not support women's franchise. On the other hand, there were men who acknowledged the right of white women to franchise but opposed voting rights for Negroes, or would confine the right to liberated male slaves. Some white women, too, were for voting rights for themselves but not for Negroe men or women. In this welter of contradictions, suffragettes who stood also for the abolition of slavery, like Sarah and Angelina Grimke, concluded that the issues

of freedom for slaves and freedom for women should be linked. They began to agitate on both the issues.

The need for such linking became dramatically evident at the World Anti-Slavery Convention held at London in 1840. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton, the women in the U.S. delegation, were not allowed to take part in the proceedings. The two established in the same year an Equal Rights Association for the emancipation of slaves and of women. In 1848 they organised a Woman's Rights Convention at Seneca in New York State. The Convention adopted a document, based on the American Declaration of Independence, which said: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men *and women* are created equal.... The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man towards woman."

Among black women of the U.S. who took part in the struggle for women's rights was a former slave bearing the name of Sojourner Truth. She said at a women's convention at Ohio in 1851:

> I think that 'twixt the Negroes of the South and the women of the North, all talking about rights, the white man will be in a fix pretty soon.... I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns, I could work as much and eat as much as a man -- when I could get it -- and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? That man there, he says women can't have as much rights as men 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman, man had nothing do with Him.

I am reminded of the story narrated by an African member of a women's delegation which participated in a seminar organised in the German Democratic Republic by the Women's International Democratic Federation. She recalled an occasion when she led a deputation to a Minister of the government of her newly independent country with a charter of women's demands. When the Minister gave a hesitant and evasive reply, she asked him indignantly: "Why do you forget that we women have borne you men in our womb and fed you and nurtured you for nine months, free of cost?" Hearing this story while travelling together in a bus, we burst into laughter and admired her courage and candour.

The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1861 ended slavery, but not women's inequality. The cause of women's

suffrage had to be asserted, as in Britain, by a militant agitation entailing demonstrations, arrests and hunger strikes. As in Britain, so in the U.S.A., the part played by women in the First World War helped to break the opposition to women's franchise. In 1920 the 19th Amendment was ratified by three-fourths of the States and became part of the basic federal law. It laid down: "The right of citizens of the U.S. to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the U.S. or by any State on account of sex." Women were thus able to vote in the Presidential elections of 1920 onward, as in other national and State elections.

Socialism: Utopian and Marxist

Even during the feudal period in Europe there had been some radical Christian preachers who condemned the established church as a cruel mockery of the precept and example of Jesus. They corresponded to the egalitarian devotional saints of India, though fewer in number and more limited in their impact. They were forerunners of today's 'liberation theologists' of the West. Among such was Thomas Munzer of Germany with his vision of a just society in which all would be equal and free, brothers and sisters of one another. He was among those who inspired the peasants' war of the 1520s against feudal lords in Germany.

After the growth of capitalist economy came the Utopian socialists. They were so described later by Karl Marx and his followers who claimed to expound, in contrast, scientific socialism. The approach of the Utopian socialists to the removal of social evils was materialist and humanist, rather than religious. Prominent among them were Robert Owen, Charles Fourier and Saint-Simon. With a variation only in emphasis, all three attacked private property, organised religion and the institution of the indissoluble and male-dominated marriage. Many socialists, both Utopian and Marxist, denounced bourgeois marriage as legalised prostitution. By this they meant that marriage being the only 'career' open to a woman of the middle and upper classes, she gave herself to a man -- almost invariably of her own class -- in return for care and maintenance. It was as if the man had the use of his wife's body, as of a prostitute, in return for money. Divorce was disfavoured by the church, and the laws on the subject used to be such as to make it impossible to end

the marital relationship even when it had been drained of love and affection. It was in this context that socialists denounced bourgeois marriage.

Owen (1771-1858) did not advocate free love (though his detractors called him and his associates whore-mongers) but wanted husband and wife to separate when they could no longer endure each other. Children, as in Plato's ideal republic, were to be separated from their parents around the age of two, and brought up by trained teachers. Owen, like Plato, was an idealist who wanted to abolish the system of the family and of private property with their distracting loyalties which divert men and women from service of the community. Both wanted human beings to transcend the sense of difference between their 'own' children and other children, and selfish attachment to one's own property and prosperity rather than the community's well-being. We who have observed in recent decades in India the bitter truth of the lack of genuine involvement of most teachers in teaching their wards in State-run schools will find it difficult to share the faith of Plato and some of the utopian socialists, as also Frederick Engels later, in the socialisation of child care. I recall how, even in such a simple matter as conserving electricity by turning off lights and fans while leaving an office room, Indira Gandhi tried in vain, through personal example and exhortation, to motivate government employees. The same men and women would in their own homes, be careful to keep the electricity bill down. Can such government officials be trusted to take care of children of unknown parentage as if they were their own?

Owen tried out his ideas of communitarian living with no family, no church and no monogamy -- in the sense of the compulsory chaining together of a man and woman -- both in his native England and in America. The experiments failed, but Owenite communes continued to be founded by those who were influenced by his ideas.

Fourier (1772-1837), the French radical thinker, attacked the hypocrisy of the sexual mores of contemporary European 'civilisation'. He held it to be inhuman that men could freely enjoy physical love while women were treated as minors and as the property of fathers and husbands. Fourier envisioned a new order which he called Harmony, in which there would be no permanent marriage but no chaotic promiscuity either, no private property and no individual family. People would live in large communes with all engaging in both mental and manual work and without the division

of tasks into masculine and feminine. Fourier concluded the chapter on women in his book entitled 'Harmony' with the celebrated thesis: "Social progress is in proportion to the progress in the liberation of women."

Saint-Simon (1760-1825) asked what would happen to France if all the 30,000 landlords, princes, aristocrats and bureaucrats were to die suddenly, and answered: nothing. He advocated a society in which 'industrialists' (a term in which he included all working people as well as capitalists, intellectuals and scientists) should have power, with the intellectual, particularly the technical, elite in command. While condemning bourgeois marriage based on considerations of money as legalised prostitution, the Saint-Simonists did not attack monogamy but wanted to elevate women to the same level of consciousness as men. Saint-Simon was inclined towards religion and advocated a New Christianity based on Love.

Among prominent women Saint-Simonists was Suzanne Voilquin who affirmed that the work of liberation of women had to be the work of women themselves. She saw the redemption of society as coming from women, who were the specialists of 'feeling': "Are we not all Loving Ones as wives and mothers? Mothers! This holy bond, uniting all of us will be in future our most beautiful and glorious title. While speaking of mankind one will no longer use the term 'Sons of Men' but 'Children of Women'." Here is an echo of the reverence in which motherhood has been held in our country where India is *Bharat Mata* and life-giving rivers--like the Ganga and Yamuna -- are also of the feminine gender.

Another Saint-Simonist was Desiree Veret, of proletarian origin like Suzanne. She helped to found a feminist journal, and wrote a series of articles on what 'free love' should mean for the new woman who refuses the alternatives both of bourgeois marriage slavery and of prostitution. Women like Desiree came under attack from male proletarians as well as from bourgeois men and women.

Following the failure of the June 1848 revolution in France, some of the working women of Paris brought out a journal called *La Politique des Femmes* ('Women's Politics'). They had the same objectives as socialist men, but were aware also of the need to fight for their own interests: "Our political aim is the same as that of the men, but our standpoint is different. Each of us has to preserve his/her originality. Under the broad banner of socialism the politics of women and the politics of men can march in a broad front."

Karl Marx (1818-83) wanted the marriage relationship to be freed from the domination both of the church and of the capitalist cash nexus. He wrote in the course of an article in *Rheinische Zeitung* (15 November 1842) on a Divorce Bill to the effect that: The essence of marriage is human morality, not spiritual sanctity, not determination from above but self-determination, inner natural consecration, not supernatural sanction, loyal subordination to the nature of the relationship, not passive obedience to commandments that stand above the nature of the relationship. Secular marriage should not be placed under the supervision of ecclesiastical authorities.[5]

His own marriage at the age of 25 with Jenny von Westphalen was recorded in the registry office of Bad Kreuznach on 19 June 1843. It was preceded a week earlier by a marriage contract which provided for legal common ownership of property between the partners. Jenny, older by four years, was not intimidated by the scholarship of her husband, and offered him the following advice in a letter of 21 June 1844, soon after their baby girl had arrived: "Don't write with too much rancour and irritation. You know how much more effect your other articles have had. Write either in a matter of fact and subtle way, or humorously and lightly. Please, dear heart of mine, let your pen run over paper, even if it should on occasion stumble and fall, and the sentence with it. Your thoughts all the same stand erect like the grenadiers of the old guard, so honourably firm and courageous."

Both Karl Marx and his collaborator Frederick Engels (1820-95) were at one with the Utopian socialists in holding the bourgeois institution of marriage in contempt. The Communist Manifesto[6] said that the bourgeoisie, just as it had "stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe" -- by converting the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers -- had "torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation."[7]

On the sexual morality of the bourgeoisie: "Our bourgeois, not content with having the wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives." As for the proletarian who was without private property thanks to the destruction of the petty artisan and the small peasant consequent on the development of in-

dustry, his relation to his wife and children no longer had anything idyllic about it.

Marx saw the possibility of the emancipation of women in their being drawn out of the domestic sphere into social production. He wrote sixteen years later in *Das Capital* (1864): "The fact of the collective working group being composed of individuals of both sexes and all ages, must necessarily, under suitable conditions, become a source of humane development, although in its spontaneously developed, brutal, capitalistic form, where the labourer exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the labourer, that fact is a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery."

Frederick Engels in his work on 'The origin of the family, private property and state' (1884) established a linkage between the rise of private property, monogamy and the patriarchal family. He envisaged the socialisation of child care and abolition of the bourgeois monogamous family following the entry of women into wage labour: "In the great majority of cases today, at least in the possessing classes, the husband is obliged to earn a living and support his family, and that in itself gives him a position of supremacy... Within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat... the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, and that this in turn demands the abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society." This statement hardly explains the persistence of the wife's subordination even among the working masses as distinct from the possessing classes. Not only does the working class woman in India today labour hard both at home and in the work place, her earnings are liable to be snatched away forcibly by the husband and squandered on liquor. It would appear therefore that women's emancipation is to be sought not only through changes in economic relations but, and perhaps more importantly, by raising the level of consciousness of rights and of duties, on the part of men as well as women.

In the same year as the Communist Manifesto (1848) appeared an 'Address of a Girl'. It was an open letter by Louise Otto-Peters in which she pointed out the injustice of one-half of humanity being treated as minors dependent on the other, male half. She criticised male workers who opposed women's employment as a threat to their own interests. The first women's journal in Germany, which Louise Otto-Peters established in 1849, carried on its front page the motto:

"I rally women citizens for the realm of freedom."

Working men were divided on the issue. The proletarian movement included a large number of men who shared the bourgeois view of women's role. Thus the German section submitted a memorandum to the First International at Geneva, in 1868, which said: "To wives and mothers belongs the work in the family and the household. While the man is the representative of the serious public and family duties, the wife and mother should represent the comfort and the poetry of domestic life..."

A prominent votary of the scientific socialism propounded by Marx and Engels was Clara Eissner (1857-1933). After studying at the Leipzing Teachers' College for Women, she became a socialist under the influence of the Russian revolutionary, Osip Zetkin, whom she married. Clara Zetkin joined the Social Democratic Party of Germany in 1881 and took part in the Paris convention of 1889 which founded the Second International. In 1892 she began editing the socialist women's newspaper *Die Gleichheit*.

Like Bernard Shaw and Sylvia Pankhurst, Clara Zetkin saw the First World War as a conflict between rival imperialisms. The Communist Manifesto had concluded with these ringing words: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!" In the spirit of this exhortation, Clara Zetkin, who had helped to found the International Socialist Women's Congress in 1907, organised during the First World War the first International Women's Conference Against War. It met at Berne, in neutral Switzerland, in March 1915 and on return to Germany she had to serve a prison term. Clara Zetkin joined the newly formed Communist Party of Germany in 1919. She was elected several times to the Reichstag and presided over its penultimate session during the Weimar regime in August 1932.

Clara Zetkin set out her views on the relationship between women's status and the socialist movement in a speech at the 1896 Congress of the Social Democratic Party at Gotha. She viewed the struggle for women's emancipation as being identical with the struggle of the proletariat against capitalism, with working women nevertheless needing special protection and improvement in working conditions. She said: "... the liberation struggle of the proletarian woman cannot be a struggle like that of the bourgeois woman against the man of her class. On the contrary, it is a struggle together with the man of her class against the class of capitalists... The final

goal of her struggle is not free competition with man but the establishment of the political rule of the proletariat."

Unlike some other socialists, Clara Zetkin did not advocate abolition of the institution of the family; on the contrary she stressed the role of woman as mother and wife: "By no means should it be the task of the socialist agitation of women to alienate women from their duties as mothers and wives. On the contrary, one has to see to it that she can fulfil these tasks better than hitherto.... So many mothers, so many wives, who inspire their husbands and their children with class consciousness are doing as much as the women comrades whom we see in our meetings."[8]

Though Clara Zetkin's feminism was mild and unaggressive, the conservative leadership of the Social Democratic Party of Germany disapproved of her. They did not like such developments as her organising the women's international conference against war at Bern in 1915, or the autonomous functioning, under her leadership, of the women's wing of the party. The conservative male leaders replaced the national women's conference by regional women's conferences. They went on to manoeuvre the removal of Clara from the editorship of *Die Gleichheit* which had criticised the party's line on the question of the war.

The other great woman communist of the early part of this century and a close friend and collaborator of Clara Zetkin's was Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), brilliant thinker and fearless fighter. Born in a Jewish family in Russian Poland, she enrolled at the university of Zurich which was one of the few institutions that admitted women on an equal basis at that time, and took a doctor's degree before plunging into the socialist movement. She did not marry formally but lived with Leo Jogiches, a comrade in the cause, for 15 years till 1907. And political relations bound their lives together till the end. Rosa Luxemburg's view of the institution of marriage is shown also by her going through the legal formality with Gustav Lubeck, son of an old friend, solely in order to gain permanent German citizenship: the two parted company outside the registry office.

When the First World War broke out, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht led the small group of members of the Social Democratic Party who refused to support their own imperialist government. When the German war effort collapsed and there was a revolutionary uprising in November 1918, Rosa Luxemburg was keen on its success. She was also anxious that the infant Bolshevik

Revolution in Russia should be saved from death by strangulation by counter-revolutionary forces within and outside. This was despite her difference with Lenin on what she saw as the Bolshevik party's over-centralisation and methods of terror. "The dictatorship of the proletariat," she said, "consists in the application of democracy, not in its abolition." Here was a brilliant statement of the values which are now being reaffirmed in the Soviet Union by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Rosa Luxemburg's interests extended beyond politics to literature. She wrote about Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy: "... the writings of both have... an inspiring, arousing and liberating effect upon us. And this is because their starting points are not reactionary, their thoughts and emotions are not governed by the desire to hold on to the *status quo*, nor are they motivated by social hatred, narrow-mindedness, or caste egotism. On the contrary, theirs is the warmest love for mankind and the deepest response to social injustice. And thus the reactionary Dostoyevsky becomes the artistic agent of the 'insulted and injured', as one of his works is called. Only the conclusions drawn by him and Tolstoy,... only the way out of the social labyrinth which they believe they have found, leads them into the bypaths of mysticism and asceticism. But with the true artist, the social formula that he recommends is a matter of secondary importance; the source of his art, its animating spirit, is decisive."

Rosa Luxemburg's life was cut short by her loyalty to the Spartakusband[9] which she had helped to form as a radical group, to counter the conservative leadership of the social democratic party. Robert Looker says: "... within the Spartakusbund itself, Luxemburg was unable to prevent its inexperienced rank and file from taking a series of decisions -- boycotting the elections to the Constituent Assembly, prematurely establishing a German Communist Party (the K.P.D.), participating in the January (1919) Rising -- which undermined still further its limited chances of success. The rising proved abortive, and Luxemburg, whose sense of solidarity had prevailed over her better judgment in supporting it, was among its many victims. On January 15th, 1919, she was arrested and then murdered, her skull smashed in under a soldier's rifle-butt."[10]

The conservative leaderhip of the German Social Democratic Party felt uncomfortable with Rosa Luxemburg and wanted to clip her wings, as earlier in the case of Clara Zetkin. Mary-Alice Waters says in her Introduction to a collection of Luxemburg's speeches and writings[11] that the leaders of the SPD respected her exceptional

abilities but considered her "a cantankerous foreign youngster who, on top of everything else, was a woman. One of their first proposals to her was that she turn her attentions toward the SPD's organisation for women, where they thought she properly belonged, and where they hoped she could be sidetracked and eliminated from the mainstream of the party's political life. She promptly turned down the proposal... she steadfastly refused to be forced into any traditional woman's role within the party. Unfortunately, she rarely, if ever, wrote about the special problems of the struggle for women's liberation. She considered herself, and she was, a revolutionary leader of men *and* women, and she dismissed the insults directed against her.... She understood that women can achieve their full liberation only with the triumph of the socialist revolution and the elimination of their economic bondage to the family institution, and she devoted all her energies to bringing about that revolution."

Other instances of bias against women within the socialist movement have been alleged by Maria Mies in *Feminism in Europe*. She recalls the pioneering work by Flora Tristan (whose visit to the House of Commons in 1839 disguised as a Turkish male has been mentioned earlier), under the title *Promenades dans Londres*, on the condition of prostitutes in London. Flora found that 80,000 to 100,000 women lived on prostitution. Of them, around 15,000 to 20,000 were totally destitute. She also noticed that Irish workers received the lowest wages and lived in horrible conditions. Flora wrote about the alienating and debilitating effect of the specialised division of labour in factories, which Marx later analysed graphically. After referring to these findings of Flora Tristan, Maria Mies says: "It is amazing that Engels, who wrote his book on the condition of the working class in England five years later, did not mention her book as a source.... Maybe this was one instance of sexism which we find several times in the history of ideas.... See for instance Lenin who did not mention Rosa Luxemburg's work on imperialism in his own book which he wrote six years later." Whatever might be the truth of these particular criticisms, socialists no less than others need to be on guard against the old Adam of male chauvinism.

The Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 was a landmark in the history of women's emancipation. It transformed the status of women in the vast Czarist empire, which now became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. One of the earliest decrees of the new regime headed by Lenin conferred on women equal political and

economic rights with men. Women ceased to be slaves chained to the kitchen, and to be treated as goods and chattel. Marriage laws, which had been weighted heavily against women, were drastically altered. Relief through divorce was made available in the event of marriage proving a failure.

These changes were systematically misrepresented by many publicists in the countries of the West, whose governments were bitterly opposed to the newborn socialist state and tried to strangle it through blockade and armed intervention in support of the counter-revolutionary forces. Anti-Soviet propaganda spread the canard that, along with land and industrial capital, women had been 'nationalised' in Russia.

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote a series of newspaper articles following his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1927, giving his impressions of "this strange Eurasian country of the hammer and sickle, where workers and peasants sit on the thrones of the mighty..." He wrote on the many changes that had taken place during the first ten years of the Bolshevik regime: reduction in economic disparities; removal of illiteracy; improvements in agriculture; cultural development of the non-Russian nationalities; and the new role of women.

On the last theme, Jawaharlal began by confronting the question, "'Have they really nationalised women in Russia?' That is, almost invariably, the first question that is asked about Russia. It is not easy to understand what nationalisation of women means. Probably the newspaper correspondents and editors who have taken such pains to spread this particular item of 'news' do not themselves know what they write about. At the back of their minds, perhaps, there is an idea of promiscuous sexual intercourse going on all over the Soviet Union. And they must imagine or wish others to imagine that the status of woman has been terribly degraded, and she has become a mere chattel for the fulfilment of man's passions.

"...Whatever other failings, the Russian woman of today may have, she is certainly not a chattel or plaything of man. She is independent, aggressively so, and refuses to play second fiddle to man.

"I was present for a while at a women's conference in Moscow. Krupskaya, the widow of Lenin, was there, and Madame Sun Yat-sen, and the aged Clara Zetkin, and a large number of women from foreign countries. And all the women from the other countries of Europe who spoke, envied their Russian sisters for the social and economic freedom they had won."

Eight years later the British authorities in India came out with their own version of anti-Soviet slander, and Jawaharlal reacted strongly. In a statement to the Press on 15 June 1936, he said: "... we are told exactly what communism is: 'Communism spells destruction, despair, death. Communism means the rooting out of all religion. Communism entails the complete elimination of culture. Communism robs the people of their land, their jewellery, their money and all their earthly possessions. Communism turns boys into thieves and murderers; it makes prostitutes of the nation's girlhood....' This bright specimen of thought and writing has been fathered by the publicity department of the Government of India... what shall we say to this nauseating product of a diseased mentality?"

India: Working Together for Progress

The Indian scenario is in contrast to the linear progression in the West from the bourgeois-democratic revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, to the militant struggles of women in the early part of this century reinforced by the socialist movement, and the acceptance of women's full equality with men -- at least in principle -- after the Second World War.

In India, women's equality has been an integral part of the cyclical movements of social and intellectual regeneration that have marked the country's long history. The first of these movements was led by Mahavira and Buddha after the Vedic vision of a single human family and, within it, the equality and mutuality of man and woman -- affirmed as in the *Satpadi* verse quoted in Chapter I (iv) -- became dimmed and distorted. Among the peaks of subsequent waves of resurgence were the Bhakti-Sufi movement of the medieval period and the renaissance initiated by Rammohun Roy in the 19th century which culminated in the unique Gandhi-Nehru blend of science, socialism and humanism.

In the modern period, the bourgeois democratic revolution in Europe and the U.S.A. tended to proclaim equality for men only. Even in the working class movement in the West, women had to contend against proletarian male chauvinists. In contrast, Indian women participated together with men in the anti-imperialist struggle, of which the first round was the movement against Bengal's partition in the first decade of this century. Without having to wage a

fight for the franchise, let alone having to resort to violence, India's women gained, along with men, universal adult suffrage under the republican Constitution which came into force in 1950. The Indian Constitution simultaneously put an end -- at least in the eyes of the law -- to untouchability. This illustrates the holistic character of the regeneration of Indian society that has been attempted from time to time through the ages, even if not fully realised at any time. The Gandhian approach of non-violent striving for Sarvodaya ('welfare of all') is a characteristically Indian contribution to the goal as well as to the strategy of human development.

After Gandhiji took charge of the nation's affairs, social reform -- which necessarily included women's emancipation -- and the struggle for political independence became intertwining strands of a single process of regeneration. Prior to 1920, however, there had been a long debate on the question of the priority to be given to social change vis-a-vis political advance towards self-government.

At one extreme was the opinion of Mahadev Govind Ranade that the people of India needed to go through a period of tutelage for developing the qualities of a modern nation and becoming fit for independence: "Both Hindus and Mohammedans lack many of those virtues represented by the love of order and regulated authority. Both are wanting in the love of municipal freedom, in the exercise of virtues necessary for civic life, and in aptitudes for mechanical skill, in the love of science and research, in the love and daring of adventurous discovery, the resolution to master difficulties, and in chivalrous respect for womankind." Ranade held that social reform and political progress were inextricably linked: "You cannot be liberal by halves. You cannot be liberal in politics and conservative in religion. The heart and the head must go together. It is an idle dream to expect men to remain enchained and enshackled in their own superstitions and social evil while they are struggling hard to win rights and privileges from their rulers."

At the other extreme was Tilak who was a radical in politics but a conservative in social matters. He wanted to concentrate attention on the struggle for politcal freedom. When the Indian Natonal Congress met in 1895 in Tilak's home town of Poona, those opposed to Congress involvement in social reform had their way. They threatened to burn down the *pandal* (temporary structure) if the National Social Conference founded by Ranade in 1887 -- which had for years met annually as an adjunct of the Congress -- was allowed

its use.

Some others, like Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946), were staunchly traditional in certain matters but stood for change in other respects. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur recalls that while Malaviyaji never took food or drank water from the hands of anybody except a Brahmin of his own caste, in other matters of social reform he was most progessive "and I was specially drawn to him by his indignation at the many disabilities from which Indian women suffered."[12] Madan Mohan Malaviya was a pioneer in the promotion of women's education. He also advocated throwing temples open to Harijans.

There were yet others who acknowledged the need for social reform but wanted the Congress, as the political organisation of a multi-religious and heterogeneous people, to leave the reform of the social practices of each community and region to its own leaders. Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), renowned for his study of the economic drain in *Poverty and un-British Rule in India*, wanted reformation of the practices of each religious community to be left to reformers from within that community. He said in his presidential address at the second Congress session at Calcutta in 1886: "A National Congress must confine itself to questions in which the entire nation has a direct participation, and it must leave the adjustment of social reforms and other class questions to class congresses."

Badruddin Tyabji, first in the line of distinguished nationalist Muslims, was of the same view. He said at the third Congress session at Madras in 1887: "Whereas any question of social reform must of necessity affect some particular part or some particular community of India only ... the only wise, and, indeed the only possible course we can adopt is to confine our discussions to such questions as affect the whole of India at large..."

Despite this variety of approaches, the Congress could not dodge the issue of social reform after a meeting of representatives of the Depressed Classes[13] at Bombay in November 1917 explicitly called upon the Indian National Congress "to pass at its forthcoming session a distinct and independent resolution declaring to the people of India at large the necessity, justice and righteousness of removing all the disabilities imposed by religion and custom upon the Depressed Classes. These disabilities, social in origin, amount in law and practice to political disabilities and as such fall legitimately within the political mission and propaganda of the Indian National Congress."

The Calcutta Congress of December 1917 accordingly passed the

following resolution: "...this Congress urges upon the people of India the necessity, justice and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed by custom upon the Depressed Classes, the disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience."

The following year the Congress commitment to social change was extended beyond caste, to cover also the equality of the sexes.

At a special session held in September 1918 at Bombay, Anasuya Sarabhai appealed to the conscience of the men delegates in these words: "You are all assembled here to preserve your self-respect, to free yourself from the fetters of dependency. You have fully realised what it is to submit to injustice and tyranny. If the bureaucracy claims to be the judge of your needs and to legislate for you, you look upon it as an insult. I, therefore, ask you my countrymen, whether you will deny to your sisters the rights you demand for yourselves?" Responding to this call, the Congress adopted a resolution urging that "women, possessing the same qualifications as are laid down for men in any part of the scheme (of constitutional reforms) shall not be disqualified on account of sex."

The same year, the Muslim League -- whose role at that time was not hostile but complementary to the Congress -- also declared itself in favour of women's enfranchisement on the same terms as men. These developments marked, formally and for the first time, the identification of the political movement for self-government with the cause of women's suffrage and emancipation.

Espousal of the women's cause by the country's two main political parties bore out the confidence in India's menfolk conceding the rights of their sisters which had been voiced in 1917 by Abadi Banu, popularly known as Bi Amman (d. 1924). She was the mother of the Ali Brothers (Mohamed Ali and Shaukat Ali) who led the Khalifat movement in 1920-21 along with Mahatma Gandhi. In a letter to the Women's Indian Association, which was organising a deputation to wait on the Secretary of State for India (Edwin Montagu) and the Viceroy (Lord Chelmsford) to plead for women's franchise, Bi Amman said: "May I not ask if it would not be better to bring the pressure of our united wills to bear on our husbands, fathers, brothers and sons instead of going to beg before others, however exalted? For the honour of Indian womanhood -- nay, for the honour of the manhood of India also -- I would have liked that no such deputation was going to wait on the Secretary of State and the Viceroy, but that

one should have gone out to the Congress and the Muslim League and declared openly and in clear terms what the women of Hindustan wanted from their men. I am sure whatever the women would have asked, the men would have sooner or later provided." These words were to prove prophetic.

The resurgence of Indian women in the first half of this century was at once the consequence of, and a significant contribution to, the freedom struggle. This struggle was for more than political independence; it was simultaneously a process of social regeneration. Women stepped beyond domestic walls for the first time to take part on a large scale in the struggle for independence led by Gandhiji, as well as in implementing his constructive programme. This participation in the national movement was not a negation of but an enrichment of the cultural heritage of Indian women. The women's movement in India was, thus, not an imitation of the Western suffragist agitation, resisted by and, therefore, in opposition to men. The women of India participated in the national movement alongside men, as mutual helpmates.

It is after independence that there has been a tendency among a section of educated women to imitate Western feminism. This is seen in such things as the feminist pedantry of 'chairperson' and 'spokesperson'; the wearing of unisex apparel; the imitation of men, on a much bigger scale than before, in smoking and drinking as well as in self-indulgent sexual behaviour; and the pursuit of women's representation in legislatures and in civil services as an end in itself. Reservations can benefit only women of the middle and upper classes in a situation of glaring inequality of opportunity among women.

Sixty years ago, Gandhiji described the challenge faced by Indian women in words that continue to be charged with relevance. He wrote in *Young India* (17 October 1929): "... it is a serious problem the enlightened daughters of *Bharata Mata* are called upon to solve. They may not ape the manner of the West which may be suited to its environment. They must apply methods suited to the Indian genius and Indian environment. Theirs must be the strong, controlling, purifying, steadying hand, conserving what is best in our culture and unhesitatingly rejecting what is base and degrading. This is the work of Sitas and Draupadis... not of amazons and prudes."

NOTES

1 Labour Member of Parliament and a friend of India.
2 First woman to be elected to and sit in the House of Commons. She took keen interest in questions pertaining to women.
3 Socialist and wife of the Left-wing Labour leader Aneurin Bevan.
4 The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1983, p. 8.
5 *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), pp. 274-6.
6 Written by Marx and Engels in December 1847 - January 1848, it was published in German in London in February 1848. The first English translation, by Samuel Moore, appeared forty years later in 1888.
7 The quotations from the Communist Manifesto are taken from the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, Vol. 6, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), pp. 477-519.
8 *Feminism in Europe*, pp. 142-3.
9 Named after Spartacus, the slave-gladiator who led the revolt against the barbaric use of slaves by Roman emperors. Jawaharlal writes in *Glimpses of World History* (p. 74): "The rich people tried to lull the poor by games and contests in circuses, where gladiators were forced to fight and kill each other just to amuse the spectators. Large numbers of slaves and prisoners of war were thus killed for what was called, I suppose, sport.

"But disorders increased in the Roman State. There were insurrections and massacres... Even the poor, down-trodden slaves rose in revolt under a gladiator named Spartacus. But they were crushed ruthlessly, and it is said that 6,000 of them were crucified..."
10 Introduction to *Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972).
11 *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970).
12 *Mahamana Malaviyaji Birth Centenary Commemoration Volume*, 1961.
13 This was how the then untouchable castes were referred to till they were listed in a schedule to the Government of India Act of 1935 and came to be known as the Scheduled Castes.

Part Two
In the Freedom Struggle

"We record our homage and deep admiration for the womanhood of India, who, in the hour of peril for the motherland, forsook the shelter of their homes and, with unfailing courage and endurance, stood shoulder to shoulder with their menfolk in the front line of India's national army to share with them the sacrifices and triumphs of the struggle..."

From the Resolution of Remembrance adopted at thousands of public meetings all over India on 26 January 1931.

4 Nationalism and Women's Awakening

The first stirrings of political consciousness in modern India were marked by the formation of citizens' associations in the second half of the 19th century in the three Presidency cities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. These were followed by regional organisations like the Society for the Promotion of National Feeling founded by Rajnarain Bose at Midnapore in Bengal, district branches of the Mahajana Sabha in Madras Presidency, and the Sarvajanik Sabha of Poona. The first all India conference of the politically conscious among the Indian intelligentsia was convened in December 1883 in Calcutta by Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925), leader of a group of educated Bengalis who, as he put it, entertained "the conception of a united India, derived from the inspiration of Mazzini". The conference was attended by more than a hundred delegates from different parts of the country.

The formation of an all-India forum of educated Indians was canvassed also by an Englishman, Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1912). He came to India in 1849 as a member of the civil service and spent the greater part of his career in district administration. Having served during the 1857 uprising in the North West Provinces (including the area later to be known as the United Provinces and now Uttar Pradesh), where much of the fighting took place, Hume felt the need for a channel of communication between the rulers and the ruled. He proposed, on his retirement from service in 1882, the formation of an associaton which would, in his own words, serve as "a safety valve for the escape of great and growing forces". The Indian National Congress, which held its first session in Bombay in 1885, was the culmination of the parallel efforts of Surendranath Banerjea and Hume. What was intended as a safety valve became, over the years, a spring of national renewal and anti-imperialist mass mobilisation.

There was no woman delegate among those who entered their names in the register at the inauguration of the Indian National Congress. A woman delegate participated for the first time in the fifth annual session, in 1889. She was Kadambini Ganguly, who was also one of the first women to graduate in medical science. Within two decades, women took part in the movement against the partition of Bengal. It was the first militant anti-imperialist struggle.

Divide and Rule: Partition of Bengal

Indian Muslims had been distrusted by the British rulers for some time following the 1857 uprising which ended in the depositon and exile of the nominal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar. The destruction of the Mughal empire caused feelings of deep hurt among Muslims. Even those of humble station tended to identify themselves with the ruling class -- just as, subsequently, the common British tommy in India basked in the glory of Queen Victoria's empire.

Muslims of the middle and upper class, unlike their Hindu counterparts, sullenly stayed aloof from the newly established institutions of modern education. This only brought them the mortification of watching the Hindu elite forging ahead. The British saw in this situation an opportunity to woo Muslim support by offering preferential treatment to Muslims in government employment. This strategy had begun to yield results by the time the Indian National Congress was formed. There were only two Muslims among the 72 delegates at the founding session in 1885.

An English official wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, on 24 February 1886 about the policy of extending preferential treatment to Muslims:

> I am confident that it will bear good fruits; indeed it seems to have done so already, by the complete abstention of the Mohammedans from Brahmin and Baboo agitation. It will be a great matter to sweeten our relations with this portion of the Indian population, the bravest and at one time the most dangerous. They all with one voice declare that they got their whipping in 1857, and they take it like men. They now look to us alone, not to be subjected to Hindu domination.

The outstanding Muslim personality in public life at the turn of the century was Badruddin Tyabji (1844-1906). He was to participate in the first session of the Congress, but happened to be detained outside Bombay on urgent business. He had to miss the second session too. This led some to assume, as Lord Dufferin's informant did, that he was keeping away from the Congress. It soon became apparent that this was not the case. Presiding over the third session of the Congress at Madras, in 1887, Badruddin Tyabji said in the course of his address that he failed to understand why Muslims should not work shoulder to shoulder with their fellow-countrymen for the common benefit of all.

Badruddin Tyabji was the first Indian to become Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court. When a British barrister made some disparaging remarks about the Indian National Congress, Tyabji pulled him up: "I have always regarded Congress Presidentship as the highest honour, higher than being on this bench. Let me tell the counsel that in my Court no contemptuous references to that body will be permitted." When Syed Ameer Ali[1] invited Tyabji to attend a Muslim political conference that was proposed to be held at Calcutta, Tyabji wrote to him that if the Mohammadan Conference was started simply as a rival to the National Congress, "I should entirely oppose it, as it seems to me that the proper course is to join the Congress and take part in its deliberations."

A section of the Muslim intelligentsia went along with Tyabji's robust nationalism. Others, however, shared the fear expressed by an older Muslim leader, Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-98), that democracy based on representative government would result in Hindu domination and harm Muslim interests. The nascent Muslim bourgeoisie with their late start in modernisation felt handicapped in the race for entry into the civil services and the modern professions, trade and industry. The plan for the partition of Bengal, mooted by the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, in 1903 was intended to capitalise on this feeling of frustration.

Ostensibly aimed at improving administrative efficiency by reorganising an unwieldy province, the partition scheme was in fact designed to separate Bengali Muslims from Bengali Hindus. Of the 18 annual sessions of the Congress held from 1885 to 1902, four (the maximum at any one centre) had been hosted by Calcutta. Bengali leaders had presided over six of the sessions held outside Calcutta. The Bengali presence was thus conspicuous on the stage of Indian

nationalism. Curzon decided to strike where, as he thought, it would hurt most.

The Viceroy made no secret of his intention of encouraging Muslim separatism. Addressing a gathering at Dacca in Muslim-majority East Bengal, Curzon said: "When a proposal is put forward which would make Dacca the centre and possibly the capital of a new and self-sufficing administration; which must give to the people of these districts by reason of their numerical strength and their superior culture, the preponderating voice in the province so created; which would invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of old Mussalman viceroys and kings; which must develop local interests and trade to a degree that is impossible so long as you remain the appendage of another administration -- can it be that the people of these districts are to be advised by their leaders to sacrifice all these great advantages from fear? Do you mean to be so blind to your future as to repudiate the offer?"

Women in the Anti-Partition Movement

The final decision to partition Bengal was announced by the Government on 20 July 1905. It set off a vigorous movement of mass protest in the province, with sympathetic reaction in other parts of the country, the like of which had not been witnessed before. The common people, including women, were for the first time galvanised into political action. Some 500 women held a meeting at Janikandi village in the district of Murshidabad to protest against the partition.[2] '*Bande Mataram*' (literally, 'Hail the Mother', with the mother symbolising the motherland) was the rallying cry which sustained the morale of the anti-partition demonstrators in face of assaults by the police.

The repressive measures adopted by the British authorities -- lathi charges on processionists and arrest of the leaders -- served only to steel the determination of the nationalists. During the anti-partition agitation were forged the weapons of *Swadeshi* (buying only Indian-made goods) and its counterpart Boycott (of foreign, specially British-made goods which were being dumped in the captive Indian market). Little could Charles S. Boycott, the agent for Lord Erne's estate in Ireland who refused rent reductions during the

land struggle of 1880 and was subjected by the Irish tenants to the withholding of all services and social contacts, have imagined that his name would enter history. The technique employed against him came to be adopted in far lands.

Shyamaji Krishnavarma (1857-1930), an early revolutionary, wrote in October 1905 in *Indian Sociologist*, the monthly journal published by him in London: "If anyone refuses to buy or sell any commodity, or to have any transactions with any class of people, he commits no crime known to the law. It is therefore plain that Indians can obtain emancipation by simply refusing to help their foreign master without incurring the evils of a violent revolution." Economic boycott was forged as the weapon of a weak and unarmed nation against a powerfully armed alien government. The movement started with boycott of cloth made in Manchester and was soon widened to cover Liverpool salt and foreign sugar as well as social boycott of persons using British goods.

Women contributed their gold bangles and other jewellery for the promotion of the Swadeshi movement. Saraladevi, a niece of Rabindranath Tagore, opened an emporium called Lakshmir Bhandar in Calcutta for popularising Swadeshi goods. Women active in the Swadeshi movement outside Bengal included Mrs. Ketkar (daughter of Bal Gangadhar Tilak) and Mrs. A.V. Joshi in Bombay, and Sushila Devi, Hardevi and Purani in the Punjab.

Mrs. Ramsay MacDonald, who visited India at that time, noted that "the movement seems to be spreading as much among women as men." Valentine Chirol, the British writer of a book on *Indian Unrest*, said that "... revolt seems to have obtained a firm hold of the zenana; and the Hindu woman behind the *purdah* often exercises a greater influence upon her husband and her sons than the English woman who moves freely about the world... In Bengal even small boys of so tender an age as still to have the run of zenanas have, I am told, been taught the whole patter of sedition, and go about from house to house dressed up as little *sanyasis* in little yellow robes preaching hatred of the English."

The Indian National Congress had little to do with these stirring events though it did adopt a resolution criticising the partition. The Congress was at that time dominated by moderates who had no stomach for courting imprisonment and facing lathi charges. But there were some Congress leaders outside Bengal who admired and fully supported the anti-partition agitation. Notable among them

were Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai. The similarity of one element in their names with that of the Bengali leader Bipin Chandra Pal led to the description of the trio as the Bal-Lal-Pal group of 'extremists'.

Lord Hardinge, who replaced Minto as Viceroy towards the close of 1910, realised that there could be no peace till the partition of Bengal was ended. The annulment of partition was announced on the occasion of the visit of the British King and Queen, George V and Mary, for the Delhi Durbar in December 1911. But, meanwhile, the poisonous seed of Muslim separatism had been sown by the British. Separate electorates for Muslims were created under the Indian Councils Act of 1909, the first to provide for a significant elected component -- even though on an extremely limited franchise -- in provincial legislatures. The mischief of separate electorates was that since only Muslims could offer themselves as candidates for election, and they had to appeal to Muslims only and not to the population as a whole in a territorial constituency, a premium was placed on invocation of separate identity and of exclusive Muslim interests. This poisonous seed was to sprout into a second partition of Bengal in 1947 as part of a larger partition of the sub-continent itself into India and Pakistan.

Annie Besant: Organisations of Women

The next landmark in national awakening and women's resurgence was the formation of the Home Rule League in 1916 and of the Women's Indian Association in 1917 by Annie Besant. Partly of Irish extraction on her father's side, Annie Besant (1847-1933) was a free thinker and suffragette who moved from Fabian socialism to Theosophy. She first visited India in November 1893 and came to know and admire India's cultural heritage. Soon after being elected president of the International Theosophical Society following the death of Col. Olcott, she made Adyar, in Madras, her permanent home in 1907.

Annie Besant's principal lieutenants were Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) and Margaret Cousins (1878-1954). Poetess, patriot and orator, Sarojini was born in a Bengali Brahmin family of Chattopadhyayas. She was one of the earliest among English-educated women to choose her husband -- Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu of

Hyderabad -- outside her caste and linguistic region. Margaret Cousins was born in Ireland and was imprisoned twice in the cause of women's suffrage in Britain.

All the three pioneers of the women's movement in India worked closely with men comrades. Among Mrs. Besant's prominent collaborators was Charles Bradlaugh, who consistently championed Indian interests in the House of Commons. The poet James H. Cousins[3] and Margaret, both theosophists, made India their home and worked as a husband-and-wife team. Sarojini Naidu was near and dear enough to Mahatma Gandhi to poke irreverent fun at him. All the three women influenced and inspired large numbers not only of Indian women but men too. It was the government's harassment of Annie Besant which triggered the entry into public life of Jawaharlal Nehru when, as a young lawyer, he addressed a meeting of prominent citizens of Allahabad on 20 June 1916. The meeting was organised to protest against the government's order demanding security from the journals published by Annie Besant.

She had the courage to write in her newspaper *New India* (2 March 1917), at the height of the First World War: "Young men cannot be expected to make the sacrifice asked for unless they are inspired by a passionate love for their Motherland, such as emptied the Universities of Great Britain. Love for a foreign Empire in which they are a Dependency cannot do it, love for an Empire in which they are a partner will do it. The prospect of the prolongation of a condition of inferiority will not inspire; the love of Liberty and the hope of winning it, and of becoming citizens of an Empire of free Nations will inspire." This was a remarkable anticipation of the position which the Indian National Congress was to take a quarter-century later in relation to the Second World War.

When the Governor of Madras ordered the internment of Mrs. Besant, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote a spirited letter to *The Leader* (21 June 1917) in which he called for non-cooperation with the British authorities in place of the politics of petitioning: "Are we going to indulge in mere protests and representations as we have done for so many weary years? ...Ours have been the politics of cowards and opium-eaters long enough and it is time we thought and acted like live men and women who place the honour and interests of their country above the frowns and smiles of every Tom, Dick and Harry who has I.C.S. attached to his name. Let us make it clear to the powers that be that we will not tolerate this highhandedness, and as

long as and until they do not retrace their steps, there shall be no cooperation between the people and the Government. Every one of us who holds an honorary position under the Government should resign it and refuse to have anything to do with the bureaucracy. I am aware that many will not be prepared to do this... Of the likes of such we have no need, we want no faint hearts or wobblers in the Home Rule League... The wheat will be all the purer when the chaff is removed."

Annie Besant was chosen, while under internment, to preside over the annual session of the Congress at Calcutta in December 1917. Becoming the first woman to hold that highly prized office, she said in her presidential address: "While I was humiliated, you crowned me with honour; ...while I was crushed under the heel of bureaucratic power, you acclaimed me as your leader; while I was silenced and unable to defend myself, you defended me, and won for me release. I was proud to serve in lowliest fashion, but you lifted me up and placed me before the world as your chosen representative."

On the participation of women in the Home Rule movement Mrs. Besant said: "The strength of the Home Rule movement is rendered tenfold greater by the adhesion to it of large numbers of women, who bring to its helping the uncalculating heroism, the endurance, the self-sacrifice of the feminine nature. Our League's best recruits and recruiters are among the women of India, and the women of Madras boast that they marched in procession when the men were stopped and that their prayers in the temples set the interned captives free. Home Rule has become intertwined with religion.... That is, in this country, the surest way of winning alike the women of the higher classes and the men and women villagers. And that is why I have said that the two words, 'Home Rule', have become a Mantram (an incantation charged with power.)"

During the Home Rule movement Jawaharlal was moved also "by a number of eloquent speeches delivered by Sarojini Naidu in Allahabad. It was all nationalism and patriotism...." (*An Autobiography*, p. 35)

Sarojini Naidu became in 1925 the first Indian woman to be elected president of the Congress. She said "You have done something that may serve to redeem for one moment the shame and degradation of your fallen manhood. In giving to a mere woman, the woman who for years and years rocked the cradle and sang lullaby,

that national standard which is the emblem of your own regeneration, you have gone back to the earliest inspiration that built your civilisation and admitted the woman a co-sharer and a comrade in the secular and spiritual evolution of a people."

The Women's Indian Association, which Sarojini Naidu helped to build as the first organisation of Indian women, was the nucleus of the All India Women's Conference which emerged in 1926. She presided over the fourth annual session of the Women's Conference at Bombay in July 1930, and soon afterwards played a notable part in the Salt Satyagraha. The A.I.W.C. has appropriately commemorated her by naming its building on Bhagwandas Road in New Delhi as Sarojini House.

Stri Dharma, journal of the Women's Indian Association, was edited for many years by Margaret Cousins. A tireless organiser, she succeeded in establishing more than forty branches of the Association. Sentenced to a year's imprisonment in 1932 during the civil disobedience movement for protesting against rule by ordinance, she used to sing with other prisoners the song 'God Save Our Motherland', composed by Annie Besant as a patriotic substitute for 'God Save the King'.

A close colleague of Margaret Cousins was Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi (1886-1968), the first woman medical graduate of Madras. She gave up her large practice to work for women's uplift. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi became the first Indian woman legislator when she was nominated to the Legislative Council of Madras in 1927. She was subsequently elected Deputy Speaker of the Council but resigned in 1930 in protest against the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi.

The resistance from conservatives that had to be overcome before young Muthulakshmi could enter college in the then princely State of Pudukottai in Tamil Nadu has been graphically recounted by President R. Venkataraman: "The State Darbar ran a prestigious College in the town, called the Maharaja's College. In the Darbar records there is a discussion that took place in the College and Darbar over an application for admission to the F.A. Course from one C.N. Muthulakshmi, the eighteen-year old daughter of a former Principal of the College. Muthulakshmi had just then passed her matriculation examination. In her application bearing the date 4th of February, 1904, Muthulakshmi said she was 'eager to commence the collegiate course'. The point to be noted is that until that date *no* girl had been admitted to the College. The application disturbed the Es-

tablishment. The father supported the desire of the girl with all his might. But the principal wrote to the Darbar: 'I do not think it advisable to admit her into the regular class and train her along with the other students, who are boys, as I believe that such a procedure will demoralise the boys.' Just imagine how a single girl student, it was feared, would pose a threat to an entire college of boys! The Diwan opposed the admission of Muthulakshmi on other grounds also. It remains to the credit of the then Raja of Pudukottai that he overruled these objections. He did not dream that the girl he was helping, was meant not only to finish her studies at the College but later to become the first woman medical graduate of the Madras University; the first Indian woman member of a Legislative Council; and finally to blazon a new trail in the world of social reform."[4]

The enthusiasm and organising abilities of persons like Muthulakshmi Reddi, Ammu Swaminathan and Rukmani Lakshmipathi helped the growth of the Women's Indian Association. With its base in Madras Presidency, the organisation had 2,700 members by 1921.

The National Council of Women was formed in 1925 to promote mutual awareness and co-ordination of work among women's organisations in various parts of the country. These efforts culminated in the establishment in 1926 of the All India Women's Conference, which held its first session at Poona in January 1927. The conference was presided over by Maharani Chimnabai, the progressive-minded wife of the remarkably progressive ruler of Baroda[5] who was in the forefront of the campaign against untouchability. Several subsequent sessions of the A.I.W.C. were presided over by women of the princely houses: the Rani Saheb of Sangli; the Begum Mother of Bhopal and the Dowager Rani of Mandi. This led Sarojini Naidu to claim that the Women's Conference was "the most representative body in India, not excepting the Indian National Congress even, because we have here on a common platform women of every rank and every shade of public opinion."

Poona was appropriate as the venue of the founding session of the Women's Conference, Maharshi Karve having established the first women's university there in 1916. The A.I.W.C. began as a gathering of 47 women from different parts of the country who were keenly interested in promoting girls' education, to draw up a memorandum on educational reform. This was in response to a remark made by Mr. Oaten, Director of Public Instruction in

Bengal, at a prize-giving function in Bethune College, Calcutta: "How long are you going to tolerate a man-made syllabus, a man-made examination and a controlling authority in which women have no influence, as the dominating arbiter of your educational destinies?" He urged women to "tell us with one voice what they want, and keep on telling us till they get it."

While drawing up the Memorandum on Educational Reform, the delegates assembled at the Women's Conference realised that a condition for the accomplishment of girls' education was the abolition of child marriage. Therefore, at the next Conference in Delhi in February 1928, it was decided to send deputations to the Viceroy and to the All Parties Conference to press for enactment of the Child Marriage Restraint Bill which had been introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly by a non-official member, Harbilas Sarda. This led on, in the thirties, to realisation of the need to mobilise political support for the women's cause. The constitution of the A.I.W.C. was amended in 1938 to permit political activity of a non-party and constructive nature.

NOTES

1 Bengali Shia Muslim leader who stood for a rational and liberal interpretation of the *Quran*. He advocated separate electorates for Muslims.

2 P.N. Chopra *Women in the Indian Freedom Struggle* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education), p. 7.

3 He taught English at the National University established by Annie Besant at Adyar in Madras.

4 *So May India Be Great* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1990), p. 47.

5 Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad said in a thoughtful and candid address at the Social Conference in Bombay in December 1934: "Caste restrictions are breaking down because the railway, the school and college, and the public service are bringing men together promiscuously. It is the force of circumstances which is freeing us from social trammels, and not our desire to be free."

5 Gandhian Era: Mass Mobilisation

The anti-partition movement gave rise not only to Swadeshi and Boycott; the harshness of the repressive measures adopted by the alien rulers led to revolutionary acts of violence directed against British officials.

In April 1908, at Muzaffarpur in Bihar, there was an attempt on the life of D.H. Kingsford, of the Indian Civil Service. (He had, in an earlier posting as chief presidency magistrate at Calcutta, ordered the severe flogging of several young demonstrators). Such actions were organised by secret societies like the Anusilan Samiti of Bengal and Abhinav Bharat of Maharashtra.

Women Revolutionaries

Bhikhaiji Rustom Cama (1861-1936), from an affluent Parsi family of Bombay, was one of the earliest to take to the revolutionary path. She lived abroad from 1902 and was associated in London and Europe with the revolutionary leaders Shyamaji Krishnavarma, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (a brother of Sarojini Naidu), V.D. Savarkar and Lala Har Dayal.

Bhikhaiji Cama organised the despatch of revolutionary literature and arms to India from Paris. At the Socialist Congress at Stuttgart in August 1907 she unfurled a flag of Indian freedom which she designed. It carried the symbols of the sun and the moon, and had inscribed on it the words '*Bande Mataram*'. This was also the title of a journal brought out by her from Paris in 1909.

In a message to the people of India, published in the journal, she explained why she had taken to the path of violent revolution: "Some of you say that as a woman I should object to violence. Well, I had that feeling at one time; it was repugnant to me even to talk of

violence...Why should we deplore the use of violence when our enemies drive us to it? How is it that the Russian, Sophy Perovoskai and her comrades are heroines and heroes in the sight of Englishmen and Englishwomen while our countrymen are considered criminals for doing exactly the same thing for the same cause?" Madame Cama was imprisoned for three years during the First World War and was allowed to return to India only in 1935.

Later women revolutionaries included Santi Das, who joined the Jugantar Party while in her teens and, along with her colleague Suniti shot dead Stevens, the notorious district magistrate of Comilla in December 1931. Both were sentenced to transportation for life. Bina Das tried to assassinate the Governor of Bengal, Stanley Jackson, on 6 February 1932 and was sentenced to seven years. Among those who took part in a raid on the Chittagong Armoury in 1933 was Kalpana Dutt. She was sentenced to life imprisonment. On her release she joined the Communist Party in 1942 and subsequently married the Communist leader P.C. Joshi.

Satyagraha: A New Way

There was an alternative to petitionary politics, on the one hand, and to revolutionary violence on the other. This third alternative was Satyagraha (literally, holding fast to truth) or non-violent non-cooperation, evolved by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) for fighting injustice. It was not the passive pacifism of conscientious objectors to war but a dynamic mobilisation of the people to resist wrong, even if the resistance entailed having to endure physical assault, imprisonment or death. This new method, based on moral force, rendered obsolete the gradualist and constitutional approach of the early Congress and the Home Rule League. The militant mass action of Satyagraha also made unnecessary the resort to isolated acts of revolutionary violence.

Gandhiji developed the technique of Satyagraha during the years he spent in South Africa. The young barrister had gone there on professional work in 1893. He was deeply affected by the racial discrimination against Indians which he saw and experienced. Indians in Transvaal had to pay an annual poll tax, had no right to vote, and could own land only in a specified location. They could not use the pavements, or move out of doors at night without a pass. Then came

the passage of the Asiatic Registration Act of 1907 which required all Indians -- men, women and children -- to have their fingerprints taken. Gandhiji advised resistance to this law. He cautioned his countrymen that refusal to submit to the indignity of fingerprints might bring punishment. He himself was arrested in January 1908 and sentenced to two months. Many Satyagrahis defied the law and followed him to jail.

In 1911 a provisional settlement of the question brought about suspension of the Satyagraha. But in the following year the Union Government went back on its promise. To this fire, fuel was added when a judgement of the Supreme Court laid down that only Christian marriages were legal in South Africa. At one stroke it turned all Indian marriages invalid, and all Indian wives in South Africa into concubines. This made the women, including Gandhiji's wife Kasturba, want to join the protest movement. P.D. Tandon recalls[1] that while Gandhiji called upon the Indian women in Phoenix Farm, established by him in Natal, to join the struggle, he did not ask Kasturba to do so since her participation might be construed as mere wifely obedience. "What defect is there in me which disqualifies me for the jail?", Kasturba asked. "I also wish to take the path to which you are inviting others."

In defiance of the order which made it illegal for Indians to travel across the Natal-Transvaal border without a permit, a party of eleven Indian women, including Kasturba, courted imprisonment by entering the Transvaal. Similarly, Indian women from the Tolstoy Ashram (founded by Gandhiji 21 miles from Johannesburg in the Transvaal) crossed the border and proceeded to Newcastle, in Natal, to persuade the Indian miners there to go on strike. They were arrested. The discipline and non-violence of the women Satyagrahis in South Africa was in contrast to the violent demonstrations being staged by suffragettes in England at about the same time.

The strike spread and thousands of miners and other Indians prepared, under Gandhiji's leadership, to march to the Transvaal border in a concerted act of non-violent defiance. He made strict rules for the conduct of the Satyagrahis, who were to submit without retaliation to insult, flogging or arrest. Gandhiji was arrested and sentenced, but the Satyagraha continued. At one time there were about fifty thousand indentured labourers on strike, and several thousand other Indians in jail. The Government tried repression and even shooting, and many lives were lost. The struggle continued till

the principal Indian demands were conceded in January 1914.

Gandhi and Kasturba

It was also in South Africa that Gandhiji and Kasturba began to learn the difficult art of respecting, and adjusting to, each other's personality and values. It is an art that is indispensable if married life is to prove durable on a basis of equality instead of the traditional subordination of wife to husband. Learning it is a process that is often painful and bitter, and yet there is nothing more fulfilling than man-and-wife rapport as and when it is achieved.

A zealous reformer is prone to be impatient and angry with conservative persons who resist his reforms, and the Mahatma still in the making was not exempt from this frailty. Krishna Kripalani remarks in his biography of Gandhiji that Kasturba was a devoted wife and mother, faithful to the tradition of caste and community in which she had been nurtured. She was willing and happy to serve her husband, but she resented his obliging her to clean the chamber pots of strangers living in the house. One of them was a Christian clerk of outcaste or 'untouchable' parentage. She found it revolting to clean his pot, but Gandhiji was adamant. He could be most unkind to those he loved most or regarded as his own.

Gandhiji's recollection of this episode is full of self-reproach: "Even today I can recall the picture of her chiding me, her eyes red with anger, and pearl drops streaming down her cheeks, as she descended the ladder, pot in hand. But I was a cruelly kind husband. I regarded myself as her teacher, and so harassed her out of my blind love for her.

"I was far from being satisfied by her merely carrying the pot. I would have her do it cheerfully. So I said, raising my voice: 'I will not stand this nonsense in my house.'

"The words pierced her like an arrow.

"She shouted back: 'Keep your house to yourself and let me go.' I forgot myself, and the spring of compassion dried up in me. I caught her by the hand, dragged the helpless woman to the gate, which was just opposite the ladder, and proceeded to open it with the intention of pushing her out. The tears were running down her cheeks in torrents, and she cried: 'Have you no sense of shame? Must you so far forget yourself? Where am I to go? I have no parents or relatives

here to harbour me. Being your wife, you think I must put up with your cuffs and kicks? For Heaven's sake behave yourself, and shut the gate. Let us not be found making scenes like this!'

"I put on a brave face, but was really ashamed and shut the gate. If my wife could not leave me, neither could I leave her. We have had numerous bickerings, but the end has always been peace between us. The wife, with her matchless powers of endurance, has always been the victor."

The conflicts of the man-and-wife relationship are not resolved once for all in real life. Back in India, when Gandhiji was living at Sabarmati Ashram he received a letter from Amritlal Thakkar, of the Servants of India Society, that a humble and honest untouchable family wanted to join the Ashram. The family consisted of Dudabhai, who had been a teacher in Bombay, his wife Danibehn and their baby daughter Lakshmi. The Harijan couple agreed to abide by the rules of the Ashram, and were accepted.

Their admission, B.R. Nanda says in his biography, roused "irrational but deep prejudices and brought on Gandhi's head storms both inside and outside the Ashram. The wealthy merchants of Ahmedabad, who had been supporting the Ashram, were scandalised by this outrage on orthodoxy and cut off supplies. The Ashram ran out of funds and Gandhi decided to move into the untouchables' quarters in the slums of Ahmedabad, and to live by manual work. This desperate step was averted by an 'anonymous' donation of Rs. 13,000." The donor was Ambalal Sarabhai, a magnate of Ahmedabad, with whom Gandhiji was to clash a little later when he espoused the cause of the textile workers of that city.

The financial crisis had been tided over, but another and more difficult crisis faced Gandhiji within the Ashram. Some of its inmates were unhappy about the arrival of the untouchable family, and among them was Kasturba. She had given in to her husband's heterodoxy in South Africa, but in her native environment her prejudices about untouchability revived. Gandhiji was deeply depressed. The Ashram code was no respecter of persons. How could he allow his wife to flout a rule irrevocable for everybody else?

He steeled himself and posed a startling choice to his wife. She had to give up untouchability or quit the Ashram. Kasturba was stunned by this moral coercion. She knew her husband too well to think that this was an idle threat. With an effort of will, she accepted the untouchable family.

The creative tensions of two independent spirits yoked together continued till at least as late as 1938. Ambujammal recalls[2] that Kasturba came that year to Madras with her husband for the convocation of the Hindi Prachar Sabha (Society for the Propagation of Hindi). Kasturba wanted to visit the Kapaleswar temple where Harijans were still not allowed, and sought Gandhiji's assent. He said: "I will not give her permission. But if she wants to go, let her go." She did not go.

Several years later, when a grateful nation donated a crore of rupees for the Fund in memory of Kasturba (who died in 1944 when she was with Mahatma Gandhi during his detention in the Aga Khan Palace at Poona), Gandhiji said: "I do not mind if the whole money is wasted through lack of experience, but the work of the Kasturba Trust shall be carried on solely by women. It is a Trust in memory of a woman who was simple and illiterate, and it must be spent through women for the well-being of the simple and illiterate village folk -- women and children."

Constructive Work alongside Struggle

On his final return to India from South Africa in 1915, Gandhiji abstained from political activity in order not to embarrass the British during the war. He still believed at that time in the sincerity and goodwill of the British government, even if individual officials acted wrongly.

During a visit to Santiniketan in 1915, the poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) greeted him as a Mahatma (great soul) -- a title that became almost part of Gandhiji's name. But he himself said that he would deserve the title only if he paid with his life for striving to realise his ideals. The condition was to be literally fulfilled when he met a martyr's death in the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity.

Though keeping aloof from politics, Gandhiji took up in 1917 the cause of the exploited tenant farmers of Champaran district in Bihar who were compelled by British planters to apply at least 15 per cent of their land to the cultivation of indigo (the source of a dye important for the British textile industry). All of that crop would be taken away as rent for the land.

Thousands of peasants travelled from their villages to look at and make obeisance to the Mahatma, in the manner in which people

have traditionally sought the *darshan* of temple deities and of holy men. But this was a holy man with a difference. He told them how they could secure justice by fighting for it fearlessly and non-violently. Gandhiji, typically, made efforts to promote hygiene and elementary education in the villages of Champaran at the same time as he was organising the tenant farmers to fight for their rights. After some months the government set up a committee, with Gandhiji as a member, and its recommendations brought relief to the indigo cultivators.

Shortly afterwards Gandhiji led another peasants' struggle, this time in the Kheda district of Gujarat. Peasants were being compelled to pay the land tax as usual, despite drought and failure of crops. After four months of a no-tax campaign, the authorities exempted small peasants from the revenue assessment. Campaigns such as these, together with Gandhiji's insistence on the forswearing of untouchability by his followers, helped to invest the freedom struggle with the additional dimension of concern for the poor and the exploited.

Gandhiji launched the first political struggle in 1919. It began as a fight against the repressive Rowlatt Bills. Gandhiji formed a Satyagraha Sabha and called for *hartal* (closure of shops, offices and all public activity) on 6 April. The response to the call was overwhelming. On 13 April 1919 General Dyer carried out a massacre of unarmed demonstrators at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar that caused countrywide indignation. Meanwhile many leaders of Indian Muslims were feeling uneasy about the terms that seemed likely to be imposed by the victorious Allied Powers on Turkey, whose Sultan was for them the Khalifa. Gandhiji offered to support the Muslim community on the Khilafat issue if they would accept his method of Satyagraha and join the movement of non-violent non-cooperation on a six-point programme: *i)* boycott of law courts by lawyers, who would set up popular tribunals for administering justice; *ii)* boycott of schools and colleges owned or aided by the government, and the establishment, in their place, of national educational institutions; *iii)* boycott of elections; *iv)* surrender of honours and titles; *v)* boycott of British goods and encouragement of Swadeshi; and *vi)* a temperance campaign to wean addicts from liquor.

Launched on a full scale in August 1920, the movement saw lawyers with a large practice throw away their princely income -- Salem Vijiaraghavachariar in Tamil Nadu; Tanguturi Prakasam in

Andhra; Motilal Nehru in Allahabad and Chittaranjan Das in Calcutta. My husband was among the lawyers who gave up their practice. I remember his telling me how he and his colleagues organised *panchayats* in Delhi which would sit under a tree and settle disputes. Asaf Ali was arrested in December 1921 and sentenced to imprisonment for a year and a half.

Several leading scholars left educational institutions run or aided by the government, and taught for a pittance in national colleges. Among them was Zakir Husain (later elected President of the Indian Republic), who left the M.A.O. College at Aligarh to help found the Jamia Millia as a centre of national education. Some others worked from within existing educational institutions but gave them a nationalist orientation. For example, Asutosh Mookerjee as Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University promoted the study of Indian languages. He had advised students in the course of a convocation address in 1907: "In your just admiration for all that is best in the culture of the West, do not, under any circumstances, denationalise yourself." Asutosh Mookherjee resigned the vice-chancellorship in 1923 in protest against the attempt of the Governor, Lord Lytton, to curb the University's autonomy.

Women took a big hand in the popularisation of Swadeshi and the picketing, which often led to arrest, of shops selling foreign cloth and liquor. Among the prominent participants were Basanti Devi (1880-1974), wife of Chittaranjan Das, who along with her husband gave up a life of luxury and was arrested in 1921; Perin Captain (1888-1958), a granddaughter of Dadabhai Naoroji, who took a prominent part in Khadi work; Saraladevi, born in an aristocratic family of Orissa who was active in the national movement from 1920; and Urmila Devi (1883-1956), sister of Chittaranjan Das, who was arrested in December 1921 for taking a prominent part in the boycott of the Prince of Wales during his visit to India.

Gandhiji terminated the non-cooperation movement early in February 1922 because of an incident of mob violence at Chauri Chaura village in the eastern United Provinces where several policemen were burnt to death. The Mahatma's decision came as a shock to many including Jawaharlal Nehru, who felt that an isolated act of violence did not call for the halt of a mass movement when it was at its crest. The feeling of disappointment notwithstanding, the Congress Working Committee meeting at Bardoli on February 11 and 12, adopted at Gandhiji's instance a Constructive Programme

which included the eradication of untouchability, promotion of Khadi, and Prohibition.

Khadi promotion was of special interest to rural women. Many of them had put away their spinning-wheels in the attics after the advent of manufactured yarn deprived them of this means of supplementing the family income. During the Second Round Table Conference with representatives of the British government in London, in 1931, Gandhiji told the participants: "You will -- even the Indian members of the committee -- perhaps be astonished to find that today the Congress, through its organisation, the All-India Spinners' Association, is finding work for nearly 50,000 women in about 2,000 villages, and these women are possibly 50 per cent Mussalman women. Thousands of them belong to the so-called untouchable class. We have thus, in this constructive manner, penetrated these villages, and effort is being made to cover every one of the 700,000 villages."

Prohibition was of equal interest to women. Foremost in the fight against 'Demon Drink', which was the ruin of many a poor family, was C. Rajagopalachari, popularly known as Rajaji, the southern apostle of Gandhiji. The campaign entailed persuasion, on the one hand, and, on the other, the picketing not only of liquor shops but the auction of liquor vends by the government. This was so effective in Madras Presidency that in 1931 the licences fetched only a fraction of the anticipated revenue. Thousands of ordinary men and women, with no thought of fame but only of service, applied themselves to these items of constructive work and to women's education.

Jawaharlal Nehru had no enthusiasm for the Constructive Programme, either in the twenties or in the thirties when it was vigorously revived. In a statement to the Press on 12 January 1934, Jawaharlal said about village uplift and Harijan welfare work: "This kind of safe and pious activity can well be left to old ladies." When a non-official Bill for removing obstacles to Harijans' entry into temples was under consideration in the Central Legislative Assembly in the early thirties, Gandhiji sent an appeal to all the members, through C. Rajagopalachari, asking for their votes in favour of the Bill. Nehru was amazed at this because the Assembly had been boycotted by the Congress. Moreover, a civil disobedience movement was on, though suspended temporarily. "To me", he wrote in his autobiography (p. 381), "for Gandhiji or any Congress leader to countenance such activities appeared immoral and almost a breach

of faith with the large numbers of people in gaol or carrying on the struggle." Soon afterwards Gandhiji went on a fast in Yeravda prison, where he had been sent back on re-arrest, in protest against denial of the facilities given to him earlier for carrying on Harijan work from within jail. To Jawaharlal this "seemed an extraordinarily trivial matter for such a tremendous step."

With regard to Khadi, Jawaharlal accepted its symbolic value as "the livery of freedom", and always wore it. He himself spun regularly, specially while in prison, as part of physical exercise and to let the mind relax, but he did not share Gandhiji's faith in Khadi as a significant contribution to solving the problem of under-employment and poverty.

Jawaharlal Nehru says in the autobiography (p. 383) that the British authorities took no steps to popularise the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929. Explaining why the Congress, too, did little to propagate the objective of the legislation, he explains: "We suffer from the disease of nationalism, and that absorbs our attention and it will continue to do so till we get political freedom."

Subhas Chandra Bose, too, gave primacy to the political struggle. He said at the Maharashtra Provincial Conference in Poona on 3 May 1928: "... without political freedom -- i.e., without the power to shape our own destiny -- we cannot have either compulsory free education or social reform or industrial advancement. If you demand education, ... the plea is put forward by Government that there is no money. If you introduce social legislation ... you find Miss Mayo's[3] cousins on this side of the Atlantic arrayed against you and on the side of your social die-hards. When you are working yourself to death in order to bring about the economic and industrial regeneration of India ... your Imperial Banks and your Railways and Stores Departments are least inclined to help your national enterprises. You pass resolutions in your Municipalities and in your Councils in favour of Prohibition and you find that the Government meets you with a stonewall of indifference or hostility. I have no doubt in my own mind that Swaraj and Swaraj alone is the sovereign remedy for all our ills."

To Gandhiji, on the other hand, reform and revolution were not contradictory but mutually supportive. Constructive -- or what, after independence, we call nation building -- work was not only a contribution, worthy in itself, to the amelioration of the living conditions of the poor. It served, in the intervals between civil disobedience, to

raise the level of social and political consciousness of the intelligentsia as well as the common people.

Despite the Congress radicals' lack of enthusiasm for the Constructive Programme, thousands of men and women responded to the call of Gandhiji. They worked among the rural masses and the urban poor in the cause of Khadi, Prohibition, Hindu-Muslim unity and the war on untouchability. I have often wondered how many more could have been mobilised, and how much more accomplished, if Jawaharlal had viewed reform not as a distraction from but as an aid to revolution through continuous contact with and work among the masses. It would have brought into being a large army of trained and politically conscious cadres. They may or may not have been able to avert the partition of the sub-continent brought about by the chain-reaction of communal hysteria triggered by the Muslim League's Direct Action in Calcutta on 16 August 1946. But trained cadres would certainly have helped to translate from the statute book into reality the many measures of economic and social reform which Jawaharlal got enacted after independence.

Drain Inspection by Katherine Mayo

Besides promoting Muslim separatism and affirming the unsuitability of representative democracy for India, the British rulers encouraged propaganda to the effect that India was unfit for self-government because of social backwardness and specially because the treatment of Indian women by their menfolk was beastly.

In 1927 appeared in London a book which was a sensational success, running into a seventh impression in the very year of publication. It was *Mother India*[4] by Katherine Mayo. This American scribe was hired by the British authorities to defame Indians and to justify foreign rule. Miss Mayo was briefed at the India Office in London before she came to this country, where her researches in women's hospitals led her to conclude that Indian males were sex maniacs and that Indian women were physical wrecks from venereal disease and from constant abuse of their bodies. Miss Mayo reported further that Indian mothers 'worked on' their children at night in order that the girls may sleep well and the boys may grow up to be manly.

Mother India was an exercise in political polemics as well as prurience. Miss Mayo severely criticised the Muslim League for

making common cause at that time with the Congress in demanding self-government. She justified British rule in India, comparing it with her own country's 'civilising' mission in the Philippines. The book provoked many rejoinders, including *Father India* (also published in London) by C.S. Ranga Iyer, a member of the Central Legislative Assembly.

Gandhiji called Miss Mayo's work a "Drain Inspector's Report". In the course of an article under this title, he wrote in *Young India* (15 September 1927): "The book is without doubt untruthful, be the facts stated ever so truthful. If I open out and describe with punctilious care all the stench exuded from the drains of London and say 'Behold London', my facts will be incapable of challenge, but my judgement will be rightly condemned as a travesty of truth. Miss Mayo's book is nothing better, nothing else....

"If she is not subsidised, Miss Mayo is an avowed Indophobe and Anglophil refusing to see anything good about Indians and anything bad about the British and their rule....

"That a book like Miss Mayo's can command a large circulation furnishes a sad commentary on Western literature and culture."

Characteristically, Gandhiji went on to say: "I must now come to the other side of the picture. Whilst I consider the book to be unfit to be placed before Americans and Englishmen (for it can do no good to them), it is a book that every Indian can read with some degree of profit. We may repudiate the charge as it has been framed by her, but we may not repudiate the substance underlying the many allegations she has made. It is a good thing to see ourselves as others see us. We need not even examine the motive with which the book is written. A cautious reformer may make some use of it."

Beyond Suffrage to Social Transformation

Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru, whatever their differences on certain questions like non-violence and the Constructive Programme, were at one in promoting women's participation in the freedom struggle and in the tasks of social regeneration. Both wanted the women's movement to have a mass orientation.

Urging educated women not to confine their attention to suffrage, Gandhiji said: "They (educated women) may fight, if they like, for votes for women. It costs neither time nor trouble. It provides

them with innocent recreation. But where are the brave women who would work among the girl wives and girl widows and who would take no rest, and leave none for men, till girl marriages become an impossibility and till every girl feels in herself strength enough to refuse to be married except when she is of full age and to the person about whom she is given the final choice?" It is remarkable that as far back as 60 years ago, when arranged marriages were the rule, Gandhiji should have advocated an effective say for the girl.

Again, "Before ... reform on a large scale takes place, the mentality of the educated class has to undergo a transformation. And may I suggest ... that the few educated women we have in India will have to descend from their western heights and come down to India's plains.... This question of liberation of women, liberation of India, removal of untouchability, amelioration of the economic condition of the masses and the like resolve themselves into penetration into the villages, reconstruction or rather reformation of the village life."[5]

Gandhiji wanted women, like men, to work for "an India, in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability.... Women will enjoy the same rights as men.... This is the India of my dreams."

Jawaharlal Nehru, like Gandhiji, did not regard women's suffrage as a sufficient condition, in itself, for their emancipation. He said in a letter of 23 July 1937 to Rani Rajwade:[6] "So far as the women suffrage movement is concerned in its narrow aspect there is not much doing in India. Women have got the suffrage though in a limited way and they are bound to get it extended. But the growing feminist movement in India which deals with other problems also is, of course, an important latter-day development."

Like Gandhiji, Jawaharlal wanted women to address themselves to the country's major problems. In the course of a message to Prayag Mahila Vidyapitha, Allahabad (12 January 1934), he asked the students of the women's university: "What will you do ... when you go out? Will you just drift and accept things as they are, however bad they may be? .... Or will you justify your education and prove your mettle by hurling defiance at the evils that encompass you? The *purdah*, that evil relic of a barbarous age, which imprisons the body

and mind of so many of our sisters -- will you not tear it to bits and burn the fragments? Untouchability and caste, which degrade humanity and help in the exploitation of one class by another -- will you not fight them and end them and thus help in bringing a measure of equality in this country? Our marriage laws and many of our out-of-date customs which hold us back and especially crush our womenfolk -- will you not combat them and bring them in line with modern conditions? Will you not also fight with energy and determination for the physical improvement of our women by games in the open air and athletics and sane living so that India may be full of strong and healthy and beautiful women and happy children? And, above all, will you not play a gallant part in the struggle for national and social freedom that is convulsing our country today?"

Jawaharlal Nehru had referred in the autobiography to certain organisations which "functioned in a gentlemanly way or, like the All-India Women's Conference, in a lady-like way: the spirit of aggressive propaganda was not theirs." Later, he explained: "When I suggested that the Women's Conference represents the middle class, I did not say this in a spirit of criticism. It is essential that the women's movement should start work among the masses."

The Gandhi-Nehru Alchemy

The combined charisma of Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru elicited response from men and women of all classes on an unprecedented scale.

The saintly personality of Gandhiji was the single most important factor in overcoming the resistance of men, in the male-dominated families of the upper and middle classes, to their womenfolk venturing outside the domestic walls to take part in public life. Sucheta Kripalani[7] has observed: "Gandhiji's personality was such that it inspired confidence not only in women but in the guardians of women, -- their husbands, fathers and brothers.... the standard of conduct that he laid down for his work was so high. Therefore when women came out and worked in the political field, their family members knew that they were quite secure, they were protected. Had Gandhiji's leadership been not there, such a large number of women would not have come."[8]

Another reason for women joining the successive rounds of the

freedom struggle in increasing numbers was their indignation at the jailing of their fathers, brothers, husbands and friends.

The reach and impact of Gandhiji's message was increased manifold by the many poets and novelists in various languages of the country who were deeply influenced by him. Krishna Kripalani[9] writes: "The eminent Hindi novelist Premchand has described in an autobiographical essay how, inspired by the Mahatma, he resigned from Government service and settled down in a village to see life in the raw and to write about it. His later career as the foremost novelist in Hindi (as also in Urdu), his insight into the life of the village folk, his abounding sympathy with their unhappy, stunted lives, and his simple and direct delineation of it was a major influence on many of his contemporaries, and reflects the impact of Gandhi on modern literature in India. Among other writers of note who responded to this impact, each in his fashion, may be mentioned the gifted Gupta brothers, Maithilisharan and Siyaramsharan, as well as Jainendra Kumar, in Hindi, Kaka Kalelkar, 'Darshak' and Umashankar Joshi in Gujarati, Sane Guruji, [V.S.] Khandekar and Mama Warerkar in Marathi, Nilmani Phookan in Assamese, Kalindi Charan Panigrahi in Oriya, Annadashankar Ray in Bengali, Bharati in Tamil, Vallathol in Malayalam, and many more in these and other languages."[10]

The poems of Subramania Bharati (1882-1921), for instance, celebrated not only the coming political freedom of India but the liberation of women, low-caste toilers and all the oppressed. A song of freedom set for the 'Kummi' dance of southern India, rendered into English by the poet himself, says:

Gone are they who said to woman: 'Thou
shalt not open the Book of Knowledge.'
And the strange ones who boasted saying:
'We will immure these women in our homes' --
Today they hang down their heads.

Dance the Kummi, beat the measure.
Let this land of the Tamils ring with our dance.
For now we are rid of all evil shades;
We've seen the Good.

Bharati sang also of the New Russia in a poem, translated by Profes-

sor K. Swaminathan, which includes the lines:

> A murmur faint meant years in jail,
> A questioning 'why' brought banishment ....
> In one brief hour arose the people's
> Rule over people's life; a great republic
> Has been proclaimed.[11]

Jawaharlal Nehru, who spoke in the idiom of modern socialism rather than of *Rama Rajya* as Gandhiji did, appealed more especially to students and the youth. He retained a shining youthful image till late middle age -- which once invited the quip from Sarojini Naidu: "Jawahar, don't think that all these young women who come to hear your speeches are converts to socialism. They only want to look at your handsome face."[12]

The Mahatma and Jawaharlal Nehru between them seemed to exercise an alchemy that turned the common clay of Indian humanity into heroes and heroines. The transformation was not confined to any particular segment of the social spectrum. Thousands upon thousands of men and women from the educated elite and the urban and rural middle class, as well as ordinary villagers, responded to the call of patriotism and social regeneration. They displayed qualities of courage, dedication and self-sacrifice of an order unsurpassed, in my opinion, in the history of national liberation movements.

Rameshwari Nehru: Gentle Crusader

An early leader of the women's movement who played a notable part both in constructive work and in the struggle for freedom was Rameshwari Nehru (1886-1966). She was born to affluence, as the daughter of Raja Narendranath, a prominent citizen of Lahore who became a member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly after resigning from the civil service. Rameshwari was married at the age of sixteen to Jawaharlal's cousin Brijlal Nehru who joined the Indian Audit and Accounts Service after completing his education in England.

Despite this upper-class and establishment background, Rameshwari was stirred by newspaper accounts of the movement against Bengal's partition and the speeches of Tilak and other national

leaders. In 1906 she addressed a letter to her brother-in-law 'Joe' who was at Harrow, exhorting Jawaharlal to return soon to India and help to liberate the motherland. The letter was delivered to another Joe -- Joseph Wood, headmaster of the school -- who alerted Motilal Nehru about the subversive letter addressed to his son. However, on learning who the author was, the headmaster felt reassured and wrote a friendly letter to Motilal Nehru on 19 May 1906: "I am intensely amused to hear that it was a charming young lady who defied the British Raj! Give her my kind regards, and say that I hope some day, when she knows us better, she will like us more.... You have every reason to be proud of your son, who is doing excellently, and making his mark in the school."

In 1909 Rameshwari started a women's monthly journal in Hindi titled *Stree Darpan* ('Mirror of Women') at Allahabad, and she continued to edit it for 16 years. Among the subjects discussed in the journal were the measures taken in the Soviet Union to promote women's equality with men, including reform of marriage laws.

In 1928, on moving to the capital with her husband, she founded the Delhi Women's League and was its president. Rameshwari and Brijlal Nehru lived on Clive Road, as the present Tyagaraja Marg was then known. It was on a visit to their residence, along with my husband, in the winter of 1928 -- we had married in September -- that I first saw Jawaharlal Nehru. Though my husband was of about the same age as Jawaharlal, he was well acquainted with Motilal Nehru too. Asaf Ali was a practising lawyer, unlike Jawaharlal who never developed a serious interest in the profession[13] in which his father had attained high fame and wealth. My husband too -- with his interest in literature and his gift of expression -- would have preferred to be a man of letters. But he needed to eke out his modest inheritance by practising law; and he was sought after as a successful criminal lawyer. He often met Motilal Nehru, whom he esteemed as a towering senior both in the legal profession and in public life. Motilal always stayed, when he came to Delhi, with his nephew Brijlal, of whom he was specially fond because it was Brijlal's father, Nandlal Nehru, who after the grandsire's death had brought up Motilal. Motilal always held Nandlal in high regard; and after Nandlal's premature death, looked after his son Brijlal.

This was the background to Brijlal and Rameshwari Nehru inviting my husband and me to dinner at their Delhi home, at a time when Motilal and his son were staying with them. As we waited for

Jawaharlal's return from a speaking tour of some Punjab towns, Motilal Nehru would stop in the middle of the conversation to enquire, *Chhote saab aagaye?* He instructed the domestics to keep hot water ready for the young master's bath.

At last Jawaharlal burst in, all covered with dust. He barely glanced in our direction as he went in quickly for a wash and change. He must have thought it was the usual evening gathering of some of the capital's Anglicised elite at his cousin's place. I was introduced to Jawaharlal on his joining the company for dinner, and was dazzled by the first close view of him. I was wearing a silk sari and some jewellery, and might well have struck him, as he looked me up and down with amused curiosity, as a dolled-up slip of a girl, destined to decorate drawing rooms.

Rameshwari Nehru must have sensed with womanly intuition how uncomfortable I felt among persons much senior to me in age, who were engaged in conversation on matters of state and policy. She came over to me, leaving the circle surrounding Motilal Nehru, and asked me about my family and my interests, and expressed motherly concern about things that are important to a young woman at the threshold of family life. When she thus showed affectionate interest in me, I rushed as it were into her embracing arms. I remember how deeply impressed I was by her striking personality, the large and beautiful eyes imbued with sympathy and understanding. She saw that I was a frightened young thing bewildered by the sharp change in environment from a missionary institution in Naini Tal to life in a Muslim home in the walled city of Delhi. Wishing that I should occupy myself with something significant besides domestic chores, she suggested to me that I might join and work for the Delhi Women's League. This was my apprenticeship in organisational work. Rameshwari Nehru taught me the procedure of calling meetings, preparing minutes of discussions, keeping records and monitoring the implementation of decisions. This training led on to my being elected secretary of the Delhi Women's League.

Rameshwari soon left India on her husband being posted in London. There she represented India in many forums including the women's committee of the Commonwealth of India League, addressed meetings on the problems of Indian women, and availed herself of an opportunity to visit the Soviet Union in 1931.

On return to India, Rameshwari accompanied Gandhiji on several stretches of the nine-month 'Harijan tour' of the country on

which he embarked on 7 November 1933. She applied herself with exemplary earnestness to anti-untouchability work. She would visit the sweepers' colonies in every town she lived in, train their womenfolk for useful occupations, and cook and dine with them as a symbol of human equality and comradeship. Thakkar Bapa, a lieutenant of the Mahatma in the Constructive Programme, said of her: "She is an impressive figure among the reformers of our epoch... I have travelled in her company in several parts of the country in connection with the various Harijan problems peculiar to each province or state.

"Whether it was a trek in the sandy desert of Sind to study the question of Megwals and Bhils, or a march in the state of Travancore to agitate for the admission of Harijans to Hindu temples famous for their conservatism.... it was a great delight and inspiration to me to be in her company.... the immense liveliness with which she mixed with the sweeper women, heard their daily grievances and their family quarrels, was revealing to me in spite of my long experience of city sweepers and their life." Rameshwari was elected president of the Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1959 and served in that capacity until a year before her death.

When she defied prohibitory orders at Lahore during the Quit India movement, Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, the Punjab Premier, felt embarrassed at having to order the arrest of a close friend's daughter. On her father Raja Narendranath falling seriously ill, she was released on parole and Sikander Hyat Khan let it be known that he could arrange to have her interned comfortably in her Srinagar home. The spirited lady politely declined the offer. She said in a letter of 23 October 1942 to the Premier: "I know that the proposal has the strong support of my parents. But I cannot agree to it consistently with the principles I hold.... I, therefore, want to go back to the Women's Jail where I was lodged before I came out on parole.... We cannot avert the threatened foreign invasion heavily laden with the chains of slavery as we are. We must feel free before we get the necessary strength to fight for freedom... My internment in Kashmir in my own house will reduce my self-inflicted penance to a farce which I do not want to do." On 4 November 1942, when her father was returning to normal health, she informed the Home Secretary of the Punjab that she proposed to go back to the Women's Jail on the afternoon of 6 November, and did so.

The Bengal Famine was raging when Rameshwari came out of

prison at the conclusion of the nine-month sentence. Wartime restrictions on the Press prevented the public from knowing the full extent of the disaster, partly man-made. The toll in the famine was a million and a half lives according to official estimates and, inclusive of deaths from the epidemics that broke out in the wake of the famine, twice that figure according to non-official estimates. The Woodhead Commission which went into the causes of the famine criticised the provincial government -- a coalition led by non-Congress Muslims and supported by the European members of the provincial Assembly -- for entrusting food procurement to a private agency and for introducing communalism in the recruitment of staff for running food shops. Greed played its grim part in the tragedy: profits made through buying and selling rice in 1943 were estimated at Rs. 150 crores.

Rameshwari threw herself into the relief work, not disdaining to co-operate with the communists despite her differences with them on their attitude to the Quit India movement. O.P. Paliwal recalls in his biography: "When some members of the AIWC [All India Women's Conference] claiming to be Gandhians criticised her for fraternising with communists, she said that according to her understanding of Gandhism, one must honestly work to help the people. 'Why are they afraid of working with the communists', she often asked and then laughed and gave her own explanation: 'They are worried that they cannot work as hard and show their worth'."[14] I was to go through a very similar experience when I was Mayor of Delhi in the late fifties. There was rivalry between the Congress and Communist members of the municipal corporation. Some Congressmen felt, and persuaded Indira Gandhi -- who was then Congress President -- to believe, that I was unduly lenient to the Communist corporators. I explained to her that I could not ignore the Communists who happened to be very much more alert and active in the functioning of the corporation compared to the Congressmen, and that there was no question of partiality. Indira Gandhi remarked ruefully that one Communist was equal to ten Congressmen.

Salt of the Earth

The Congress session at Calcutta in December 1928 had decided that if the Motilal Nehru Committee's report envisaging Dominion

Status was not given effect to by the British rulers within a year, the Congress would opt for complete independence and would forge the necessary sanctions for securing it. A year having passed, the Lahore session in December 1929 adopted complete independence as the national objective, and authorised the leadership to launch a programme of civil disobedience if the demand was not conceded.

Gandhiji decided to base the civil disobedience movement on non-payment of the salt tax. Though salt was a basic need, even the poorest had to pay a tax on it. In Gandhiji's native Gujarat, as far back as in August 1844 a new duty on salt had met with resistance in Surat where a mob attacked the court-house. At the 1892 session of the Congress at Allahabad, Lala Murlidhar from Punjab referred to the salt tax while denouncing the flooding of the Indian market with foreign goods by the British who had "repealed the import duties and flung away three crores a year of revenue, which the rich paid, and to balance this wicked sacrifice, raised the salt tax which the poor pay. Free trade between these two nations! How I hate the sham!" Gandhiji, with his finger on the common man's pulse, chose a powerfully symbolic article of daily use for the no-tax campaign.

Ironically, Gandhiji had begun by deciding to keep women out of the Salt Satyagraha and to put them, instead, in exclusive charge of the Ashrams. Knowing that the breaking of the law by people making their own salt from sea water would result in strong police action, Gandhiji perhaps wanted to spare women and their families the ordeal. In any case, women resented their exclusion from the civil disobedience campaign. Margaret Cousins addressed a spirited letter of protest to Gandhiji: "In these stirring, critical days of India's destiny there should be no water-tight compartments of service. Women asked that no conferences, congresses or commissions dealing with the welfare of India should be held without the presence of women. Similarly women must ask that no marches, no imprisonments, no demonstrations organised for the welfare of India should prohibit women from a share in them." Gandhiji yielded.

Women were very much to the fore in the countrywide movement following Gandhiji's inauguration of the Satyagraha by setting out on 12 March 1930 on a 24-day foot march from Ahmedabad to Dandi, on the Gujarat coast, to break the law there. The example was followed by hundreds of thousands of persons all over India -- city dwellers and village folk, men and women, students and elders. There were savage police assaults on the Satyagrahis at many places.

Police violence was particularly severe at Dharasana, where volunteers had planned to raid and take possession of the salt depots. Sarojini Naidu flagged them off after impressing on the volunteers that there should be no retaliation against the police. An American newspaper correspondent sent out this eye-witness account of what followed: "In eighteen years of reporting in twenty-two countries, I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharasana. Sometimes the scenes were so painful that I had to turn away momentarily. One surprising feature was the discipline of the volunteers. It seemed they were thoroughly imbued with Gandhi's non-violent creed."

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1903-88), prominent among the women leaders of the civil disobedience movement in Bombay, recalls[15] that "we had always thought that a revolution was a big uprising of the people" and therefore wondered "how this could be brought about by breaking the salt laws...." She expressed these doubts to Jawaharlal Nehru, and asked him if he could think of some alternative form of civil disobedience. Jawaharlal told her: "Gandhiji is a very intuitive person and his instincts are always fruitful. We are not always able to see what he feels, what he is leading up to, but usually he is able to achieve something and therefore we shall have to act accordingly."

On the appointed day, thousands of women strode down to the sea like proud warriors. But instead of weapons they bore pitchers of clay, brass and copper; and instead of uniforms, the simple cotton sarees of village India. Every passer-by stopped, slipped a coin into their hands and held out proudly a tiny pinch of salt. The Satyagrahis appealed to the rich, going into the cotton, grain, cloth and bullion markets of Bombay with cries of, 'Who will buy the salt of freedom?' 'Don't you want the salt of freedom?' to raise funds for the movement. The auctioning of the illegally made salt would bring in fabulous sums: one package fetched Rs.10,000. Women's participation in the Salt Satyagraha was on a much larger scale than in the non-cooperation movement of a decade earlier.

Kamaladevi recalls that when she was arrested on the eve of a salt raid she was to have led in Bombay, "I was represented by my little son[16] of seven, who proudly carried the banner and engaged in the drama of his first battle." There were other freedom fighters of tender age. Johri of the Bombay Youth League organised youngsters into *Vanar Senas* (monkey brigades, named after the army that as-

sisted the hero of the *Ramayana* epic), as twelve-year-old Indira Nehru did in Allahabad. Girls of 10 or 12 would sell prohibited literature. Women would duplicate illegal news sheets in kitchen and barn, act as messengers, write on street walls the news of the day, and picket shops selling foreign cloth and liquor.

Hansa Mehta,[17] Perin Captain,[18] and Lilavati Munshi[19] were among the hundreds of women who went to the cloth dealers of Bombay and requested them not to sell imported cloth. The Satyagrahis also appealed with folded palms to the customers to desist from buying. In the first 10 months of 1930 there were some 17,000 convictions of women by the British guardians of Lancashire and Manchester interests in Bombay. The closing of shops was declared an offence and shopkeepers began to be arrested along with the picketers.

Kamaladevi herself was convicted under the vagrancy law on refusing to give her address because she did not want to implicate others. She was put in the 'C' class. K. Natarajan, editor of the *Indian Social Reformer*, wrote strongly against this harsh treatment when he came to know of it from his daughter who happened to see Kamaladevi in the prison. She was then transferred to the 'B' class.

Kamaladevi found jail life, as did I and hundreds of others from the well-to-do strata of society who had little idea of how the majority of our sisters lived, a humanising and educative experience: "... a large number of women who were with me in prison came from very poor classes, poorer than the lower middle class.... I became more and more convinced how important it was to improve their economic life if their social life was to be improved -- that it was not possible to think of merely trying to break caste, it was bound up with their poverty."

The plight of women prisoners in small towns and villages, she recalls, was even worse than in the cities. In the absence of toilets, the women would be marched out to the fields accompanied by male guards, outraging their sense of modesty. In 1932, political prisoners in Bombay were locked up with ordinary women prisoners in Arthur Road jail. It was only after the political detenues objected on health grounds, because several of the prisoners were prostitutes, that they were shifted to another barrack. When women with children in their arms were arrested, only infants under three were allowed to remain with the mother. Other children were left on the streets.

Jawaharlal wrote about the treatment of women Satyagrahis in

jail (*An Autobiography*, p. 344): "The lot of our womenfolk in prison was especially hard and painful to contemplate. They were mostly middle-class women, accustomed to a sheltered life, and suffering chiefly from the many repressions and customs produced by a society dominated to his own advantage, by man. The call of freedom had always a double meaning for them, and the enthusiasm and energy with which they threw themselves into the struggle had no doubt their springs in the vague and hardly conscious, but nevertheless intense, desire to rid themselves of domestic slavery also. Excepting a very few, they were classed as ordinary prisoners and placed with the most degraded of companions, and often under horrid conditions. I was once lodged in a barrack next to a female enclosure, a wall separating us. In that enclosure there were, besides other convicts, some women political prisoners, including one who had been my hostess and in whose house I had once stayed. A high wall separated us, but it did not prevent me from listening in horror to the language and curses which our friends had to put up with from the women convict warders."

The civil disobedience movement saw the emergence of the Hindustani Seva Dal as the volunteer corps of the Congress. It had a women's wing, of which Kamaladevi later became the 'General Officer Commanding'. Women volunteers in Bombay went through rigorous exercises and route marches as part of their training in a camp at Borivli. This led to anxious questions in the British parliament about a "women's army" being raised in India. The local authorities closed down the Borivli camp and banned the Seva Dal.

The report for 1930-31 of the Desh Sevika Sangh of Bombay, whose members, dressed in orange, were the first to sell contraband salt, gives a graphic account of the impact made by the women volunteers: "There was no doubt that the very presence of a woman in orange was effective. We were asked for the loan of our *Sevikas* to picket the most unexpected things and places. One set of individuals wanted them to picket the race specials, another asked them to picket the banks to prevent the sale of government paper. An enterprising potato merchant asked the loan of a few *Sevikas* to picket Italian seed potatoes to give indigenous seed potatoes a chance. An artist sent a request to picket the Bombay Art School as, in his opinion, it was vitiating Indian art. A delightful trio of curly-headed boys from one of the largest schools of Bombay, bashful but hopeful, asked for a few *Sevikas* to stand at every entrance of the school so

that their unheeding companions might be shamed into staying away from school when the Congress called for a *hartal*. We controlled the corners of our mouths and hardened our hearts against all these appeals for help."

Satyavati Devi (1907-45) was pre-eminent among women leaders of the civil disobedience movement of 1930-32 in Delhi. She was the granddaughter of Swami Shraddhanand.

Though Delhi had been named as the capital of British India in 1911 and soon began to attract Indians from all parts of the country, the social milieu remained conservative. Women were confined to their homes and excluded from participation in public life. Tall and slender, with her compelling personality and fiery oratory, Satyavati was able to mobilise women (like Saraswati Gadodia and Parvati Didwania) even from families of the Marwari community, generally considered conservative.

Students responded readily to Satyavati's call, specially the boys and girls of the Hindu College and the Indraprastha Girls' School. The latter institution had been founded by a leading personality of Delhi, Babu Jugal Kishore. The first principal was an Australian, Miss L. Gmeiner, a theosophist and an ardent follower of Annie Besant. It was in the Indraprastha School premises that the office of the Delhi branch of the Home Rule League was housed. It was formed by my husband along with like-minded friends including Lala Shankar Lal, Pandit Shiv Narain Haksar and Pandit Nekiram Sharma in 1916, at the same time as Jawaharlal formed a branch of the League in Allahabad. The Chief Commissioner of Delhi threatened to withdraw the government's grant to the Indraprastha School unless Miss Gmeiner gave up her political activity. Jugal Kishore accepted the challenge and appealed successfully to the public for funds to meet the situation created by official disfavour. The generous response to the appeal included a handsome monthly donation from S.R. Bomanji of Bombay.

Had it not been for Satyavati, I wonder if I would have ventured out of my sheltered domestic life, notwithstanding that my husband was a prominent Congressman who had already gone through the baptism of imprisonment in the non-cooperation movement of the twenties and was now again in the thick of the civil disobedience movement. I had just come out of a college run by foreign missionaries. With my westernised habits I doubted whether I could adjust my way of life and my values to those expected of a Satyagrahi.

But Satyavati's burning zeal was infectious. I was drawn to her and could not stay away from the great fight.

On the launching of the civil disobedience movement, Chandni Chowk and the innumerable lanes and by-lanes round it began to resound with patriotic songs and slogans raised by us during the *prabhat pheris* (early morning processions). As the day advanced, there would be picketing of shops selling foreign cloth and liquor, and street-corner meetings in defiance of prohibitory orders.

Delhi being land-locked, Satyavati and some of us decided to break the salt law by assembling in a marshy vacant lot in Shahdara, a suburb where the sub-soil water had a high salt content. About 50 of us made illegal and muddy salt, of which we made packets for distribution rather like *prasad* (consecrated offering). This went on for 10 days, after which the police swung into action. The Satyagrahis were dispersed with lathi blows and tear-gas shells, and several were arrested. But each act of repression steeled us. When a fellow volunteer was arrested, we felt thrilled and awaited our turn with eager anticipation.

In prison we led a self-disciplined life, plying the *charkha*, singing patriotic songs in defiance of the jail rules, conducting literacy classes for non-literate inmates of the jail, and improving our own understanding of politics and economics by reading books (many of them smuggled in, like V.D. Savarkar's). Distinctions of community, caste and sub-caste crumbled in the shared community life of the prison house. No more for us the rituals associated in orthodox homes with cooking and eating. All of us shared the daily chores of scrubbing the floor, cleaning and peeling vegetables, washing utensils and minding the *chulah* (fireplace). But the cooking was reserved for the experts among us. We fought for and got rations issued instead of cooked food. Pooling our rations helped us to vary the fare of *roti* (bread), *dal* (pulses) and vegetables. Visitors from our families, who were allowed once a fortnight, brought welcome additions to our larder in the form of fruits, spicy *papad* and pickles. Jail, which was intended by the alien rulers to isolate and to demoralise us, turned out to be a university of life where we learnt to rise above our former self-centred existence.

Another dimension of Satyavati's personality developed more fully after the civil disobedience movement. She joined the Congress Socialist Party. Her husband Balbhadra was an officer of the Birla Mills, but this did not deter her from working among the city's textile

labour force to promote unionisation, raise their political consciousness and secure their participation in the freedom struggle. Nor did Satyavati allow the cares of family life to tie her down. She had a son and two daughters. She had to carry one of them, a suckling infant, to jail with her on being sentenced during a Satyagraha.

Satyavati was the chairman of the reception committee when the Congress Socialist Party held its annual conference at Meerut, near Delhi, in 1936. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, who presided, was greatly impressed by her: "The thing I remember most about the session is Satyavati".[20] It was as though, Kamaladevi said, a person like her would never die; that she would leave something of herself behind.

Frequent jail going, and the hard life that Satyavati led even when free, wore down her frail body. She fell victim to tuberculosis, which was in those days a dreaded terminal disease. But Satyavati's spirit was unsubdued and she continued with her public work. Imprisoned during the Quit India struggle, she was released along with most other political detenus in 1945, when I was still underground because the warrant for my arrest had not been withdrawn. I was deeply moved when I read a Press statement by her expressing her happiness that I had successfully avoided capture and had kept the flag flying. This was just a few months before her death.

Paying tribute to her memory, Jawaharlal said during a speech in Delhi on 3 November 1945: "With feeling I refer to the death of Shrimati Satyavati. Her image is before my eyes. I had despaired of her life, when I saw her in the hospital. I want the people of Delhi to erect a befitting memorial in her honour. I am not in favour of a memorial of stone. I am in favour of earmarking a good amount out of the purse presented to me for Shrimati Satyavati's memorial."

The first memorial was a girls' school, opened in a working class area in which Satyavati had been active. I donated for this cause and to the memorial fund the amount which the authorities returned to me, when I emerged from underground life on the cancellation of my arrest warrant early in 1946, as the proceeds from the auction of my car which had been confiscated. The Delhi Administration has done well to name a college after Satyavati.

Durgabai was prominent among women participants and organisers of the civil disobedience movement in the south. She had been married off as a child to a man whom, when she grew up, she refused to live with. She was to acquire the surname of Deshmukh

much later.[21]

As early as in 1923, when she had just entered her teens, Durgabai was a girl volunteer at the Kakinada session of the Congress. Her knowledge of Hindi was an asset in this role, and she was posted at the exhibition *pandal* (enclosure). As Jawaharlal Nehru, dressed in a dhoti and waistcoat, approached the gate the young volunteer asked him to produce his ticket. She recalls[22] that he neither had a ticket nor an anna[23] coin to buy one with. He was going back, when Konda Venkatappiah, a senior Congressman of the Andhra region known popularly as 'Desabhakta' (devotee of the nation), brought Jawaharlal to the gate again and said to Durgabai, "Silly girl, do you know who he is?" "Yes," she replied, "I have seen his photograph." At this point Jawaharlal told Venkatappiah: "Why do you scold her? I am glad that the girl is discharging her duty. We need more such, who will do their work courageously."

Durgabai remembered a green-bordered dhoti worn by Jawaharlal at Kakinada, and when she attended the Karachi session of the Congress in 1931 she presented him with a pair of dhotis with the same kind of border, woven from fine yarn of 100 counts spun by herself. Jawaharlal protested that it was the brother who should give presents to the sister but he accepted the gift and wore one of the dhotis when he attended the AICC session the next morning.

When women were initially excluded from the Salt Satyagraha, Durgabai wrote a long letter of protest. Nageswara Rao Pantulu, a prominent Congressman of Andhra, took the letter to Gandhiji.

Tanguturi Prakasam, the Andhra Kesari (Lion of Andhra), was to have gone to Chirala on the Andhra coast to break the salt law, even as Rajaji did at Vedaranyam on the Tamil coast. But Prakasam changed his mind and offered the Satyagraha at Madras, accompanied by more than 70 volunteers who had been mobilised by Durgabai. He nominated her as the 'dictator' who would lead the movement after his arrest. She was herself arrested soon after.

Durgabai's formal education had been interrupted, and it was only after her release that she joined Banaras Hindu University and took the M.A. degree. She then studied law at Madras. While practising as a lawyer at Madras she built up over the years the Andhra Mahila Sabha, which became one of the shining symbols of women's resurgence. Other notable participants in the civil disobedience movement in south India included Rukmani Lakshmipathi in the Tamil region, and Lakshmi Menon of Kerala.

NOTES

1 *Patriots and Pioneers* (Allahabad, 1971).
2 Oral History transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
3 The reference is to Katherine Mayo, an American journalist who wrote in 1927 a book entitled *Mother India* which argued that Indians were unfit for independence on account of their social backwardness.
4 London: Jonathan Cape.
5 *Young India*, 23 May 1929.
6 Rani Laxmibai Rajwade, wife of Rao Raja Ganpatrao Raghunath Rajwade who was army minister of Gwalior State in the early thirties. Jawaharlal Nehru, as chairman of the National Planning Committee formed by the Congress, selected her to head the sub-committee on women's status and role in society.
7 A fighter for freedom and follower of Gandhiji, Sucheta Mazumdar (1908-74) taught at Banaras Hindu University and in 1936 married Acharya J.B. Kripalani (1888-1982). After independence she served for a term as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh.
8 Oral History transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
9 Litterateur who learnt and taught at Santiniketan under the guidance of Rabindranath Tagore and became in 1954 the first Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Letters) and, later, Chairman of the National Book Trust.
10 *Modern Indian Literature* (Nirmala Sadanand Publishers, 1968).
11 The passages are taken from *Subramania Bharati: Chosen Poems and Prose*, a Bharati centenary commemoration volume brought out by the Ministry of Education and Culture (New Delhi, 1984).
12 *Patriots and Pioneers* (Allahabad, 1971).
13 Law seemed to Jawaharlal an amoral profession, since a lawyer was expected to argue on any side. He was also put off by the avarice and the pettifogging approach of the generality of lawyers. "I have marvelled" he says in his autobiography (p. 189), "at the cupidity of men of my own profession. My first big shock came during the Punjab Martial Law trials in 1919 when a very eminent leader of the profession insisted on his full fee – and it was a huge fee – from the victims of Martial Law, one of them a fellow-lawyer, and many of these people had to borrow money or sell property to pay him. My later experiences were even more painful. We had to collect money, often in coppers from the poorest workers, and pay out fat cheques to lawyers. It went against the grain."
14 *Rameshwari Nehru – Patriot and Internationalist* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1986).
15 Oral History transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
16 Ramakrishna, her child by Harindranath Chattopadhyay, brother of Sarojini Naidu, whom Kamaladevi married under the civil law in 1919 after they got to know each other through a shared interest in the theatre. They separated in 1934. Kamala had earlier been married and widowed as a child.
17 Educationist and social reformer who married Dr. Jivraj Mehta, outside her own Brahmin caste. She was the first woman to be elected to the Bombay Legislative Council in 1931.
18 Granddaughter of Dadabhai Naoroji. She and her sister Goshibehn were close friends of Kamala Nehru.
19 Lilavati was, like her husband K.M. Munshi, a leading writer in Gujarati. Both

were active in the struggle for freedom and social reform.

20 Oral History transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

21 Durgabai married Chintaman Deshmukh in 1953, when he was Union Finance Minister and in that capacity a member of the Planning Commission, and she was Member, Social Services.

22 Oral History transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

23 A pre-metric unit, of the value of one-sixteenth of a rupee.

6 Nehru: Socialist Orientation

There was an interval of a decade between the civil disobedience movement and the next and final round of the freedom struggle. During this interval the Congress experimented with office acceptance in the provinces under the Government of India Act of 1935.

Provincial Autonomy, National Planning

Jawaharlal Nehru had not been averse, in the earliest phase of his public life, to utilising the limited opportunities afforded by local self-government for ameliorating the condition of the people. He served for two years as elected Chairman of the Allahabad Municipality during 1923-25. In this capacity he tried to improve the city's congested old areas which were neglected, while large sums were spent on the spruce maintenance of the new areas "where all the Big Noises and Little Noises live" -- rather like the attention lavished after independence on the Central and South zones of New Delhi where Ministers, business magnates, civil and military officials and foreign diplomats live. As municipal chairman Jawaharlal also promoted the use of Khadi by municipal employees, of Hindi and Urdu in official transactions, and the singing of Iqbal's patriotic song *Sare Jahan se Achha Hindustan Hamara* by school children.

Later, however, Jawaharlal came to the conclusion that nothing short of complete independence could cure India's ills. When elections were held, on a relatively wider franchise than before, under the Government of India Act of 1935 which offered a measure of autonomy to elected governments in the provinces of British India (as distinct from the Princely States), Jawaharlal Nehru campaigned for the Congress candidates. He did so in order to demonstrate the popular support enjoyed by the organisation, while the issue of office

acceptance was kept open.

The outcome of the elections was that the Congress was in a position to form governments in eight provinces: Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Central Provinces, Madras, North-West Frontier Province, Orissa and the United Provinces. As for the other three provinces, Allah Bux formed a ministry with Congress support in Sind; Sikandar Hyat Khan, whose National Unionist Party won an absolute majority, in the Punjab; and Fazlul Huq of the Krishak Praja Party formed the ministry in Bengal with the participation of Muslim League and Depressed Classes representatives after the Congress refused to form a coalition government. Neither the Muslim League nor the Congress won the majority of reserved Muslim seats in the 1936 elections. (The picture was to be transformed by 1946, when the Muslim League with its separatist programme wrested almost all the Muslim seats in the provincial Assemblies except in N.W.F.P.)

The Congress eventually decided in July 1937 to accept office, Gandhiji recommending it on the ground that, notwithstanding the deficiencies of the 1935 Act, Congress in power would be able to implement many items of the Constructive Programme and to reduce the burden of the peasants.

A notable feature was the appointment by the Congress of a woman as Minister for the first time in India. The distinction went to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Jawaharlal's sister, who was made a member of the Congress government in the United Provinces. Of the presiding officers of the provincial Assemblies, two were women.

There were varied reactions to the functioning of the popular Ministries. For the common people, and for government employees, it was a strange and heart-warming sight to see British officers taking orders from Indian Ministers. But Jawaharlal's initial estimate of the performance of the Congress governments was adverse. He said on 25 November 1937 in the course of a personal letter to Govind Ballabh Pant, who headed the government in the United Provinces: "If I may put it in technical language, the Congress Ministries are tending to become counter-revolutionary." This, ten years later, was to be the harsh and dogmatic verdict of some Leftists on the government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru after independence.

However, Jawaharlal later revised his opinion of the role played by the popular Ministries. He gave his mature estimate in an Afterword that he added, on 8 August 1940, to his autobiography: "I was perhaps unnecessarily hard on the Congress Ministers; the fault lay

much more in the situation itself and in the circumstances.... Among the many good things that they did was the agrarian legislation they passed, giving considerable relief to the peasantry, and the introduction of what is called Basic Education." Another important reform was of conditions of prison life to make them less harsh.

A momentous development during the period of popular ministries in the provinces was the setting up by the Congress of a National Planning Committee. The time was opportune, because popular representatives for the first time had access to official data on economic and social problems.

The formation of the Planning Committee, during Subhas Chandra Bose's presidentship of the Congress, was the culmination of Jawaharla Nehru's efforts over the years to give the Congress a socialist orientation. After repeated urging by the U.P.P.C.C., the A.I.C.C. had adopted a resolution, at its meeting in Bombay in May 1929, which did not employ the word socialism but said: "In the opinion of this Committee, the great poverty and misery of the Indian people are due, not only to foreign exploitation in India but also to the economic structure of society, which the alien rulers support so that their exploitation may continue. In order therefore to remove this poverty and misery and to ameliorate the condition of the Indian masses it is essential to make revolutionary changes in the present economic and social structure of society and to remove the gross inequalities."

The next landmark was the adoption of a resolution on Fundamental Rights and the Economic Programme at the Karachi session of the Congress in 1931. This document is the nucleus of many of the principles embodied in the chapters on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State policy of the Constitution of free India. The Karachi resolution affirmed *inter alia* that: "All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex"; "The franchise shall be on the basis of universal adult suffrage"; "The State shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions"; "The State shall provide for free and compulsory primary education"; "Children of school-going age shall not be employed in mines and factories"; "Protection of women workers and, specially, adequate provision for leave during maternity period."

In August 1937 the Congress Working Committee called for the formation of committees of experts by the Congress ministries (while urging the governments of other provinces and Princely States

also to co-operate) for collection of data for framing schemes of "national reconstruction and social planning". The resolution suggested that consultations be held between the provinces on the need for river valley projects.

On the 2nd and 3rd of October 1938, a conference of Ministers of Industries from the Congress-ruled provinces adopted a resolution on planning. It read: "The problems of poverty and unemployment, of national defence and of economic regeneration in general cannot be solved without industrialisation including heavy key industries, medium-scale industries and cottage industries. Steps should be taken to start manufacture of machinery and plant and tools of all kinds; automobiles, motor boats etc.; electrical plant and accessories; heavy chemicals and fertilisers; and metal production." For giving effect to this, the resolution called for the formation of a National Planning Committee whose personnel would be announced later by the Congress president.

Jawaharlal Nehru was the natural choice for chairmanship of the Planning Committee. The membership was broad-based and included industrialists and scientists besides Congressmen. There were two women members: Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade. The honorary general secretary was K.T. Shah, a Leftist economist.

The membership of the National Planning Committee, inclusive of two who resigned and four who were co-opted, was as follows:

1 Mr. M. Visvesvaraya (resigned)
2 Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas
3 Dr. Meghnad Saha
4 Mr. A.D. Shroff
5 Dr. Radha Kamal Mukherjee
6 Shri N.M. Joshi
7 Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (co-opted)
8 Shri Gulzari Lal Nanda (co-opted)
9 Shri J.C. Kumarappa (resigned)
10 Dr. Nazir Ahmed
11 Dr. V.S. Dubey
12 Shri Ambalal Sarabhai
13 Mr. A.K. Shaha
14 Dr. J.C. Ghosh
15 Shri Walchand Hirachand

16 Mr. Abdur Rahman Siddiqi (co-opted)
17 Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade (co-opted)
18 Mr. Shuaib Qureshi.

Representatives of several provincial governments and Princely States also attended the meetings by invitation. The first session of the National Planning Committee was held on 17 December 1938, when questionnaires to elicit information and views were finalised.

Contrary to a notion that has been entertained in some quarters that Jawaharlal Nehru, influenced by the Soviet model, favoured large investment in heavy industries to the neglect of agriculture, he was well aware of the central importance of agriculture in the Indian economy. Pointing out that the resolution appointing the Planning Committee had spoken exclusively in terms of industrialisation (the pre-occupation was understandable in the context of Britain's treatment of India as a captive market for its own manufactures), Jawaharlal said in a memorandum of 4 June 1939 to his colleagues: ".... it is impossible to conceive of any scheme of national planning in any country, and least of all in India, which does not include agriculture. Agriculture is and will remain the largest single industry of this country, and it is associated with a host of subsidiary industries."

In the same memorandum, Jawaharlal said that though "national independence is an indispensable preliminary" for carrying out a plan for the country's development, "this does not mean that we must wait for independence before doing anything towards the development of planned economy." Looking beyond India's independence, he said: "A world union of free and equal nations may lead to a voluntary limitation of sovereignty: it will indeed help planning within nations." Meanwhile he advised against falling into "the bad habits of official committees and commissions which are notorious for spending on themselves large sums of public money." The travelling allowance for members of the National Planning Committee and sub-committees was not to exceed "second class railway fares."[1]

The work of the Planning Committee was hampered by the imprisonment during the war years of the chairman and several members of the Committee and its sub-committees. Jawaharlal's interest in the subject was unabated even when he was in jail. Following the restriction placed on his correspondence (he could send only one letter in a fortnight, and not more in the shape of enclosures), he wrote

to the Superintendent of the Dehra Dun district jail on 11 January 1941: "In view of what you told me about my letters this morning... I should like to know how the rules or the discretionary power are going to be applied in regard to another matter. I do not want to take the trouble to do something which I am subsequently informed is against the rules and I should not have done.

"I have been functioning for over two years as the Chairman of the National Planning Committee. This Committee has consisted of representatives of all the provincial governments, some important Indian states, prominent businessmen, economists, engineers, and some other experts. The Committee appointed twenty-nine sub-committees on various subjects.... - consisting of experts in the particular subject entrusted to them, [they] presented their reports, which were considered by the full Planning Committee. The Committee will of course carry on its work in my absence, but in regard to many matters they, or the General Secretary, desire to make references to me to obtain my views about the procedure to be followed....

"The General Secretary has sent me some of the sub-committees' reports for me to revise them or make any suggestions in regard to them.... I am supposed to return them with such corrections or notes as I might choose to add to them.... I should like to know how far I am allowed to proceed with this work...." The British authorities refused permission to receive and return the Planning Committee's documents.

Meanwhile the Committee and the sub-committees met as often as they could, with attendance far short of the full strength. The reports of the sub-committees were considered by the Committee, the final meeting being held on 26 March 1949. Jawaharlal Nehru transmitted to the Congress President the Report[2] compiled by K.T. Shah on the basis of the reports of the sub-committees and the resolutions thereon adopted by the full Committee.

Woman's Role in Planned Economy

There had been quite a controversy in 1936 over the composition of the Working Committee formed by Jawaharlal Nehru as Congress president. He included a number of socialists, but not a single woman member.

The protests were as amusing as the omission was surprising, considering Jawaharlal's well-known commitment to women's equality. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur[3] in a letter of 30 May 1936 from Simla informed Jawaharlal that she was suggesting a communication to him from the All India Women's Conference "deploring the fact that a woman has not been appointed a member of the Working Committee." Gandhiji, writing from Bangalore (29 May 1936), said that no one -- including himself -- would have had the "courage to break the convention" of having a woman member. But the Mahatma's letter also suggested the explanation: "... you went so far as to say that you did not believe in the tradition or convention of always having a woman and a certain number of Mussalmans on the cabinet."

Ample amends were soon to be made. Of the 29 sub-committees formed by the National Planning Committee to examine and make recommendations on various economic and social problems, the sub-committee on Woman's Role in Planned Economy was the largest. It had 30 members, all women. Whereas the other sub-committees consisted largely of experts in a technical sense, the women's sub-committee comprised persons who had been active in the women's movement. Formed on 16 June 1939, the sub-committee on 15 December 1939 co-opted three persons, including myself, in place of members who had either resigned or could not participate.

The composition of the sub-committee was: Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade (Chairman); Mridula Sarabhai and Mrs. Perviz N. Dubash (Secretaries); Perin Captain; Taraben Maneklal Premchand; Indirabai Bhagwat; Mrs. Barkatrai; Sarla Devi, M.L.A.; Lavanyalata Chanda; Pushpalata Saikia; Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit; Rameshwari Nehru; Jethiben Sipahimalani, M.L.A.; Karunadevi Paramanand; A.V. Kuttimmalu Amma, M.L.A.; Begum Zarina Currimbhoy; Hansa Mehta; Vidyagauri Nilkanth; Sarojini Naidu; Durgabai Joshi, M.L.A.; Lilavati Roy; Mrs. S.C. Mukherjee; Amasuya Gyanchand; Aruna Asaf Ali; Begum Hamid Ali; Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi; Radhabai Subbaroyan; Begum Shah Nawaz, M.L.A.; Kapila Khandwalla; and Godavari Sarabhai.

The terms of reference were comprehensive:

"... the place of woman in the planned economy of India, including consideration of her social, economic and legal status, her

right to hold any property, carry on any trade, profession or occupation, and remove all obstacles or handicaps in the way of realising an equal status and opportunity for woman.

In particular the Sub-Committee was to concern itself with:

a) the family life and organisation, and woman's employment in the house, and the change therein in recent years;
b) marriage and succession, and the laws governing these;
c) the conditions of industrial employment of women, and the protection of working women in mines, factories, plantations, workshops and cottage industries, as well as in domestic employment and retail trade;
d) social customs and institutions which precluded woman from taking her full share in India's planned economy;
e) the types and methods of appropriate education to enable her play her due role in household work, in the professions, and social and national services; and
f) any other question connected therewith."

Intensive discussions took place at three sessions of the Women's Sub-Committee that were held from 2nd to 4th September 1939 (with ten members present); from 15th to 18th December 1939 (14 members were present); and from 4th to 9th July 1940 (attended by 11 members). Not much work could be done thereafter on a sustained basis because of the Individual Satyagraha and the Quit India movement that followed, and the preoccupation of several members with relief work in the famine that raged in Bengal during the peak of the Second World War. The report of the sub-committee, drawn up on the basis mainly of the discussions that had taken place during 1939, was presented by Mridula Sarabhai before a meeting of the National Planning Committee on 31 August 1945. The Committee considered the recommendations from September 1 to 4 and adopted a number of resolutions based on the recommendations.

The views expressed by members of the sub-committee are set out in its report (published in November 1947), and those of members of the main committee are recorded in the resolutions adopted by it after considering the sub-committee's report. Unanimous on certain issues but divergent on certain others, these observations are of interest and relevance to this day, specially because of the continuing debate in the country on whether there should be a uniform

civil code for all citizens.

Marital Morality: Ending Double Standards

Members of the Women's Sub-Committee were agreed on the principle that "an identical standard of morality, which harmonises social welfare with individual freedom, should be accepted for both man and woman, and should guide legislation and social convention."

This statement was revolutionary in its import. The situation at that time was that the personal laws governing both Hindus and Muslims conferred on the male the non-reciprocal right to have a plurality of spouses. The relief of divorce in the event of the husband taking another wife was unavailable to the Hindu wife, marriage being regarded as a life-long sacrament. The Muslim wife had a notional right to seek divorce but not on the ground of polygamy; and the right meant little in practice as explained succinctly by Zarina Bhatty in the following words:

"A Muslim can have up to four wives at a time without any protection to the woman against the exercise of this privilege. The law does not admit polygamy as a cause for seeking divorce by a Muslim woman. Of course, the corresponding right of a woman to have more than one husband in any circumstances is inconceivable much less granted in law. A man can divorce at will just by uttering 'I divorce you' three times, anywhere any time without any witnesses. He is also not required by law to give any maintenance to the wife thus divorced beyond the period of *iddat* which is three months and few days. If a man initiates divorce he is obliged to pay *mehr*, a sum of money agreed upon at the time of marriage. This provision is taken as a security for Muslim women against hasty divorce. But as long as the right to have four wives continues to be enjoyed by a man, he need not divorce his wife if he does not wish to pay her *mehr*, he can simply discard her or ill-treat her beyond her endurance. In such an event if she initiates divorce then her husband is not entitled to pay the *mehr*. Another practice not altogether unfamiliar is that some orthodox husbands refuse to consummate marriage till the wife voluntarily forfeits the right to *mehr* which is recognised in law. Since Muslim marriage is not complete until it has been consummated, such refusal understandably results in her yielding to

the husband's wishes.

"On the other hand, a woman cannot give divorce to her husband, she has to seek it and the husband must agree to give it. If he does not, then she must go through a cumbersome process of enlisting the support of law. Another inhibiting factor attached to women seeking divorce is that, in doing so they automatically forfeit the right to *mehr* and *iddat* both. Clearly the law makes it as easy as possible for man and as difficult as possible for woman to secure a divorce."[4]

When the unanimous recommendation of the Women's Sub-Committee for laying down an identical standard of marital morality went up to the National Planning Committee, conservative members both among Muslims and Hindus opposed the proposal to make monogamy compulsory under law. Shuaib Qureshi was in favour of divorce in the event of a second marriage by the husband, but was against a legal ban on polygamy. In contrast, G.M. Sayed (of Sind) was for immediate and compulsory monogamy. N.M. Joshi, V.S. Dubey and A.D. Shroff were in favour of raising the age of marriage to the same level as the age of majority and providing for easy divorce by either party, but held that a legal provision requiring monogamy was not necessary.

The National Planning Committee by a majority endorsed the recommendation to make monogamy compulsory. This was a giant step forward in the struggle for women's equality. Monogamy came to be enforced by law on the Hindu male with the passage of the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, but the reform is yet to be implemented in respect of the Muslim male.

The National Planning Committee also adopted a resolution affirming that "divorce shall be available at the option of either party, subject to such conditions as may be laid down by the law in that behalf. These conditions may relate to sufficient notice period for the divorce to be effective, and maintenance and custody of children. These conditions should be equal as between man and woman."

When this resolution was adopted, three Muslim members appended a dissenting note which assumed (contrary to the position explained in Zarina Bhatty's analysis quoted earlier) that Muslim personal law needed no improvement. Shuaib Qureshi, Syed Mahmud (from Bihar) and Nazir Ahmad asserted in their note: "This shall not affect the Muslim personal law, according to which the two parties to a marriage contract could, as the law stands even now,

have, as part of the contract, equal right of divorce. As to the right of maintenance of children, that too is fully safeguarded under the Islamic law."

G.M. Sayed associated himself with these three Muslim spokesmen when the Committee discussed the sub-committee's recommendation of equal rights for women "to hold, acquire, inherit, and dispose of property of all kinds, and to shoulder corresponding obligations, without any differentiation at any stage or in any manner on grounds of sex alone...." The four Muslim signatories to a note of dissent said: ".... this should be without prejudice to Muslim personal law."

A landmark recommendation by the Women's Sub-Committee was that the right to insist on restitution of conjugal rights in Hindu and Muslim law should be abolished. It is tragic that this proposal to end a barbaric practice is yet to be implemented.

The National Planning Committee also endorsed the sub-committee's recommendation of co-education as "the basis or ideal of the national system of education, which should be founded on common courses of study for boys and girls." Shuaib Qureshi and A.K. Shaha were against co-education between the ages of 12 and 18.

Comrades of the Road

Noteworthy is the sub-committee's general approach to the question of the status and role of Indian women, as summed up in the Introduction to the report: "The women's movement in India, though comparatively recent, has ... gradually developed into a conscious desire for human development on equal terms. Politically woman's advance has not met with the opposition which it has encountered in some of the Western countries.... The national movement in India has helped the cause of women in this respect....

"We do not wish to turn woman into a cheap imitation of man or to render her useless for the great tasks of motherhood and nation-building. But in demanding equal status and opportunity, we desire to achieve for woman the possibility of development under favourable circumstances of education and opportunity.... We would like to displace the picture so deeply impressed upon the racial imagination of man striding forward to conquer new worlds, woman

following wearily behind with a baby in her arms. The picture which we now envisage is that of man and woman, comrades of the road, going forward together, the child joyously shared by both. Such a reality we feel cannot but raise the manhood and womanhood of any nation."

On the economic basis that can sustain such a vision, the sub-committee said: "... woman cannot be free until the means and the training for economic liberty have been assured to her, and until the functions which nature and society impose on her are organised in such a way that while fulfilling them woman still retains the right to mould her social and economic life in any way she chooses...

"A great many women will confine their activities to the home and a great part of their work will be done in the home. This important work, though not recognised in terms of money value, is an essential contribution to the social wealth and should be so recognised." The National Planning Committee endorsed this recommendation. India's national leaders thereby became among the first in the world to accept the concept of unpaid family labour being an economic contribution as real and valuable as the earning of a money wage or salary.

The Women's Sub-Committee had begun intensive deliberations when Jawaharlal addressed the All India Women's Conference at its Allahabad session on 28 January 1940. He said he was 'astounded' by the comprehensiveness of the questionnaire produced by the sub-committee and paid this tribute to its work: "I feel that of all the sub-committees of the National Planning Committee, the sub-committee which has done the most work, and ... has really built up almost a movement for the purpose, has been the women's sub-committee."

Members of the sub-committee held different views on sexual morality, ranging from the conservative to the mildly progressive and totally radical. Views of the last category found pronounced expression in the documents prepared by the secretariat, including draft chapters of the sub-committee's report. This was because K.T. Shah,[5] who was general secretary of the National Planning Committee, was a socialist who held radical views on the ethics of the man-woman relationship.

Shareefa Hamid Ali, who was president of the All India Women's Conference in 1940, and was a member of the sub-committee, complained more than once to Jawaharlal Nehru that –

as she put it in one of her letters to him -- "the ideals of morality, chastity, laws of marriage, legality of children -- instead of being raised to a higher standard -- are, I find, being degraded to an appalling degree." She took objection to the proposition that "every woman who becomes a mother does something laudable for the country -- whether inside or outside marriage." Referring to K.T. Shah she says: "I was not aware that this *man* was a member of the *woman's* sub-committee... I am writing to you in confidence that both Mrs. Brijlal (Rameshwari) Nehru and Mrs. (Sarojini) Naidu have asked me repeatedly to go over the N.P.C. papers *very* carefully because there are very many things in it which cause them, and me, profound uneasiness." Begum Hamid Ali objected in particular to the proposals that abortion should be permitted legally, that methods of birth control would be recognised, and that children even of casual intercourse would be considered legitimate.

Jawaharlal, in the role of moderator appropriate to a committee chairman, writes to 'My dear Tai' (Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade) on 30 March 1940: "Many of the subjects dealt with by your committee relate to intimate details of personal life and to all manner of prejudices and customs. It is right that these prejudices and injurious customs should go and we should work to that end. But the way to remove them is not always the way of merely denouncing them. One has to approach the subject in a manner which is the least offensive to large sections of people and which does not irritate them to such an extent as to blind their reasoning capacity. Otherwise there is great danger of the whole report being condemned off-hand as a fantastic Utopian and airy document which has no relation to fact. Or, even worse still, it might be dubbed as an immoral and injurious document.... The result of this will be bad for the women's cause and it will also be bad for the whole National Planning Committee.... You will forgive me for writing frankly on this subject, but I do attach importance to your report and I think that it might well be a landmark in the women's movement in India.... Although we are pressed for time in the N.P.C., I would much rather give you more for your sub-committee's report rather than get something which is not A-1. If I can be of any help to you in any way, you can always command me."

NOTES

1 There used to be four classes of railway travel: First, Second, Inter, and Third. After independence, the Inter and Third classes were abolished, the Third class being renamed as the Second. But more of luxury classes have been added over the years: Air Conditioned First, A.C. Sleeper, A.C. Chair Car -- besides luxury trains for tourists from affluent countries and well-to-do Indians.

2 Main Report, and reports of 26 sub-committees (Bombay: Vora & Co.).

3 A Christian born in a princely family, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (1889-1964) became a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. She played a notable part in the movement for freedom and women's awakening.

4 Article in *A.I.W.C. Golden Jubilee and Margaret Cousins Birth Centenary Commemoration Volume* (New Delhi: All India Women's Conference), p. 51.

5 He contested the first Presidential election in 1952 as an independent and lost to the Congress candidate, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Shah secured 92,827 votes (against Prasad's 507,400) -- the second highest among five candidates.

7 Communal Divide and the Women's Movement

The words 'communal' and 'secular' have come to be used in India in a special sense during this century. 'Commune', both as verb and noun, suggests togetherness. 'Communal' would ordinarily denote 'for common use of the community' and 'communalism' would stand for the principle of communal organisation, as in the Paris Commune of 1871. However, thanks to the creation, for the purpose of political representation, of separate electorates for Muslims and other religious communities during British rule, the words 'communal' and 'communalism' have acquired a negative connotation in India. They have come to denote separatism, the opposite of togetherness.

Similarly, instead of 'secular' meaning non-ecclesiastical and 'secularism' standing for scepticism about religious truth, the words are used in India to denote religious toleration and the co-operative co-existence of citizens belonging to different religious faiths. Thus, a recent seminar of distinguished Indian intellectuals urged religious leaders to promote secular values -- a proposition that must sound bizarre to foreign ears. This was a seminar on the theme of 'Jawaharlal Nehru and India's Quest for a Secular Identity' held in April 1987. It adopted a statement which concluded by urging that "Secular values should be actively promoted by judges, teachers and religious teachers."[1]

It is in this special sense arising from the Indian context that the words 'communalism' and 'secularism' are used in this chapter and indeed throughout the book.

'Bande Mataram' Controversy

British colonialists conducted their first major exercise in fomenting Hindu-Muslim divisiveness, as we saw in chapter 4, by

partitioning Bengal in 1905 and following it up in 1909 with the introduction of separate electorates for Muslims in elections to provincial legislative councils. A controversy connected with the popular movement against Bengal's partition continued to echo through the decades. It concerned the song *Bande Mataram*, which formed part of a Bengali novel, *Anand Math*. The writer was Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838-94). Bankim Chandra was in the first batch of students to graduate from Calcutta University, and he valued English as a unifying link among educated Indians. But he cautioned against alienation of the English-educated classes from the masses, and himself wrote extensively in Bengali. Among the chief characters in *Anand Math* is Shanti: "This simple Indian housewife was fired by patriotism and came to Anandamath, dressed as a man. She remained true to the ideal of Indian womanhood in her dedication to her husband. But she abandoned the shyness and diffidence which is typical of a delicate Indian wife and was transformed into a fighter."[2]

The song *Bande Mataram* became widely popular, and its opening two words became the rallying cry of the boycotters and demonstrators during the anti-partition movement. Given below is an English rendering of the verses of the song, by Modhumita Mojumdar.

SALUTE TO THE MOTHER

To the one who is well-watered, full of fruit and cool breeze
The one who is verdant with grains -- to the Mother
To the one whose nights are joyous with white moonlight decorated with fully open flowers and clusters of trees
The pleasantly smiling, pleasant of speech,
Giver of pleasure and blessings -- to the Mother.
Seven crores of throats with their resounding sound
Twice seven crores of hands holding sharp swords
Why are you powerless with so much power?
The holder of great strength, I worship: the one who delivers from danger
The one who stays hordes of enemies -- the Mother.
You are learning, you are Dharma
You are the heart, you are soul
You are the life force in the body
You are the power in the arm

You are the devotion in the heart
I build your image in temple after temple.
You are Durga the wielder of ten weapons
You are Kamala who moves about amidst lotuses
You are Vani the giver of knowledge. I salute thee.
I salute Lakshmi, the pure, the incomparable.
The well watered, full of fruit, the Mother.
Salute to the Mother,
To the verdant, to the pure-minded, well-smiling, adorned with jewels,
To the land, to the one who sustains, to the Mother!

The British banned the singing of *Bande Mataram*. At the Bengal provincial conference held at Barisal in 1906 the delegates were beaten up for singing it in defiance of the ban. The Rowlatt Committee appointed by the British administration was later to hold the novel *Anand Math* responsible for the spread of the revolutionary -- what it called 'seditious' -- spirit. *Bande Mataram* began to be sung at patriotic gatherings throughout the country, and the two opening words served as a greeting. Motilal Nehru informs his son in a letter of 16 November 1905: "Bande Mataram has become the common form of salutation even in Allahabad... If this movement only continues you will on your return find an India quite different to the India you left."

Some Muslims took exception to the singing of *Bande Mataram* on the ground that it praised goddesses. Till as late as 1938, M.A. Jinnah -- who had begun as a nationalist but became a virulent separatist -- was harping on *Bande Mataram* as a major Muslim grievance. Frances Gunther, the American journalist who accompanied her husband when John Gunther visited India in preparation for writing *Inside Asia*, described in a letter of 13 February 1938 to Jawaharlal Nehru how she and her husband had spent three hours talking to Jinnah: "By the way, all the British loathe and scorn Jinnah but give him all this publicity to annoy you. For two and three-quarter hours John listened politely while Jinnah talked, talked and talked. Finally I could stand it no longer and shouted, 'But for God's sake, what in hell does the Muslim League *want*?' Well, believe it or not, he brought up the Bande Mataram -- seriously -- and he brought up Hindi-Urdu.[3] That seemed all he could think of. He left out jobs. Why don't you send Abdul Ghaffar Khan[4] to trail him

wherever lies spoken -- terrific contrast -- lion to a weasel....

"It's just one verse they object to, I understand.... why don't you get them to offer a substitute verse -- challenge Jinnah publicly to a poetical duel!"

The Congress did not take the line that the literature and the arts of a country are bound to bear the impress of the religious symbols of the majority of its people, and if some Muslims did not like it they should put up with it. On the contrary, in deference to the sentiment of a section of Muslims, and on Gandhiji's advice, the Congress Working Committee decided on 28 October 1937 that only the first two stanzas of *Bande Mataram*, which had no religious overtones, should be sung at public gatherings. Frances Gunther evidently did not know of this, but Jinnah should certainly have known.

Islam reached Indonesia much later than Hindu rule and, with it, Hindu culture. Indonesians did not find it necessary after their conversion to Islam to repudiate their pre-Islamic cultural heritage which included the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* epics. Indian Muslims could likewise have accepted the feminine deities invoked in the later lines of the *Bande Mataram* song as symbols of well-being and of desirable qualities. If some Muslims could not achieve this degree of cultural empathy, they could have simply refrained from joining in the singing of *Bande Mataram*. It was unreasonable on their part to object to Hindus expressing their love of the motherland in the imagery of the age-old culture to which all Indians are heirs. It is a tribute to the catholic Indian ethos that, even after the sub-continent's partition at the insistence of the Muslim League, the patriotic song *Sare Jahan se Achha Hindustan Hamara*, composed by the poet Mohammed Iqbal before he became a separatist and an advocate of Pakistan, continues to be sung with enthusiasm to this day. While *Jana Gana Mana*, composed by the poet Rabindranath Tagore, has been made the official national anthem, *Bande Mataram* and *Sare Jahan se Achha Hindustan Hamara* continue to be sung as non-official and popular national anthems.

Purdah and the Franchise

Just as the British fostered separatism among Indian Muslims in order to divide the national movement, they invoked the Muslim custom of *purdah* (adopted also by some Hindu families of the upper

classes in the north) to deny Indian women the right to vote. The Southborough Committee on Franchise, in its report of April 1919, cited *purdah* as a practical difficulty in justification of not recommending franchise for women. The Committee said that the demand for franchise was, in any case, confined to a 'minority' consisting of educated Indian women.

Sarojini Naidu appeared as a witness before the joint committee of the Houses of the British parliament on the Government of India Bill of 1919. She argued in vain that it was irrational to deny the women of India the right to vote because a section among them observed *purdah*. Eventually the 1919 Act left it to the discretion of the provincial legislatures to decide whether and on what qualifications women might be granted the franchise. When the Bombay Legislative Council debated the issue in 1921, the European members led the opposition to women's enfranchisement. The Parsi members were in favour and the other communities were divided on the issue. The resolution granting the voting right to women was adopted by 52 votes to 25.

Though Bengal had led the country in social reform, and literacy among girls in Brahmo Samaj families was high, the overall percentage of women's literacy was depressed by the Muslim women of East Bengal who were made to observe *purdah* and denied education. During the debate on the women's franchise resolution in the Bengal Legislative Council, Muslim spokesmen led the opposition. Writing on 'Backward Bengal: Women's Suffrage Defeat', Margaret Cousins observed: "They (the Muslim members) exaggerated the fact that about one woman to every eight men might (not must) vote once in three years, into the fiction that every woman would compulsorily keep voting all the time and meals would not be cooked. They inflated the fact that *purdah* polling stations would be provided, into which women might enter as unseen as into a ladies' carriage, into the terror that 'sexes would mix promiscuously', and they said that 'Islam did not want Muhammadan women to go hand in hand with men to bazaars, councils and courts'." A combination of 30 Muslims and six other members of the Bengal Council defeated the resoluion. It was adopted only at the second attempt, in 1926.

Religion, Caste, Sex in Elections

The diabolical thoroughness with which British colonialists exploited and accentuated the differences of religion, caste and race is illustrated by the pattern of the constituencies created for the elections held during the twenties.

In the provinces, territorial constituencies were divided into 'communal' and 'non-communal'. In the communal constituencies, there were separate electorates consisting of Muslims in all provinces except Burma; of Sikhs in the Punjab; of Anglo-Indians in Madras, Bengal and Burma; of Indian Christians in Madras; and of Europeans in all provinces except the Punjab, the Central Provinces and Assam. In the so-called non-communal constituencies, seats were reserved for Non-Brahmins in Madras and for Mahrattas (who, too, are non-Brahmins) in Bombay in plural-member constituencies.[5]

Women could stand for election to the provincial Legislative Councils in those provinces that permitted it. Women could not vote at all in the elections to the Council of State which, together with the Legislative Assembly, formed the central legislature. In those provinces where the sex disqualification for the provincial Legislative Council had been removed, women could vote in the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly.

The franchise was so severely restricted by property and educational qualifications that in the 1920 elections (boycotted by the Congress) the electorate for the Central Legislative Assembly in eight major provinces excluding Burma totalled only 908,740. Women's franchise added 52,156 to the register.

In the 1923 elections, in which the Congress decided at the last minute to participate, the electorate for the Central Assembly stood at 990,979.

Voting by eligible women used to be very low. In the 1926 elections the participation was highest in Madras (22 per cent), followed by Bombay (12 per cent), the Punjab (12 per cent), Bengal (9.6 per cent) and the United Provinces (4.5 per cent).

A Franchise Committee was formed at the Round Table Conference convened by the British Government in London in 1930, and it undertook a tour of India. This committee, unlike its predecessor headed by Southborough, accepted women's franchise in principle. It found that during the evidence tendered before it by various groups

including women who observed *purdah*, only Muslim men from the north were unfavourably disposed towards women's enfranchisement, on the ground that it would undermine the institution of *purdah*.

The Franchise Committee's proposals envisaged a reduction of the ratio of men to women voters from 14:1 in Assam and 10:1 in Madras to an average of 5:1. But increase in the number of women voters was to be brought about by means which included some pernicious criteria. In addition to women who qualified on their own, by virtue of education or property, the wife of a man who had property qualifications, if she was over 25 years of age, could vote; so could a widow over 25 if her husband was enfranchised at the time of his death.

The All India Women's Conference objected to these proposals since they did not recognise women's inherent right to citizenship and the vote. Women's representatives rejected the argument of British officials that eligibility as wives and widows would be advantageous since it would increase the number of women voters. The enfranchising of women on individual merit might decrease the number of women voters, the A.I.W.C. argued, but it would assert the principle of equal status and enable its attainment at least in the future. Women's representatives also criticised the prescription of the property qualification for a population that was overwhelmingly poor, and the literacy qualification for a largely illiterate women population.

Separate Electorates for Muslim Women

The worst feature of the Franchise Committee's proposals was the extension of the divisive system of separate communal electorates to the filling of seats proposed to be reserved in the legislatures for women. Now that women were to be enfranchised, though subject to crippling qualifications, the British rulers wanted to discourage the joining of hands by Hindu and Muslim women. This was a further refinement of the imperialist policy elaborated over the years to divide Indian from Indian.

A joint meeting of representatives of the All India Women's Conference, the Women's Indian Association and the National Council of Women drew up a memorandum which informed the

government that they did not desire any special privileges for themselves by way of reservation of seats or nomination, and that they would prefer to fight elections in general constituencies on equal terms with men.

Opinion among Muslim women was divided on the question of communal electorates. Begum Hamid Ali was among the representatives of the A.I.W.C. who argued in support of joint electorates for women. This was during the hearings in 1933 by the select committee of the British parliament on Indian constitutional reforms, to be embodied in the Bill which was eventually adopted as the Government of India Act of 1935. Another exponent of joint electorates was Begum Aizaz Rasul.[6] But they were outnumbered by Muslim women leaders who went along with the separatist politics of the Muslim League.

Among the separatists were Begum Shaista Ikramullah and Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz. An insight into the working of their mind is provided in Begum Shahnawaz's autobiography.[7] She attended in July 1932 at Nagpur a meeting of the standing committee of the All India Women's Conference of which she was Vice President. Begum Shahnawaz says that, while talking to a prominent woman leader of the Indian National Congress, "I came to know what they (Congress) were aiming at. The majorities of one per cent given to the Muslims in the Punjab and Bengal under the Communal Award were not acceptable to them and they were trying to have the Muslim women's seats, reserved for them through separate electorates, thrown into the common pool by agitating for joint electorates for all the women's seats, and by so doing take away the bare majorities of one given to the Muslims in those legislatures. Miss Feroze-ud-Din and I told the Standing Committee that Muslim women would never accept joint electorates when their men were not prepared to do so. Women members of the Nationalist group were ready to agitate along with the Hindu members for joint electorates for women."

Under the Government of India Act of 1935 as finally adopted, six million women became eligible to vote, as against 29 million men. The Act retained the objectionable features that had been criticised by the Women's Conference. The enfranchised women included those qualifying as wives and widows of propertied or otherwise eligible men. Seats were reserved for women on a communal basis -- though women could contest any of the general seats. A delimitation

committee was to identify the constituencies to be reserved for women. In these, both men and women could vote, except in the case of Muslim constituencies where the electors would be women only.

On top of all this, the procedures followed by the provincial authorities for the registration of women voters were arbitrary and cumbrous. The Government of Bengal sent a request to leading men to list literate women in their neighbourhood who, to their knowledge, were eligible to vote. In Bombay, village officers were to identify women qualified by literacy to become voters. In Madras, women were asked to submit their applications in person to the registration officer. Later, women in *purdah* were allowed to register through their husbands or other male relatives. Commenting on this, *Stri Dharma* said in an editorial: "The integrity of women was to be vouched for by men only. One sometimes wishes that men who make these rules could be made into women for a few years of their lives, to realise how these pin-pricking slurs on womanhood hurt. Why must it be only a male relative who may vouch for the woman applicant? Why not a woman of education or repute who knows the applicant?"

The All India Women's Conference made a conscious effort to enlist more Muslim members. Margaret Cousins wrote to Mrs. Hosain Ali on 10 December 1936 from Madanapalle in south India: "One of the things I am most anxious to do as new President of our A.I.W.C. is to increase the beautiful bonds of sisterhood between all our community women. Last year we had few Muslim ladies -- it was so far south.[8] This year I hope you will all rally round the flag. Please do everything you can to be with us. I have always been conscious that you should become one of our important office-bearers. We need young capable women like you and we need our Muslim sisters.... Please do come and bring other Muslim delegates."[9]

Shortly afterwards, on 3 April 1937, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru: "I am very pleased about your programme regarding the Muslim masses. You should, wherever possible, have women on your provincial and local committees to get into touch with Muslim women who are not nearly so tainted with the communal spirit as their menfolk. Throughout my work among women -- extending now over a long period -- I have *not* found the communal virus hampering us. Of course it *is* there but in lesser degree and if once the women are free from it the next generation will be healthy-

minded."

Events did not bear out the hope expressed by Amrit Kaur. It was not to be expected that the average Muslim woman, uneducated and living in seclusion in a subordinate position within the home, could withstand the prevailing current of separatism. Though the women's movement in its initial phase had been free of communalism, it could not for long remain unaffected by the growing cleavage between the Congress and the Muslim League in the political arena. Separate all-India organisations of Muslim women were formed in the late thirties.

NOTES

1 Statement adopted on 12 April 1987 at the conclusion of a seminar in New Delhi under the joint auspices of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla: the Indian Council of Social Science Research: the Indian Council of Historical Research and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

2 V.S. Naravane in an article in *Indian Horizons*, No. 3-4, 1985.

3 The reference is to the insistence of many Muslim leaders on supremacy for Urdu. When the Government of the United Provinces passed an order on 8 April 1900 to the effect that law courts and government offices should also entertain petitions written in Hindi in Devanagari script, many Muslim politicians objected and held protest meetings. They said it would lower the status and prestige of Urdu. Again, when C. Rajagopalachari as Prime Minister of Madras Presidency sought to promote Hindustani in the late thirties, the Muslim League objected strongly. It was not satisfied with Rajaji's explanation that the language sought to be promoted would have an admixture of words derived from Sanskrit as well as Persian, and could be written either in the Devanagari or Persian [Urdu] script.

4 Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1891-1988), the tall and splendidly built leader of the Pathans of the North West Frontier Province in the struggle against British rule. He accepted Mahatma Gandhi's technique of non-violent resistance so completely that he came to be known as the Frontier Gandhi. When it was decided to partition the sub-continent, the Red Shirts -- as his followers were known -- boycotted the referendum in the N.W.F.P. because they were denied the third alternative which they wanted, of an independent Pakhtoonistan as against accession either to Pakistan or to India.

5 Memoranda submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission by the Government of India, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1930.

6 She was elected to the United Povinces legislature for several terms from 1937, was a member of the Constituent Assembly and of the Rajya Sabha, and served as a Minister in the Government of Uttar Pradesh during 1969-71.

7 *Father and Daughter* (Lahore: Nigarishat, 1971).

8 The 1935 Conference had been held at Trivandrum, and the next session was to be held at Ahmedabad in December 1936.

9 *A.I.W.C. Golden Jubilee and Margaret Cousins Birth Centenary Commemoration Volume* (New Delhi: All India Women's Conference).

8 The Final Round

Even as members of the women's sub-committee of the National Planning Committee were asserting the right -- a right accepted by the best among Indian men -- to march forward together as equal comrades with our menfolk, the world was plunged into a terrible war by Hitler's Germany. Part of Hitler's noxious creed was that women's sole concern was with the kitchen, children and the church.

War for Empire or Democracy?

Jawaharlal Nehru was largely responsible for the outward-looking interest of India's freedom movement in international developments. The Congress expressed itself repeatedly against the policy of appeasement of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy which was being pursued during the thirties by Britain and other countries of Western Europe. Practising democracy at home but imperialism abroad, they were only postponing the day of reckoning.

The Tripuri Congress, meeting in March 1939 -- six months before the outbreak of the Second World War -- adopted a resolution which expressed opposition to "imperialism and fascism alike.... In the opinion of the Congress, it is urgently necessary for India to direct her own foreign policy as an independent nation, thereby keeping aloof from both imperialism and fascism, and pursuing her path of peace and freedom." When Britain at last gave up the policy of appeasement and declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, the Viceroy followed suit and declared that India was at war, without even the formality of consulting the Central Legislature. Meeting at Wardha later in the same month, the Congress Working Committee called upon the British Government to declare what their war aims were, and in particular how those aims were going to

apply to India both immediately and after the war. There was no response, and the Congress Ministries resigned in protest in November 1939. On the Viceroy rejecting the Congress offer, renewed in July 1940, to support the war effort if a provisional national government was formed with the promise of independence at the end of the hostilities, the Congress launched a Satyagraha campaign. But it was confined to token civil disobedience -- in order not to embarrass the British during 'the perils and dangers of war'. Imprisonment was courted by individuals chosen by Gandhiji. Jawaharlal was arrested in October 1940; my husband and I were soon added to the honours list.

Meanwhile the war was going badly for the Allies. Each reverse suffered by the British in the eastern theatre was welcomed by a section of Indians for two reasons. One was that the British imperialists, who were refusing to get off India's back, were being humbled. The other reason was that the advancing Japanese forces were accompanied by the Indian National Army formed by Subhas Chandra Bose. After effecting a sensational escape in January 1941 from his Calcutta home where he had been interned, Bose made his way to Afghanistan from where he wanted to go to the Soviet Union. Failing in this attempt he proceeded to Germany and from there to Japan. About 20,000 Indian officers and men of the British Indian Army, taken prisoner by the Japanese in East Asia, joined the force raised by Bose, which was to fight alongside the Japanese to drive the British out of India. A large number of women joined the Indian National Army organised by Subhas Chandra Bose. They formed a regiment named after the Rani of Jhansi, heroine of the 1857 uprising. Among prominent personalities in the I.N.A. was Captain Lakshmi Swaminathan, daughter of Ammu Swaminathan.

The Congress viewed with concern the growing sense of satisfaction at the success of Japanese army, since it could lead to a passive acceptance of Japanese aggression against India. In the spring of 1942 the British Cabinet sent Sir Stafford Cripps to negotiate with Indian leaders, but the talks failed since the British were not prepared to concede responsibility for Defence to an Indian War Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. Moreover, the Cripps proposals for the post-war period would allow a province or Princely State which did not want to accept a new Dominion constitution to keep out.

'Quit India' Struggle

Following the failure of the Cripps mission and further reverses suffered by the British forces, Gandhiji feared that India would go the way of Malaya and Burma if the British did not quit. He said in an inverview to an American journalist: "Hundreds, if not thousands, on their way from Burma perished without food and drink, and the wretched discrimination stared even these miserable people in the face. One route for the whites, another for the blacks! Provision of food and shelter for the whites, none for the blacks! And discrimination even on their arrival in India! India is being ground down to dust and humiliated... And so one fine morning I came to the decision to make this honest demand: 'For Heaven's sake leave India alone. Let us breathe the air of freedom. It may choke us, suffocate us, as it did the slaves on their emancipation. But I want the present sham to end'."[1]

The Congress Working Committee adopted on 14 July 1942 at Wardha a resolution calling for the withdrawal of British rule from India so that a provisional government, representative of all important sections of the people, could be formed for organising effective resistance to aggression. The resolution made it clear that the intention was not to jeopardise the defensive capacity of the Allied Powers: "The Congress is therefore agreeable to the stationing of the armed forces of the Allies in India...."

The notice to the British power to quit India, embodied in the above document, was reiterated, and the sanctions for enforcing the demand spelt out, in a resolution placed before the All India Congress Commttee in Bombay on 7 August 1942. The operative portion said: "The Committee resolves, therefore, to sanction for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale.... Such a struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji and the Committee requests him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken.

"The Committee appeals to the people of India to .... carry out his instructions as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom.... A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instructions or for instructions to reach our people, and when no Congress Committee can function. When this happens, every man and woman, who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself

within the four corners of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place and which leads ultimately to the independence and deliverance of India."

Gandhiji concluded his speech on this resolution on 8 August at the A.I.C.C. with these words: "The Congress will do or die...I shall make every effort to see the Viceroy or address a letter to him and wait for his reply before starting the struggle. It may take a week or a fortnight or three weeks." The resolution was adopted late in the evening. The Congress president, Maulana Azad, announced that he would send copies of the resolution to President Roosevelt, to the Chinese Government and to the Soviet ambassador in London. (Gandhiji wrote later: "The movement was not started by the resolution of 8 August. Before I could function, they arrested not only me, who was to lead and guide the movement if negotiations failed, but principal Congressmen all over India. Thus it was not I but the government who started the movement.")

Clearly, Gandhiji and his colleagues had no idea that they would be rounded up by the police within a few hours. The sudden swoop was, in its secret and meticulous planning -- with a special train standing ready at Victoria Terminus to take most of the leaders for incarceration in Ahmadnagar Fort -- reminiscent of the totally unexpected Japanese air attack on the American fleet anchored at Pearl Harbour on 7 November 1941.

Some of us, however, knew that the arrests were coming. My husband and I had told the leaders about the government's plan before the A.I.C.C. meeting began, but they would not believe it.

Nationalist consciousness had become so widespread by the early forties that many Indians even among government employees felt sympathy and admiration for those who were fighting for the country's freedom. Jugal Kishore Khanna, who was at that time general secretary of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee, recalls how he got to know from a friendly source in the Home Department about a Top Secret circular to the Bombay Government, the railways and other authorities concerned about plans for the arrest of the Congress leaders immediately on the adoption of the Quit India resolution:

"I sent the infomation through Asaf Ali to Bombay. He left on 3 August 1942 in the morning by the Frontier Mail and gave the infor-

mation to the Working Committee at its first meeting. But, as I was told later on in Bombay on the 6th or the 7th, Sarojini Naidu and others laughed it away saying, 'These Delhi people always bring all sorts of news.' On the 7th, the information was confirmed by a Bombay Secretariat source. On the 8th, the proceedings (of the A.I.C.C.) went on till 10.30 p.m. Mahatma Gandhi for the first time made a very long speech, for about one-and-a-half hours instead of the usual 15 or 20 minutes, on 'Do or Die', the final struggle. Maulana Azad asked us to meet him at Birla House (where he was staying) at 7.30 the next morning for proceeding to the flag-hoisting ceremony at Gowalia Tank Maidan. I laughed at the idea."[2]

I recall the exact expression that Sarojini Naidu used when we told the Working Committee about the impending Pearl Harbour. She called it the wild talk of opium smokers at a *Chandukhana* in Delhi.

My husband and I were not in the least surprised when, in the early hours of 9 August, the police knocked on the door at the flat where we were staying. When they announced Asaf Saheb's arrest, I asked "What about me?" "There is no warrant for you, madam," I was told.

I persuaded the British sergeant who had come in a taxi with a couple of policemen to let me accompany them to the railway station to see off my husband. Dawn was about to break and there was a cordon round Victoria Terminus to keep crowds away. As I walked along the platform I saw Maulana Azad sitting at a window in a compartment of the special train, and stopped to talk to him. As Congress President he was to unfurl the tricolour at a public gathering at Gowalia Tank Maidan at 8 a.m. I made up my mind on an impulse: 'I am going there.'

Bhulabhai Desai's son Dhirubhai had come to the railway station, and he drove me in his car to the Maidan. The meeting was declared illegal under Section 144. A white sergeant gave two minutes for the crowd to disperse. I quickly scrambled up to the dais, announced to the people the arrest of the leaders, and pulled the cord to hoist the national flag. Few knew my identity; some thought that the girl with plaited hair was a college student from Delhi. Hardly had the flag been unfurled when the police lobbed tear-gas shells into the crowd. The men and women ran helter-skelter with tears streaming from their eyes. Among them was Indira Gandhi, though I was not aware of it at the time. She had got married to

Feroze less than five months earlier. "I had my first experience of a tear-gas attack at the flag-hoisting ceremony," she recalls.[3]

The experience of that morning made me decide that I would not again tamely enter jail by offering Satyagraha. The people were indignant at the arrest of the leaders and the indignation should find organised expression in such a forceful manner that the alien rulers would have no option but to quit India. I found that this was also the feeling of some other delegates who had come to the A.I.C.C. session from Delhi and were staying at the Lakshmi Insurance building on Hornby Road. They included Deshbandhu Gupta and Jugal Kishore Khanna. We decided to go to Delhi, enter the city quietly and organise the movement there. Taking a train, we got off at Agra from where we motored to Delhi. I was looked after at the beginning of my underground life in Delhi by Nirmala and Uma, the daughters of Dr. N.C. Joshi, patriot and well-known surgeon of Karol Bagh. A truly secular person who saved many Hindus and Muslims alike during the partition riots, he was later to fall victim to a Muslim fanatic's bullet.

Like us from Delhi, many others felt that flocking into jails was not an adequate response to the leonine violence let loose by the alien regime. The people were spontaneously expressing their anger at the arrest of the national leaders by tearing up railway track, cutting telegraph lines and blowing up bridges. This patriotic upsurge, in which students and youth were to the fore, needed to be canalised into an organised movement on the lines of the anti-Fascist resistance in Occupied Europe. This was the approach not only of well-known Congress Socialists like Jayaprakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia and Achyut Patwardhan, and 'Nehru socialists' like myself who were not formally members of the C.S.P., but of Gandhians like R.R. Diwakar and Sucheta Kripalani.

All of us went underground to organise the people's resistance to the British rulers and to dislocate the war effort. The only Left group to stand apart, and even to oppose us, were the Indian communists. They believed that Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 had transformed the hostilities into a people's war. We felt differently. While we deeply sympathised with the Soviet people and admired their heroic resistance to Hitler's hordes, we were of the view that they were fighting for their freedom and we for ours and there was no contradiction between the two struggles.

The Quit India movement resulted in the liberation of several

areas and the replacement there of the alien regime, for some time, by people's rule. Liberated areas were established in parts of Bihar and eastern United Provinces and in some pockets in Bengal, Orissa, Karnataka and Maharashtra. The peasantry played a leading role in this struggle. Among the 'national governments' established in some areas was the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar formed at Tamluk in Bengal, with its own army called the Vidyut Vahini and a Sisters' Corps attached to it. "Such governments," says an authoritative review, "survived the longest in the Satara district of Maharashtra and Dharwar district of Karnataka, where the 'Patri Sarkar' functioned till the middle of 1945 under the leadership of Nana Patil. The movement continued in varying intensity in parts of Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, the then Central Provinces and Assam. Everywhere the government reprisals included arson, killings, molestation of women and imposition of heavy collective fines."[4]

Much has been made of my own part in the movement. I was but a splinter of the lava thrown up by the volcanic eruption of a people's indignation. It is true that during my underground existence for three-and-a-half years, the incessant travel, unaccustomed living conditions, food at irregular hours, and the constant tension told on my health. But so many other comrades in the movement suffered similar or greater hardship.

If I had often to undergo discomfort, there were interludes when I was affectionately taken care of by sympathisers of the cause of freedom. They belonged to all sections of Indian society including the patriotic bourgeoisie. I remember how Mridula Sarabhai, after she came to know that I was in Bombay and was ill, located me and drove me to the palatial home of her wealthy kin, who took me into their care despite the harm that could come to them for harbouring a fugitive for whose capture the police had announced a reward. There were similar, kindly hosts in Delhi and Calcutta and elsewhere who not only helped me to recover my health with medication and nourishing food but supplied me with the rich silks and fancy goggles of a society lady which I used as disguise, in place of my accustomed wear of grey and printed khadi.

There was help also from less expected quarters. We had sympathisers even among police officers. I was more than once tipped off on an impending police raid so that I could move to another hide-out. We had cooperation, too, from young entrepreneurs and technologists with whose help a Congress Radio came up in Bombay

and managed to function for more than four months. Babubhai Khakhar and Vithalbhai K. Jhaveri procured the money and the materials for the transmitter as well as the technical experts. The chief announcer was Usha Mehta, who was working for her Master's degree and was one of the tens of thousands of students all over the country who joined the 1942 movement. "The only political activity that she had so far been involved in," says Vijay Agnew, "was meeting with fellow students interested in promoting the use of Hindi as a national language."[5] The Congress Radio operated from 20 August 1942 till the end of December, with Dr. Rammanohar Lohia as a frequent speaker. The station countered the alien rulers' propaganda disseminated by 'Anti-India Radio', as we called the British-controlled All India Radio. The clandestine radio station, announcing itself as broadcasting from "somewhere in India", would play every day Iqbal's *Sare Jahan se Achha Hindustan Hamara* as well as *Bande Mataram*.

While there was no lack of cooperation from various strata of our people, from the lowest to the middle class and some of the affluent, the ranks of the underground itself began to be depleted. Some confessed candidly that they could not stand any longer the rigours of underground existence and surrendered themselves to the police. They preferred life in prison with its regularity and security of a sort, even if it was a monotonous life. Some others who had substantial properties to lose decided to surrender when the British authorities announced that the houses, motor-cars and other valuables of absconders would be confiscated if they did not turn themselves in by a specified date. Yet others -- Sucheta Kripalani, for instance -- pleaded the stirrings of moral conscience. They felt that the activity of sabotaging the war effort which we were organising was contrary to Gandhian principles. This objection was raised despite the fact that, over the Congress Radio and in our illegally circulated literature, we were careful to draw a distinction between planned dislocation of Britain's imperialist war effort, on the one hand, and senseless destruction of lives and property, on the other. In a pamphlet entitled 'A.B.C. of Dislocation', we said: "Dislocation is a common and effective method used by enslaved and oppressed peoples against their rulers.... Thus, if telegraph wires are cut, fish-plates on railway lines are removed, bridges are dynamited, industrial plants put out of order, petrol tanks set on fire, police stations burnt down, official records destroyed -- they are all acts of dislocation. But a

bomb thrown at a market place or a school or a *dharmashala* is not dislocation. It is either the work of *agents provocateur* or misdirected energy....

"Sabotage is ...not the only programme... nor is it an end in itself. We should always bear in mind that our object is to bring about a mass uprising."

I could see later that our logic was not flawless: one kind of violence could in some circumstances result in the same unfortunate consequences as the other kind. But we believed sincerely that the August 1942 movement, which entailed violence only against selected targets and tried to avoid injury to life and private property, rather than the courting of a supine existence in jail, was the right response to the savage violence of the foreign usurpers of our land.

It is remarkable that though some lily-white Gandhians, more loyal to non-violence than the Mahatma, turned up their noses at us during and after the Quit India movement, neither Gandhiji nor Jawaharlal Nehru disowned us. I was thrilled and deeply moved when I received from Gandhiji soon after his release in May 1944, on account of serious illness, a benediction rather than condemnation. He wrote to me on 9 June 1944: "I have been filled with admiration for your courage and heroism. I have sent you messages that you must not die underground. You are reduced to a skeleton. Do come out and surrender yourself and win the prize offered for your arrest. Reserve the prize money for the Harijan cause."[6] In my reply I expressed my gratitude for his warm and tender appreciation. Being in Bombay at the time, and with Gandhiji so close by in Pune, I made bold to ask if I could meet and talk to him, explain my position and seek his guidance. I received word that I could.

Some of the Ashramites were horrified. Was it not improper for the apostle of non-violence to receive one who was known to have promoted violent acts of sabotage? These shallow acolytes, taking the word literally and missing its spirit, as the dogmatic fundamentalists of all faiths do, asked whether it was consistent with truth and non-secrecy to meet a person who was a fugitive. Gandhiji told them that he could not refuse to receive anyone who wanted to meet him. As for the police who were enforcing the alien rulers' law, it was for them to catch Aruna if they could, and if she came to the Ashram it would be at her risk.

My meeting with Gandhiji at Pune remains etched on my memory as a vivid illustration of the Mahatma's sympathetic under-

standing of viewpoints other than his own. Did he not say of the Jain doctrine of *Anekanta* (non-absolutism): "I very much like the doctrine of the many-sidedness of reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Muslim from his standpoint and a Christian from his." He likewise bore cheerfully with socialists and communists.

I felt equally overwhelmed by Jawaharlal Nehru's magnanimous reference while speaking at Almora on 16 June 1945, the day following his release from detention. Giving expression to his first thoughts on emerging from prison, he said: "I am coming out of jail after 1,041 days.... It is a matter for shame and sorrow that so many of our comrades are still behind prison walls. Their sufferings, unlike mine, have not hit the headlines. The world tends to forget them. That is why I want to pay homage to those unknown Congress soldiers, who have borne the brunt of the struggle.

"... those who acted for the love of their country, however much they may have erred, will always have a place in my heart. They will always have shelter in my house. They are welcome to Anand Bhawan.

"I pay my homage to those who are playing with their lives and those who are now at the door of death. Among them, it is only in the fitness of things that I must take the name of one of India's brave women, Aruna Asaf Ali. If my voice can reach her, I want to send her my love and esteem. I want to tell her that whatever she has done shall not be wasted and will bear fruit. It will leave its impression on her countrymen."[7]

My belated response (9 November 1945) was included by Jawaharlal Nehru in *A Bunch of Old Letters* (p. 495) published in 1958: "I have not thought it necessary to thank you for your generous references to me, because I knew they were not meant to be personal compliments. That was your way of signifying your regard for the revolt of the lesser known fighter, these three years." I met Jawaharlal later in Calcutta, when I was still underground since the warrant for my arrest had not been withdrawn. The Congress was engaged in negotiations with the British authorities and the Muslim League for a transfer of power. I was critical of this in the course of my discussion with Jawaharlal and letters to him, as well as in articles I wrote for the Congress Socialist journal *Janata*. I urged that, instead, the Congress should work for social revolution so as to rescue both the Hindu and Muslim masses from the communalists,

avert partition and win for India the freedom that we had dreamed of and fought for. Jawaharlal Nehru was, like Gandhiji, not merely tolerant but appreciative of viewpoints other than his own. He wrote, shortly before partition and independence, a warmly friendly Preface to a collection of my articles that was published as a book under the title *Travel Talk*.[8]

In the twentieth century no uprising of an unarmed people has prevailed against the powerful apparatus of a modern state. The storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789 was relatively simple, though even that event which symbolised the French Revolution was preceded by a critical occasion when, as Jawaharlal Nehru says (*Glimpses of World History*, p. 365), "the King tried force and his own soldiers refused to obey his orders. Always in a revolution the crisis comes when the army, which is the main prop of government, refuses to fire on their brethren in the crowd."

In India, the strengthening of the state by modern technology was first demonstrated by the introduction of telegraph communication links in 1851. They proved invaluable to the East India Company's forces in quelling the 1857 uprising.[9] By 1942 the state had been vastly strengthened. The areas liberated during the Quit India struggle were soon reoccupied. As Jawaharlal Nehru put it, "the armies came and the planes came. They razed the villages (in liberated areas) to the ground. They ploughed the land where the villages once stood in order to put an end to the very fact that such brave villages once existed."[10]

Though the British succeeded in putting out the fires of the Quit India movement, the embers were soon rekindled by the trial, on charges of treason, of officers of the Indian National Army in Delhi's Red Fort during 1945. The hearings, in which Jawaharlal Nehru and Asaf Ali were among the counsel for the defence, were widely publicised in the press and were followed with great interest by the public, including Indian members of the British Indian armed forces.

From the nationalist viewpoint, the British Government could not reasonably complain of the conduct of the I.N.A. personnel during the Second World War. As part of the British Indian Army they had been sent to Burma and Singapore. When Japan occupied these regions, the British Government left the Indian Army to its fate. If the Indians had remained supine, as prisoners of war they would still have been compelled to undertake the construction of roads, or other work in factories, which would help the Japanese war

effort. Instead, they decided that they would fight for Indian freedom. This was meant to enable the liberation of India by a National Army rather than the occupation of India by the Japanese armies.

With the raising of the level of political consciousness, there was discontent among the Indian personnel of the armed forces at racial discrimination in service conditions and pay scales. The expression of disaffection by pilots of the Air Force and signalmen of the Army early in 1946 was small in scale, though serious enough. In the second half of February 1946, a strike by about 3,000 ratings of the Royal Indian Navy, starting with HMIS *Talwar*, spilled over into the streets of Bombay where there were huge anti-British demonstrations by citizens. Many were killed in the exchange of fire between the British army police and the demonstrators. Bombay's industrial workers went on a strike to demonstrate their sympathy and solidarity with the ratings.

Had the revolutionary spirit shown by our people during the Quit India movement and the R.I.N. mutiny been mobilised for a final round of the struggle for freedom, the sub-continent's partition might possibly have been averted. But the ageing and tired Congress leaders whom the British authorities released from prison on 15 June 1945, following the surrender of German forces to the Allied armies on 8 May, were in no mood for a fresh struggle. Hopes of a negotiated transfer of power were encouraged by the victory of the British Labour Party in the elections held on 26 July 1945. When the R.I.N. disaffection broke out, Congress leaders had just completed the campaign for the Assembly elections in the winter of 1945-46, and were engaged in talks with an all-party parliamentary delegation which came from Britain. Hoping, and poised, to take over State power, the dominant section of the Congress leadership looked with disfavour on the R.I.N. mutiny. Maulana Azad recalls in *India Wins Freedom* (p. 131) of the 1958 edition: "Mrs. Asaf Ali took up the cause of the naval officers and became their ardent supporter. She came to Delhi to win my support. I told her that the officers had not acted wisely and my advice to them was that they must go back to work unconditionally." Sardar Patel's intervention and persuasion brought about the end of the naval strike. The Naval Central Committee adopted on 22 February 1946 a resolution saying that they had, on assurances given by Sardar Patel, "decided to surrender ourselves in the hands of the Indian people."

Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking in Bombay on 26 February, gave his appraisal of the situation in these words: "The I.N.A. episode and the recent Royal Indian Air Force and Royal Indian Navy strikes have rendered the country a very great service. The gulf that separated the people from the armed forces has once for all been bridged. They have now come to realise that they both have one common aim -- the freeing of their country from foreign yoke."

The British read the writing on the wall. The new Labour Government sent to India a team of three Cabinet Ministers to negotiate a transfer of power. Following the talks held by them with Indian leaders, the British Government put forward proposals for convening a Constituent Assembly for drawing up a constitution that would preserve the sub-continent as a single political entity but with a weak Centre: it was to be a three-tier arrangement of provinces, groupings of provinces, and a federal Centre with responsibility for foreign affairs, defence and communications and the powers necessary to raise the finance required for these subjects.

At a meeting of the A.I.C.C. held early in July 1946, several of us from the Left -- including Jayaprakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan and Rammanohar Lohia -- argued against a settlement based on compromise of principles to placate the Muslim League. We urged instead the mobilisation of the revolutionary urge among the people for a final struggle to end British rule unconditionally.

Jawaharlal Nehru, on the other hand, said: "It seems to me that we have begun to attach far too much importance to gestures, words and slogans and generally to a certain heroic attitude.... we should not forget the fact that while we have to be revolutionary, we also have to think in terms of statesmanship...." He went on to make a generous reference to the women who had spoken during the debate: "I am glad that two women members participated in the debate, one of whom made a fiery speech.[11] This is indicative of the temper of Indian womanhood. I urge that more and more opportunities should be given to Indian women to participate in our public life."

The A.I.C.C. eventually endorsed the Congress Working Committee's acceptance of the plan for a Constituent Assembly, by 204 votes to 51. But the Labour Government's scheme, which was the first from the British side to visualise a united India, had come too late. The Muslim separatism nurtured by British imperialist politicians over a half-century had grown into an uncontrollable

Frankenstein's monster.

Partition: Victims and Healing Angels

The Muslim League organised a Direct Action Day on 16 August 1946 in Calcutta, with the provincial government headed by the Muslim League looking on. About 5,000 persons were killed. This set off a chain reaction of Hindu-Muslim rioting across northen India. The Congress accepted reluctantly the partition plan proposed by the new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, and announced by the British Government on 3 June 1947, since it appeared to be the only alternative to a civil war.

Among those most unhappy at the acceptance of partition as the price of independence were the Mahatma, Maulana Azad, the Frontier Gandhi (Abdul Ghaffar Khan), and we socialists. I recall meeting Gandhiji along with Asoka Mehta and suggesting that he should, with our support, take a determined stand against the partition scheme. Gandhiji said he could not trust us to adhere to non-violence. But the governing consideration which made Gandhiji acquiesce in the scheme of partition was his sad realisation that those who had been close followers of his for decades, inlcuding Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and Rajaji, were keen to take over power from the British. He did not wish to stand in their way. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay quotes Gandhiji as saying: "Had it been ten years earlier, they (his loyal followers) would have had time to recoup and go forward."[12]

On the political absurdity of Jinnah's theory that the Hindus and Muslims of India constituted two distinct nations, Jawaharlal Nehru had said, writing before the sub-continent's partition: "These two 'nations' existed in varying proportion in most of the villages of India. They were nations which had no boundaries...they were all over the place."

The cultural absurdity of partition, which made millions of people who spoke the same languages -- Bengali, Punjabi and Urdu -- citizens of two new 'Nation States' is unwittingly brought out by Begum Shaista Ikramullah, a proponent of Pakistan, in the autobiography written by her after partition. Recalling her friendship with me and my husband, she says: "Mr Asaf Ali, was not only one of the most prominent figures of the Indian National Movement but one of

its most charming also. He belonged to Delhi, not only in the sense that he came from one of its oldest families, but because he was the quintessence of its culture. He had the courtesy and the charm, the grace, the elegance and the manner, that undefinable air of breeding which only those nurtured in the best tradition of our culture possess. I have never heard and never shall hear again Urdu spoken as Asaf Ali spoke it.... It makes me sad to think that my children have not even heard the full range of its musical cadence. I was indeed fortunate to have heard it, fortunate to have known persons of such rare quality as Asaf Ali and his young wife, Aruna."[13]

The human cost of the partition was terrible. Millions of Hindus and Sikhs abandoned their homes, lands and livelihood in the areas that were to become Pakistan, and fled to India, while millions of Muslims similarly moved out from India. According to a British official,[14] the mutual killings of members of different religious communities totalled about 2,50,000. In addition there was the living death of the abduction and rape suffered by an unknown number of women -- always the victims of man's bestiality in times of chaos when brute force reigns unrestrained.

At the midnight hour of 14-15 August 1947 when a diminished India became independent, Mahatma Gandhi was not in the capital where the dawn of freedom was being celebrated. He was away in Calcutta where communal riots were raging. Gandhiji went on a fast till the leaders of all communities gathered on 4 September and gave him a signed pledge to keep the peace -- and honoured it. He then came to Delhi where the Muslim minority was frightened and harassed, and worked tirelessly for communal harmony till 30 January 1948 when, in the words of Krishna Kripalani, "his martyrdom shamed his people out of communal hysteria and helped to establish the secular and democratic character of the Indian State."

Jawaharlal Nehru gave first priority to the restoration of order and the protection of the Muslim minority, both through firm administrative measures as Prime Minister and by direct intervention in crisis situations even at risk to his personal safety. At the bidding of Gandhiji, young Indira also threw herself into the work of restoring harmony. She recalls: "We used to go out at five in the morning and come back long after dark. We got the streets cleaned. We went to the Town Hall. The ration shops were there, but to get the rations, nobody would give us conveyance.... The sweepers were not prepared to go because they said they would be killed. We had to

provide two young men for each sweeper as a guard....

"... We went to the Hindu *mohallas* and said: 'Is there a Muslim in this particular neighbourhood who, you would say, had been quite secular and had done nothing against Hindus?' They would say: 'Oh! yes, there is so and so.' Then we went to the Muslims and asked: 'In all this rioting, is there a single Hindu who you can say has either positively helped you or at least not done anything wrong?' They said: 'Yes, there is so and so.' Then we said, 'Are you willing to meet them'? They would say: 'No, we simply can't meet'. We had to go backwards and forwards from place to place. ... in between my father started getting rather threatening letters saying: 'Our daughters have been raped and killed and now she is working amongst the Muslims and we are going to do this to her'. ... but finally we did get a small group to sit in a place and talk and agree that this had to be ended."[15]

If Muslims felt besieged in Delhi, so did Hindus in Lahore where Rameshwari Nehru and her husband Brijlal were living in the months preceding partition. Thousands of Hindu and Sikh families converged there -- from Rawalpindi, Multan, Gujranwala, Peshawar and Montgomery -- to migrate to India. They would reach "Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan in Lahore", Rameshwari recalls, "with whatever little belongings they could get hold of. My husband and I ... went to Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan every day to look after refugees and as far as posisble arranged their safe journey to India in a reliable company. It appeared at that moment that it was impossible for any Hindu-Sikh family to stay on in Punjab with dignity. My husband wrote to Gandhiji then defending the people of Noakhali, as to 'what should we do?' Prompt came the reply, 'You should not leave Lahore. Even if you die, I shall not shed tears'."

The loyal lieutenants obeyed their leader. When Jawaharlal Nehru, on a visit to Lahore for talks with Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan of Pakistan, invited them to come to Delhi in his plane, they declined the offer. Soon afterwards there was an attack by a Muslim mob on 'Fairfields', the residence of the Nehrus, but they were saved by other Muslims who knew and respected them. It was only after the last batch of refugees was evacuated from the Lahore camps in October 1947 that Rameshwari and Brjlal came to Delhi. "In India", says O.P. Paliwal in his biography, "Rameshwari was a source of comfort and solace to the minority community on this side -- to the Muslims in India as much as she was attentive to the 'minority' on that side of the fence in Punjab."

As honorary adviser to the Ministry of Rehabilitation in Delhi, Rameshwari helped in the restoration of abducted persons to their families. In this she was assisted by Mridula Sarabhai who applied herself to the work with great zeal and energy. But there would be the odd case which presented a moral dilemma, specially because of the stigma attached in our society -- from the time of Sita of the *Ramayana* epic -- to a woman who has been abducted. One such instance, narrated by O.P. Paliwal, is of a young Sikh who "had forcibly brought to his home the young daughter of a Muslim tonga driver, while her family members were fleeing to Pakistan to save their lives. Eventually the young Sikh and the Muslim girl were married and began to live happily.

"The Sikh gentleman pleaded with folded hands.... The young wife told Rameshwari that she was perfectly happy with her husband and that the so-called 'relatives' who were claiming her return might not really accept her.

"But the law is impersonal and heartless. It stipulated that if any missing person from the other side is traceable and relatives demand his or her reunion with the original family, he or she will be sent back to the respective country. Mataji felt helpless and the law took its own course.... Mataji came back home and wept like a child. She just could not bear the agony of the unfortunate victim of a double tragedy."

NOTES

1 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. LXXVI, pp. 195-196.
2 Oral History transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library.
3 *Remembered Moments* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust, 1987).
4 *India's struggle for Independence: Visuals and Documents* (New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training), p. 125.
5 Vijay Agnew, *Elite Women in Indian Politics* (Delhi: Vikas, 1979), p. 74.
6 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. LXXVII, p. 306.
7 *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 14, pp. 1-2.
8 (Aundh: Aundh Publishing Trust, 1947).
9 Krishanlal Shridharani, *Story of the Indian Telegraph* (Post & Telegrah Department, 1953).
10 *India's Struggle for Independence: Visuals and Documents*, p. 125.
11 The reference is explained in a footnote to this passage in Vol. 15 (p. 239) of the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*: "We have listened to you and obeyed you all these years," said Aruna Asaf Ali, addressing Mahatma Gandhi at this debate. "You must now listen to us and it is your duty to obey us."
12 Oral History transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

13 *From Purdah to Parliament* (London: Cresset Press, 1963).
14 Alan Campbell-Johnson, who was press attache to Lord Mountbatten, says that the estimate of half-a-million dead cited by Winston Churchill was an exaggeration by more than 100 per cent. (*Mission with Mountbatten*, London: Robert Hale, 1951).
15 *What I Am* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust, 1986).

Part Three

After Independence: Light and Shade

"We have achieved political freedom in this country, political independence. That is a stage in the journey, and there are other stages -- economic, social and others -- and if society is to advance, there must be this integrated advance on all fronts. One advance on one front and being kept back on other fronts means functioning imperfectly, and also means that the first advance also is in danger.... we should advance on all fronts."

Jawaharlal Nehru speaking on 19 December 1949 on the Hindu Code Bill in the Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative).

9 Forces of Progress and Inertia

Post-partition India recovered quickly from the trauma of Hindu-Muslim conflagration. Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom on 30 January 1948, when a Hindu fanatic shot him dead at a prayer meeting, shocked and chastened the majority community. A dedicated life came to a poetic end, the manner of the Mahatma's death serving to hasten the return of sanity and normalcy. The Constitution of free India, which came into force on 26 January 1950, conferred equal political rights on all citizens of the democratic Indian polity, irrespective of creed and of sex.

Early Years of Promise

The early years of independence were years of promise. They seemed to herald a comprehensive social and economic revolution in the wake of political emancipation. Reform of Hindu personal law, which in the mid-fifties Jawaharlal Nehru pressed through the first House of the People elected on adult suffrage, sought to dignify women and raise their status to that of equality with men. Monogamy was enforced on the Hindu male as a reciprocal obligation, divorce was permitted on specified grounds, and daughters and widows were given a share in succession to property.

These reforms were enacted soon after the launching of land reforms and of the community development programme, along with industrial projects and river valley schemes for irrigation and power. Three major steps were initiated for restructuring the feudal-colonial agrarian economy: *i)* abolition of *Zamindari* and other intermediaries so that the peasant would pay land revenue directly to the State; *ii)* security of tenure for tenant cultivators and fixation of the maximum rent that a landlord could demand; and *iii)* imposition of a ceiling on land holdings for distribution of the surplus among the

landless. At the annual session of the Congress at Avadi near Madras, in 1955, Jawaharlal Nehru secured the acceptance of a socialistic pattern of society as the goal. The second five year plan, drawn up at his instance by P.C. Mahalanobis, the renowned statistician and thinker, envisaged the development of heavy industries in order to make the country self-reliant in economic growth and defence. Such was the larger context of the social reform legislation of the mid-fifties.

Jawaharlal Nehru envisaged an important role for women in the three institutions that were to bring about rural regeneration: the village panchayat, the cooperative and the school. Addressing a meeting of the Central Social Welfare Board in 1959, he said: "I have welcomed the coordination of the activities of the Social Welfare Board with the Community Development movement because both cover nearly the whole of the country and both have fundamentally the same objective in view.... Their activities should be closely coordinated, the Social Welfare Board looking after the work of social welfare within the larger framework of Community Development.... You should interest yourselves in the panchayats and see that women understand them and go into them. Similarly, you should interest yourselves in the cooperatives. I think that the cooperatives should be a big field for work by trained women.... The number of women teachers is bound to grow, and if they can be sent to work in the field of social welfare in rural areas, the work will immediately get a considerable accession of strength."

Speaking at Nagaur in Rajasthan at the inauguration of Panchayati Raj in the state on 2 October 1959, Jawaharlal said: "Some people thought that if the responsibility was handed over to the people, they would probably not be able to shoulder it. But it is only by providing opportunity to the people that they can be trained to shoulder responsibilities.... Therefore, we decided that in every village there should be a village panchayat with more powers, as also a cooperative society which will help its economic effort.... The third important institution which we need in our villages is the school. Every village should have a school so that the villagers should be able to receive education. And women should get equal opportunities for education."

Social Legislation: Reformers vs. No-Changers

After independence, as earlier, social reformers were opposed by staunch no-changers. Such progressive social legislation as was enacted during the colonial period was in response to demands voiced by the enlightened section of Indian public opinion. The advocates of reform had to contend, on the one hand, with voices of unreason among their own countrymen and, on the other, with the indifference of an alien administration that did not want to purchase trouble by interfering with local social customs. There is no basis for the impression sought to be spread by school textbooks prepared during the colonial period that social reform was one of the benefits conferred on India by British rule. As noted by the Committee on the Status of Women in its report, "The British policy in the field of family law had a crippling effect on women. Whatever the motivation, the British adopted a policy of letting Hindus be governed by Hindu law and Muslims by Muslim law in matters of family relations.... The result of it was to encourage the feeling of separateness and prevent the unity of the two communities. The policy achieved such success that modernisation of most of these laws has proved difficult even today.... The success of the policy of division can also be seen from the fact that though demands for changes in the Muslim law to improve the position of women were also building up, the reformers of the two communities did not work together."

It is to Rammohun Roy that the credit belongs for bringing about the abolition of Sati, not Governor-General Bentinck who signed the decree. Rightly hailed as the father of Indian journalism, Rammohun advocated social reforms through the three journals launched by him in Bengali, Persian and English around 1821, notably the weekly *Sambad Kaumudi* in Bengali. Its first editor was Bhowanee Charan Bannerjee. But he left the paper after the 13th issue on account of disagreement with Rammohun Roy's campaign against Sati. Bannerjee started a rival weekly called *Samachar Chandrika* which opposed the teaching of English and espoused orthodox Hindu views including approval of Sati.

Though Sati was supposed to manifest the devoted wife's desire to accompany her dead husband to the other world rather than remain alive but widowed, in many cases there was an economic motivation behind the murder of women in the guise of Sati. In some parts of the country, customary Hindu law gave the widow a share in

the property of the deceased. The Dayabhaga school of Hindu law prevalent in Bengal, unlike the Mitakshara, gave the widow a share. And it is significant that Sati used to be in vogue in Bengal among the upper castes who also happen to be the propertied classes. Liquidation of the widow who was drugged and forced to climb the funeral pyre, and forcibly prevented from fleeing, increased the share of the male successors to the dead man's estate.

It was only in December 1829, less than four years before Rammohun Roy's death, that the Governor-General, William Bentinck, promulgated an ordinance prohibiting Sati. The next landmark in social reform legislation was the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856. Then came the Age of Consent Act of 1860. It was ostensibly designed to discourage child marriage by making sexual intercourse with a girl of less than 10 years a rape and thus a punishable offence. This was a peculiar way of attacking the problem. In many social groups in various parts of India, it used to be a common practice to get a girl married before puberty and to send her to live with her husband after she attained puberty. The 'marriage' was therefore really in the nature of betrothal. If, in some rare cases, consummation was attempted before the girl reached the age of ten, was she or her parents expected to charge the husband with rape and take him to court? The same approach was adopted in 1891, when the British authorities amended the Penal Code to raise the age of consent to 12 for married girls and 14 for unmarried girls. These legislative exercises served more to defame (in the manner of Katherine Mayo of a later day) than to reform Indian social practices.

The first straightforward attempt to curb child marriage was the Bill introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1929 by Har Bilas Sarda, a private member, to fix the minimum age of marriage at 14 for girls and 18 for boys. The proposed law was intended to be applicable to Hindus only. It was redrafted as an official Bill that would be binding on all communities in India. The legislation was passed under the title of the Child Marriage Restraint Act in September 1930 and stayed on the statute book despite agitation by conservative Muslims who said that the Sarda Act was an encroachment on Islam. Muslim opponents of the Act worked up "the more fanatical and ignorant members of the population into a state of great indignation about it."[1] Demonstrations were held in all districts in the early months of 1931 and "agitators widely represented that it constituted a direct attack on the Muhammadan religion. During April,

very violent speeches advocating defiance of this new law were made in many places, and Maulvi Kifayat Ullah of Delhi actually solemnised the *nikah* of minor children at Peshawar with this object."

Conservative elements similarly put up stiff resistance to a Bill introduced on 13 February 1941 in the Central Assembly by a private member, Govind V. Deshmukh of Nagpur, to legalise Sagotra marriage (between agnates descended from the same forefather of a clan in remote antiquity, after whom a Gotra was named). After being circulated to elicit public opinion, the Bill came up for discussion in the Assembly on a motion for reference to a select committee.

During the debate, Ananthasayanam Ayyangar requested the European member, T. Chapman-Mortimer, to withdraw from the Committee on the Bill, "as done graciously by Dr. Sir Ratanji Dinshaw Dalal", a Parsi member. Seth Sunderlal Daga said: "The mover has proposed a Select Committee not of Hindus alone but, in order to get the Select Committee's report in his favour, he has included a large number of non-Hindus. I feel that it is not fair to change the fabric of the Hindu marriage system through non-Hindus. In the Central Haj Committee do they take a Hindu or a European member?"

Some lively exchanges took place during the debate:

Jamnadas M. Mehta: "I do not know why the zeal of some of my fellow legislators always descends on the poor Hindu community. I will ask my friend Mr. Deshmukh to try and interfere with the custom of *Purdah* if he dares. Chairs will rise in this House. I do feel as a Hindu that the removal of *Purdah* is far more necessary than the marriage of agnates, but I do not think Mr. Deshmukh or anybody in this House or outside will dare bring a Bill for removing *Purdah* and be safe tomorrow morning. Such is the strong conviction and belief of our Muslim colleagues. I would also beg of my fellow Muslim members to desist from being on the Select Committee."

An Hon'ble Member: "Why?"

J.M.Mehta: "Because 'agnates and Sapindas' are beyond their knowledge. With very great respect I would request them not to remain on the Select Committee."

Sir Syed Raza Ali: "Mind your own business."

J.M. Mehta: "It is my business to tell the Hon'ble Member that he should not dare to interfere in my business."

When the Assembly divided on the motion, the 22 Ayes included only one Muslim, M. Ghiasuddin, besides Hindu members of progressive views like T.T. Krishnamachari, Radhabai Subbaroyan, Sri Prakasa, N.M. Joshi, Bhulabhai Desai and T.S. Avinashilingam Chettiar. The 21 Noes included three Muslims -- Kamaluddin Ahmed, Muhammad Muazzam Sahib and Ghulam Kadir Shahban, besides conservative Hindus like Bhai Parmanand and Ananthasayanam Ayyangar.

Conservative Muslims again joined conservative Hindus in opposing a comprehensive Hindu Code Bill that was being drawn up by a Hindu Law Reform Committee, with B.N. Rau as chairman, appointed by the Government of India by a resolution of 20th January 1944. A report in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 6 January 1945 says that Khan Bahadur N. Ahmad, member of the Bengal Legislative Council, was among the speakers who condemned the proposed Hindu Code at a meeting held at Burdwan under the chairmanship of the Maharaja of Burdwan.

The Constituent Assembly convened under the British Cabinet Mission's plan for the transfer of power functioned also as the central legislature in place of the old Central Assembly. The following exchange took place during a debate in the Constituent Assembly (Legislative) on the Hindu Code Bill on 1 March 1949:

Naziruddin Ahmed: "I hope the House will give the subject that amount of thought and attention which I have given to it."

An Hon'ble Member: "What have you to do with it?"

Naziruddin Ahmed: "At the very outset I am asked what I have to do with it. I say I have everything to do with it. Two very enormous changes have taken place in the country. One is that we have decided to shed our communal character and the other is that we have decided to impose upon ourselves the benefits of joint electorates. Can any honourable gentleman in this House

deny the right of a Muslim to think in the same way as a large part of the Hindus think? ... Pandit Maitra put the case of the opposition in Bengal very mildly when he said that there is serious opposition to this Bill.... My learned sister (Renuka Ray) the other day asked me, 'Why is it that you are denying to your Hindu sisters rights which you are giving to your own sisters?' That is a very cardinal question. May I reply? My reply is this, that you cannot give the same kind of food to different kinds of persons. You have got to judge the position of a Hindu woman as the Hindu law conceives of it. You have got to consider the position of a Muslim woman as the Muslim law conceives it. We are not here to question the wisdom of one system or the other."

Progressive members of the Constitutent Assembly, on the other hand, advocated a reformed and uniform civil code to govern all citizens. R.M. Lala recalls that, in the Fundamental Rights Committee, "Ambedkar, Masani, Hansa Mehta and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur wanted a common civil code for all Indians, including Muslims, but others turned it down."[2]

Among those who tried to persuade Jawaharlal Nehru to drop the Hindu Code Bill was a godwoman known as Shraddha Mata. In a letter of 4 March 1949 to Sardar Patel, Jawaharlal says: "Being averse to meeting sanyasis and the like, I avoided seeing her. But Syama Prasad Mookerjee pressed me to do so. Then, one day, Jagat Narain Lal[3] brought her to see me. I found her an attractive and intelligent young woman. Since then she has seen me on several occassions and usually discussed two subjects -- the Hindu Code Bill and the question of language, i.e., Hindi. She tried to influence me in regard to these two matters and I tried to influence her the other way. I do not know what success I have had, but she has had none, so far as I am concerned."[4]

Case for a Common Civil Code

After the Constitution came into force on 26 January 1950, the Constituent Assembly (which had concluded its work of drafting the Constitution in November 1949) continued to function as the provisional parliament of free India. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who was elected the first President of the Republic, said in the course of a let-

ter to Prime Minister Nehru on 15 September 1951: "You know that I had given public expression to my views regarding the Hindu Code Bill when I had greater freedom before I was elevated to my present position.... It seems now that Parliament is being asked and is going to pass the Bill.... The revolutionary changes contemplated by the Bill have never been placed before the electorate which has had no opportunity of expressing itself on the merits of the proposal....[5] The measure is of a highly discriminatory nature. If its provisions are sound and beneficial and in the general interest of the people at large, there is no reason why its operation should be confined to one community.... I take it that the Bill proceeds on the assumption that interference with the personal law that governs members of a community following a particular religion is considered to be not an interference with the freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate that religion. In that view there is no reason why the same civil law relating to marriage, marital relations, inheritance, etc., should not govern members of all communities.... and why the personal law of a particular community should be selected for legislative interference."

The logic was impeccable. But it overlooked social dynamics. Was the Hindu community, in which there was a considerable body of enlightened opinion favouring monogamy and the right of divorce, and women's right of succession to property, to be held back till such time as other communities also became ready to accept reform?

Even within the Hindu fold, however, there was considerable opposition to reform of personal law so as to improve women's status. In the elections to the first Lok Sabha under the new Constitution, Jawaharlal Nehru stood on behalf of the Congress from the Allahabad District (East) constituency. His principal opponent was Prabhu Datt Brahmachari, a conservative contesting as an Independent. He offered to withdraw from the contest if the Prime Minister would agree to drop the proposals for reform of Hindu law. Jawaharlal responded characteristically by offering to fight the election on the very issue of Hindu law reform. Brahmachari secured 56,718 votes, nearly one-fourth of Jawaharlal's 2,33,571.

Hindu Law Reform

Jawaharlal's interest in the question of family law reform was

stimulated when he was still a student in England, by Motilal Nehru's comments on the subject in the course of the correspondence that took place regularly between father and son.

In a letter to his mother, Jawaharlal had expressed himself in favour, in principle, of inter-community marriages and said that he would himself prefer marrying outside the Kashmiri community. Subsequently he wrote in the same strain, though in guarded language, to his father. Motilal says in a letter of 28 October 1910: "There is one aspect of inter-marriage between different Hindu castes which I have not yet mentioned to you. I was consulted as to the legality of such a marriage under the Hindu law the other day and had occasion to go into the question thoroughly. The result of my investigation was that I had given my opinion against the validity of such a marriage under the Hindu law... A movement is now on foot to have a new law passed but there will be great opposition by the orthodox and it is very doubtful what the result will be." Again, in a letter of 10 March 1911, Motilal tells his son about orthodox Hindu opposition to the demand voiced by him, as member of a deputation that waited on the Magistrate at Allahabad, that the police should be instructed to prevent obscene songs being sung in public streets on the occasion of Holi: "The Civil Marriage Bill introduced in the Viceroy's Council by Bhupendra is meeting with the same silly and mischievous opposition. At times one is ashamed to call himself a Hindu. The best of them have no moral courage. They will talk by the yard but when the time comes for action will skulk away and seek refuge in the silliest of pretences."

Both the legitimisation of inter-caste (as well as Sagotra) marriages under Hindu law, and reform of the civil marriage law so as to permit persons of different faiths to marry without either having to renounce his or her religion, were to be accomplished only after Jawaharlal Nehru became the first prime minister of free India.

The provisional parliament was dissolved when the leviathan of the comprehensive Hindu Code Bill was still inching its way forward. The Bill lapsed. In the first Lok Sabha elected in 1952, Jawaharlal Nehru had the provisions of the different parts of the Hindu Code Bill introduced as separate laws dealing respectively with marriage and divorce, succession, minority and guardianship, etc. During the discussion of these Bills, the question of a common civil code for all citizens engaged the attention of many members of parliament.

When the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Bill came up before

the Lok Sabha on 9 December 1954, both N.C. Chatterjee who opposed the measure and Sucheta Kripalani who welcomed it demanded the enactment of a common civil code to govern all citizens. N.C. Chatterjee described the 'communal legislation' as being violative of Article 14, which guarantees equality before the law, and of Article 15 which prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. "Daily," he said, "the Congress leaders are harping on the evils of communalism. The Prime Minister of India is ranting on the menace of communalism. What business has this Congress Government to bring up a communal legislation...?"

While welcoming the measure, Sucheta Kripalani asked: "Why do we not have one civil code for all the people of India if we want reform? We believe that religion is a personal and individual matter. Our social life should be governed under one law. Therefore, we should have one civil code governing the lives of all citizens of India. Here too we want to do a thing, but we have not got the courage to go far enough. One criticism is that such communal legislation is against our Constitution. It is against one of the Directive Principles of the State." Sucheta Kripalani's reference was to Article 44 of the Constitution, in the Chapter on Directive Principles of State Policy, which reads: "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India."

Whatever may be the merits of the controversy over non-enactment of a common civil code, most persons will agree that the better need not be the enemy of the good. The enactment, under Jawaharlal Nehru's prodding, of a series of laws greatly improved the status of Hindu women who constitute the great majority of the women of India.

Jawaharlal himself derived considerable satisfaction from the reform of Hindu law. In the course of a letter of May 1956 to the Chief Ministers of States -- whom he tried to communicate with, as Prime Minister, every fortnight -- Jawaharlal said: "... the passage of this legislation marks an epoch in India. It indicates that we have not only striven for and achieved a political revolution, not only are we striving hard for an economic revolution but that we are equally intent on social revolution; only by way of advance on these three separate lines and their integration into one great whole, will the people of India progress."[6]

Again, he said at the celebration of the birth centenary of

Karve in Bombay on 18 April 1958: "... I should like to say that the laws which have been passed in regard to women have given me a sense of achievement. I look upon these laws as measures which had long been due, and which would liberate the women of India and give them freedom to grow. I am convinced that if the opportunity is given to them to grow, the women of this country can render great service to this country and to the world."[7]

Of the half-dozen enactments during Jawaharlal Nehru's prime ministership for the betterment of women's status, some are more profound and widespread in their impact than others. Socialists have always attached little importance to legislation on women's property rights in a situation where so few women belong to propertied families. Emma Goldman, the American feminist, said in 1918: "All honour to the heroism and sturdiness of the English suffragettes... But after all, the suffragettes too, are still lacking in appreciation of real equality. Else how is one to account for the tremendous, truly gigantic effort set in motion by those valiant fighters for a wretched little Bill which will benefit a handful of propertied ladies, with absolutely no provision for the vast mass of working women?" Similarly, Gandhiji in reply to a correspondent who raised the question of removing legal inequalities between sons and daughters in the matter of property rights, wrote in *Young India* of 17 October 1929 that it would be "a mere palliative. Millions of men have no property to transmit to posterity."

Yet it would be wrong to underestimate the significance of the Hindu Succession Act which became effective from June 1956. It gives the daughter and other women relatives a share in succession to the property of Hindu males. Till this Act, property could pass only to sons or, in the absence of male issue, to brothers and other male agnates and cognates entitled to perform religious rites for the deceased. The line of succession bore no relation to the direction of natural love and affection. If a young girl lost her father, she was entirely dependent on the kindness of a brother or uncle to support her and get her married. The widow and the mother similarly became dependent on charity. The mother, widow and daughter have now been given a full share of succession to the self-acquired property of a Hindu male dying without making a will, equal to that of the son, though their share in joint family property governed by the Mitakshara law is smaller than that of the son. It is a different matter that, in practice, many daughters in middle class homes waive their right

to a share of parental property. This reflects the regard for brothers, and for their protective role. It underlies the annual ceremony of *raksha bandhan* when women tie a string bracelet on the brother's wrist as token of solidarity.

The other major enactment, the Hindu Marriage Act which came into force in May 1955, has brought about a truly revolutionary change. It ended the age-old institution of marriage as a one-sided sacrament and enforced monogamy on the male also. Till the 1955 Act, the Hindu woman had no right to divorce on any grounds -- even if the husband took a second wife. If marriage proved unhappy she could find release only in death. A committee which investigated the causes of suicide in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, with a population of four million, found that 1,129 cases of suicide had been reported betwen 1951 and 1955. The great majority were women, nearly half of them between the ages of 19 and 30. In addition to poverty and unemployment, the committee listed "unhappy family relations and conservative marriage traditions and practices" among the major causes of suicide.

Secondly, the Hindu Marriage Act for the first time permitted divorce, provision for which was a necessary corollary of enforcing monogamy. Divorce could be sought on the grounds of adultery, desertion, cruelty, insanity or incurable disease. The legislation thus provided relief to the wife in the event of a marriage proving unendurably unhappy. (The husband had always had the relief of taking a second wife if he found the earlier marriage less than satisfactory). Most women of the middle class, however, do not avail themselves of the legal remedy of divorce that is now available, even if the husband is unfaithful or cruel, because of the social stigma that attaches to a divorcee and the vulnerability of a single woman to unwelcome attentions from males.

In addition to the reform of Hindu personal law, parliament also enacted during Jawaharlal Nehru's prime ministership the Special Marriage Act of 1954. It is an optional measure available to those who wish to avail themselves of its liberal and progressive provisions. The Special Marriage Act permits members of two different religions to marry without either party having to renounce his or her religion. It also incorporates the civilised principle of divorce by mutual consent, without requiring one or the other party to prove adultery, cruelty or the like.

NOTES

1 *India in 1930-31*, a report prepared by the authorities in India for presentation to the British parliament as required under the Government of India Act of 1919.
2 Article profiling M.R. Masani on his turning 80, in *Indian Express* (Delhi), 24 November 1985.
3 A Congress leader of Bihar.
4 *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Vol. VIII (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1973), pp.118-9.
5 The first general elections on the basis of adult franchise under the new Constitution were yet to be held. The elections took place in the winter of 1951-52. Reform and codification of Hindu personal law was not among the planks of the election manifesto of the Congress party.
6 G. Parthasarathi, ed., *Letters to Chief Ministers*, Vol. 4 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press on behalf of Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund).
7 *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches*, Volume Four (New Delhi: Publications Division), pp. 424-5.

10 Laws and Social Reality

The last major piece of social reform legislation during the prime ministership of Jawaharlal Nehru was the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961.

Modern dowry as bridegroom price is a cruel parody of the ancient concept of *Stridhana* (literally, women's wealth). The code of Manu said that what was given before the nuptial fire and on the bridal procession, what was given in token of love, and what was received from a brother, mother or father constituted the six-fold property of a married woman: "Such ornaments as women wear during the lives of their husbands, the heirs of these husbands shall not divide among themselves. They who do shall fall into deep sin."

What began as an arrangement for the protection of the bride became an instrument of exaction. Unlike child marriage and denial of education to girls, which are associated with ignorance and poverty, dowry as bridegroom price is an evil that afflicts the educated classes primarily. The most highly educated young men among the middle and upper classes -- like officers of the civil and military services and nationalised undertakings, business managers in the private sector, engineers and doctors -- command the highest bridegroom price. In such cases, dowry is regarded by parents as a return on the investment made by them in the son's education. Among the much more numerous lower middle class, parents in many cases feel constrained to demand dowry for the son, even if he is only moderately educated and has a modest income, since they see no other way of finding the bridegroom price with which to marry off their daughter. The Dowry Prohibition Act was intended to break this vicious circle.

Dowry and the Culture of Consumerism

The incidence of dowry has risen -- indeed, increased manifold -- since the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961. This is a vivid illustration of the tragic non-realisation to this day of the egalitarian economic and social transformation sought by Jawaharlal Nehru. Instead, there has been an elitist pattern of economic development and the emergence of the culture of consumerism among the middle and upper classes.

Industrial development has come to mean, over the quarter century since the passing away of Jawaharlal Nehru, the provision of luxury goods and services on an increasing scale for the ruling middle and upper classes. Consumerism is being spread by commerical advertising through the mass media, including (after Jawaharlal's time) the State-owned media of All India Radio and Doordarshan.

Whereas in the affluent countries consumerism has been gaining ground among people whose basic needs including education have been met, conspicuous consumption is -- or should be -- repugnant in our country where the majority live in want, and lack education. Though it is among the privileged minority of the population that the craze for material acquisitions is growing, consumerism is seeping down the social scale. It influences even those who cannot afford luxury goods. Dowry-related killings and suicides are the grim evidence of the vicious and widening grip of consumerism. The murder of a bride -- or her resorting to suicide in desperation because of harassment for more and more dowry -- leaves the widower free to take another bride and to collect bridegroom price all over again. It is a shame that sometimes women as mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law are accomplices in the killing of the bride or in driving her to suicide.

Another manifestation of consumerism is that, in several cases, young women themselves press their parents for the maximum dowry. They regard it as their share of patrimony, for which they do not wish to wait till it becomes their due as inheritance.

Non-enforcement of any law tends to bring law in general into contempt. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 has proved worse than useless for this reason. Among the violators of the Act in various parts of the country are barons of industry and commerce, prominent politicians, former princes, and big landlords who, despite

ceiling laws, retain vast holdings under fictitious names. The example set by them is sought to be emulated by the burgeoning middle class.

Limited Awareness of Laws

Whereas the legislation prohibiting dowry has been largely ineffective on account of the growth of the culture of consumerism among the educated and well-to-do, the prevalence of mass poverty and illiteracy accounts for the gap between social reality and certain other laws. The awareness of social reform legislation is extremely limited on the part of the intended beneficiaries.

Atrocities on S.C. and S.T. women

Both men and women among the former untouchable castes have suffered social ostracism and economic exploitation over the ages. Women, specially in rural areas, have in addition suffered sexual harassment and the ultimate indignity of rape. For the unscrupulous among caste Hindus and others, untouchability has been no bar to laying violent hands on Harijan and tribal women.

Statistics of atrocities on S.C. and S.T. persons, in a document[1] tabled in Parliament on 9 May 1989, make sad reading. Among crimes under the Indian Penal Code, registered cases of murder of S.C.s were 493 in 1981 and 564 in 1986, and of rape 604 in 1981 and 727 in 1986. In the case of S.T.s, the respective figures were: murder, 110 and 160; rape, 259 and 285.

The Untouchability (Offences) Act, enacted during Jawaharlal Nehru's prime ministership in 1955, was amended in 1976 to stiffen the punishments for the practice of untouchability. The Act itself was renamed as the Protection of Civil Rights Act.

The number of cases registered under the Act rose in Tamil Nadu from 1,136 in 1981 to 1,280 in 1985, and in Karnataka from 581 to 659. There was hardly any change in Andhra Pradesh (238 and 237) and a marginal decline in Uttar Pradesh from 224 to 188. A sharper decline was reported from Maharashtra, from 998 to 442. These figures refer only to cases registered. The number of violations which failed to be registered because no complaint was made, or no cognizance taken, can only be guessed.

Child Marriage

Another item of social legislation which has barely touched the uneducated and economically deprived among the rural population is the prohibition of child marriage. In legislating against child marriage, as in some other fields of social reform, the progressive among the rulers of Princely States were ahead of British India in the pre-independence period. Mysore (in 1894), Baroda (1904) and Indore (1918) passed laws prohibiting child marriage much before the Central Legislative Assembly of British India passed in 1929 the Sarda Act which has been discussed earlier.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act was amended in 1949 to raise the minimum age of marriage for girls further to 15. However, the Committee on the Status of Women noted in its report (1974) that in rural areas in the 10-14 age group, 13.79 per cent of girls were already married. Discussing the factors responsible for the prevalence of early marriage over the centuries, the report cited various reasons. Low age of marriage is related with the near-universality of marriage in India. Only 0.5 per cent of women never marry. Rules of endogamy which prescribe that marriage should be arranged within a certain group, and other norms of prescription, preference and proscription are best taken care of by early marriage. Leaving the girl to decide when to marry may also mean her deciding whom to marry. Secondly, the Committee's report said, early marriage is explained also by the concern for the purity of women: "Chastity gets strong emphasis among Muslims also, and with emphasis on purity of blood, early marriage appears to be the best solution." Thirdly, for those -- like the Scheduled Castes -- whose girls cannot be confined to the house as they have to share in work outside the home, early marriage has been perceived as necessary in order to ensure their reputation and protect them from motherhood before marriage. This consideration, according to some social scientists, was reinforced "among Scheduled Castes with their helplessness in protecting their women from the lust of men of upper groups who have economic power over them."[2]

The social and economic realities not having changed significantly in rural India, the impact of the latest amendment of the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1976 has been as limited as that of the parent Act over the decades. The amendment raised the minimum ages of marriage for men and women to 21 and 18 respectively. But at the 1981 Census there were 3,805,240 married persons in the

the age group 10-14 itself. Of them, 1,172,382 were child husbands and 2,632,858 were child wives. In the age group 15-19, the number of married boys was 4,165,010 and of married girls as high as 13,079,599. The overwhelming majority of these early marriages were in rural India.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy

Of the Social legislation enacted during the years of Indira Gandhi's prime ministership, two outstanding laws are the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971 and the Marriage Laws Amendment Act of 1976.

It is remarkable that while abortion was still a controversial issue in the U.S.A. in the year 1989, the Indian Parliament passed a law for legalising abortion as early as in 1971. Section 3 of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act reads:

"1) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Indian Penal Code, a registered medical practitioner shall not be guilty of any offence under that Code or under any other law for the time being in force, if any pregnancy is terminated by him in accordance with the provisions of this Act.

2) Subject to the provisions of sub-section (4), a pregnancy may be terminated by a registered medical practitioner

(a) where the length of the pregnancy exceeds twelve weeks if such medical practitioner is, or

(b) Where the length of the pregnancy exceeds twelve weeks but does not exceed twenty weeks if not less than two registered medical practitioners are of the opinion, formed in good faith, that --

(i) the continuance of the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the pregnant woman or of grave injury to her physical or mental health; or

(ii) there is a substantial risk that if the child were born, it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.

Explanation I

Where any pregnancy is alleged by the pregnant woman to have been caused by rape, the anguish caused by such pregnancy shall be presumed to constitute a grave injury to the mental health of the

pregnant woman.

Explanation II

Where any pregnancy occurs as a result of failure of any device or method used by any married woman or her husband for the purpose of limiting the number of children, the anguish caused by such unwanted pregnancy may be presumed to constitute a grave injury to the mental health of the pregnant woman.

3) In determining whether the continuance of a pregnancy would involve such risk of injury to health as is mentioned in sub-section (2), account may be taken of the pregnant woman's actual or reasonably foreseeable environment.
4) (a) No pregnancy of a woman who has not attained the age of eighteen years or who, having attained the age of eighteen years is a lunatic, shall be terminated except with the consent in writing of her guardian. (b) Save as otherwise provided in clause (a), no pregnancy shall be terminated except with the consent of the pregnant woman."

Explanation II in sub-Section (2) is noteworthy. It suggests that the government's concern for population control was one of the motivations for legalising abortion. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act places India in the front rank of countries with liberal laws on abortion.

However, the benefit can be derived only by those who are aware of the provisions of the law and have access to affordable and safe clinical facilities. The indigent and the illiterate, most of whom live in villages, do not know about the MTP Act; and clinical facilities are concentrated in the urban centres. No statistics are available on the urban-rural distribution of medical terminations of pregnancy in the country. They increased from only 381,111 over the four years from April 1972 to March 1976 to 584,218 in 1986-87; the cumulative total was more than five million since 1972. But it is probably a safe guess that only a few of the 36,680 terminations in Delhi during 1986-87 were from rural areas of the Union Territory, and that Bombay city perhaps accounted for well over half of the 122,744 terminations in Maharashtra during the same year.[3] The Committee on the Status of Women said in its report: "... it is a woman's right to have control over the size of her family... We have also been informed that though

the law does not require it, many hospitals insist on the husband's consent before performing these operations. A special effort needs to be made to convince the medical profession of the social value of this law, from the point of view of both individuals and society.

"We have also been informed that most doctors are reluctant to perform these operations in the case of unmarried girls. It is necessary to clarify the point that rape is not the only ground to justify termination in case of unmarried girls...."[4]

Divorce by Mutual Consent

It is again only the educated, aware of their legal rights, who approach the courts for obtaining the relief of divorce from a failed marriage, whether under the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 or the Act as amended in 1976. The Marriage Laws Amendment Act of 1976 incorporated into the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 the principle of divorce by mutual consent which had been allowed till then only under the Special Marriage Act. Under the Hindu Marriage Act before the 1976 amendment, divorce could be obtained only if adultery, insanity or other specified ground was proved. Hindu family law was radically liberalised by the inclusion, through the Marriage Laws Amendment Act of 1976, of the following provision in the Hindu Marriage Act:

"13 B (1) Subject to the provisions of this Act a petition for dissolution of marriage by a decree of divorce may be presented to the district court by both the parties to a marriage together, whether such marriage was solemnized before or after the commencement of the Marriage Laws (Amendment) Act, 1976, on the ground that they have been living separately for a period of one year or more, that they have not been able to live together and that they have mutually agreed that the marriage should be dissolved.

"(2) On the motion of both the parties made not earlier than six months after the date of the presentation of the petition referred to in sub-section *(1)* and not later than eighteen months after the said date, if the petition is not withdrawn in the meantime, the court shall, on being satisfied, after hearing the parties and after making such inquiry as it thinks fit, that a marriage has been solemnized and that the averments in the petition are true, pass a decree of divorce declaring the marriage to be dissolved with effect from the date of the decree."

Sati

Unlike child marriage and dowry, which are widely prevalent all over the country, the incidence of Sati is mercifully limited and is now virtually confined to Rajasthan, where feudal traditions persist. In the medieval period when Rajput kingdoms were frequently attacked by invaders, the womenfolk of the ruler's home often bravely preferred death to dishonour when the ruler was captured or killed in battle. The memory of this tradition apparently got mixed up with the religious veneration of some legendary personalities like Savitri, symbol of wifely chastity.

There was countrywide shock and dismay when, on 16 September 1987, thousands of men and women gathered at Deorala, not far from Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, for the *chunri mahotsav* of Roop Kanwar. An educated young woman, she was supposed to have burnt herself, but was probably burnt forcibly on the funeral pyre of her husband 13 days earlier. The conscience of the country was outraged by this expression of the local community's approval of the barbaric custom of widow burning.

Parliament passed in December 1987 a Commission of Sati (Prevention) Bill which provides for death sentence or life imprisonment for organising or abetting Sati, and other punishment for the glorification of Sati. But the law insofar as it prohibits the praise of Sati has remained a dead letter in the absence of political will to implement it. No action was taken against the Sankaracharya of Puri who unabashedly supported the practice of Sati. On the other hand, the then Government of Uttar Pradesh arrested Swami Agnivesh when he was on his way to challenge the Sankaracharya to a debate on whether Hindu scriptures really justified Sati. Agnivesh is a prominent member of the Arya Samaj, founded by the great social reformer Dayanand Saraswati. He has led peace marches in Punjab torn in recent years by terrorist violence, and demonstrations against ostentatious celebration of New Year's Eve by affluent revellers at five-star hotels in the capital. That a man like Agnivesh should have been arrested, and an obscurantist espouser of Sati left untouched, is a measure of the decline in the ethical standards of the country's governance over the decades since independence.

Constitution and its Interpretation

When the Special Marriage Bill, a purely optional law under which Indians belonging to different religions could marry, was under discussion in the Lok Sabha in 1954, a Muslim member, Pocker Saheb, demanded that it should not be applicable to Muslims. His argument was that its provisions, envisaging for those marrying under the Act the application of the Indian Succession Act rather than traditional personal law, amounted to an infringement of the rights of Muslims.

Such persistence of a touch-me-not attitude on the part of conservative Muslims has perhaps been encouraged by certain features of the Indian Constitution which are not quite in consonance with its basic intent of establishing a secular state. An example of the unequal treatment of religions is Article 28 in the Chapter on Fundamental Rights. Clause 1 of this Article reads: "No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds." Implicit in this provision is that religious instruction may be imparted in educational institutions that receive no aid from the State or those that are aided but are not maintained wholly out of State funds. This is made explicit in Clause 3 of the Article which reads: "No person attending any educational institution recognised by the State or receiving aid out of State funds shall be required to take part in any religious instruction that may be imparted in such institution or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution or in any premises attached thereto unless such person or, if such person is a minor, his guardian has given his consent thereto." Article 30 lays down as a Fundamental Right: "All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice". Clause 2 of the same Article further provides: "The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language."

Surely, religious instruction in schools and colleges is either good for all Indians or is bad for all Indians. A large number of schools and colleges are run by the two major religious minorities. Whereas Christian missions in India have for centuries been funded substan-

tially from abroad, Indian Islam also began to receive foreign largess following the oil boom of the seventies in the Islamic countries of West Asia. The illogic and danger of Article 28 have been highlighted by recent events in Kashmir Valley, where secessionist elements have drawn support from students who received rabidly fanatical religious instruction in more than 150 Madrasas (schools) run by the Jamaat-e-Islami. This was reported by newspapers as far back as in 1987[5] but it was not till April 1990 that the Jamaat-e-Islami was banned and its schools closed down.

What could have led the constitution-makers to include Articles 28 and 30 which are patently discriminatory as between religions? It could have been the persistence of the pre-independence tendency of the Congress -- as in the instance of the *Bande Mataram* controversy discussed earlier -- to deal gingerly with religious minorities so as not to drive them into the waiting arms of the foreign rulers. Another reason could have been the controversy that was then raging over Kashmir's accession to India. It was an issue on which almost all Muslim majority countries of the world backed Pakistan in the United Nations. Special treatment of the Muslim minority in India, it was perhaps hoped, would soften the attitude of the Muslim countries. This consideration might also have influenced the Nehru government's continuance, even after partition of the sub-continent at the Muslim League's insistence, of the policy of confining to the Hindu community the reform and codification of family laws so as to improve the status of women. Whatever the intention, the consequence of confining the reform of personal law to Hindus has been to postpone indefinitely the formulation of a common civil code for all Indian citizens.

Dr. S. Gopal, the historian and biographer of Nehru, says: "... there are certain steps which, under pressure of circumstances, Nehru took or failed to take, which do not fit squarely with his promotion of secularism as the root of equality and the basis of democracy. Special treatment of minorities is in itself a weakening of the secular ideal.... An even greater inadequacy in Nehru's implementation of secular principles was his restriction of the insistence on monogamy to Hindu men and the grant of the rights of divorce and inheritance only to Hindu women. In his keenness to win the confidence of the Muslim community, he failed to provide equality before the law to all Indian women and to promulgate a common civil law. But there is no room in a secular society for inc-

qualities which claim religious sanction.... To deny rights to Muslim women which are available to women of other faiths is a violation of the provision in the Constitution that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion. The Constituent Assembly had declined, by a resolution in 1948, to accept that Muslim personal law was an inseparable part of the Islamic religion and rejected attempts to exempt it from the directive principle regarding a uniform civil code. Nehru, of course, knew all this but felt that the time had not yet come to impose in this matter on Muslims decisions taken by what would necessarily be a non-Muslim majority. A start should be made with the Hindu code, thereby preparing the ground for the extension of its principles to all Indian women. But what Nehru postponed in the fifties has now become even more difficult." (Paper read at Seminar on 'Jawaharlal Nehru and India's Quest for a Secular Identity', New Delhi, 12 April 1987.)

A curious consequence of the differential treatment of religions under our Constitution is that the Ramakrishna Mission, founded by Swami Vivekananda, has disowned Hinduism. It secured from the Calcutta High Court on 7 October 1985 a judgement upholding its claim that Ramakrishnaism is a non-Hindu minority religion. The Ramakrishna Mission was driven to taking this position in order to be able to run its educational institutions without interference by the West Bengal Government.

The issue -- in *Madhab Chandra Bandopadhyaya vs. State of West Bengal* -- was whether the West Bengal College Teachers (Security of Service) Act 1975 and the West Bengal College Service Commission Act 1978 were applicable to the Sri Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centenary College run by the mission at Rehara. The High Court held that Article 30 (1) gives religious minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions imparting not only religious instruction but general secular education; and that since non-Hindus are not required to renounce their own religion and to embrace Hinduism in order to follow the Religion Universal of Ramakrishna, Ramakrishnaism is a minority religion in India. It is unfortunate that at a time when the new wave of thinking sweeping across the Soviet Union and other socialist countries accepts the need to loosen the grip of the State and to allow greater scope for co-operative and individual effort, an institution like the Ramakrishna Mission should have to forswear Hinduism and claim the status of a minority religion in order to escape State interference.

Fundamentalism and Excommunication

The judiciary has not been immune from the tendency, implicit in the Constitutional provisions, to treat religious minorities as sacred cows. In *Saifuddin Saheb vs. State of Bombay*, four judges out of a five-member bench of the Supreme Court upheld, on 9 January 1962, the right of Sardar Syedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb, as the Dail-ul-Mutlaq, to excommunicate any member of the Dawoodi Bohra community of Muslims on religious grounds. Chief Justice B.P. Sinha delivered a dissenting judgement. He held that excommunication results in the treatment of a human being as a pariah and therefore offends Article 17 of the Constitution, which abolishes untouchability and makes its practice in any form an offence punishable in accordance with law.

The case has a history going back to 1949 when the Bombay legislature adopted the Prevention of Excommunication Act. In a suit filed the same year, Justice J.C. Shah as a single judge of the Bombay High Court held on 21 February 1952 that the Act was not inconsistent with Article 26 of the Constitution that guarantees the right of every religious denomination to manage its own affairs. On the Syedna appealing against this judgement, a bench of the Bombay High Court comprising Chief Justice M.C. Chagla and Justice P.N. Bhagwati upheld it, though on different grounds. It was this 1953 judgement of the Bombay High Court that the Supreme Court overruled in 1962.

The majority judgement was based on the reasoning that excommunication is for the purpose of maintaining the strength of the religion, and therefore, forms part of the management of the community, through its religious head, "of its own affairs in matters of religion" (Article 26 b); that the Act was not saved by Article 25 (2) (b), namely "providing for social welfare and reform"; that a religion cannot be 'reformed' out of existence or identity; and that the Act rendered the Dawoodi Bohra community impotent to protect itself against dissidents and schismatics.

Chief Justice Sinha, on the other hand, said: "Though the freedom of conscience is guaranteed to every individual so that he may hold any beliefs he likes, his actions in pursuance of those beliefs may be liable to restrictions in the interest of the community at large, as may be determined by common consent, that is to say, by a competent legislature. It was on such humanitarian grounds, and

for the purpose of social reform that so-called religious practices like immolating a widow at the pyre of her deceased husband, or of dedicating a virgin of tender years to a god to function as a Devadasi, or of ostracising a person from all social contacts and religious communion on account of his having eaten forbidden food or taboo, were stopped by legislation." Pointing out that excommunication not only excludes a person from places of worship and the beneficial use of the property of the denomination of which the Dail is the trustee but prevents burial of the dead in the burial ground of the community, Chief Justice Sinha held that Article 26 (b) must be read subject to Article 25 (2) (b).

It is ironical that a progressive piece of legislation like the Bombay Prevention of Excommunication Act, passed before the Constitution came into force, should have been held void on the ground of the Fundamental Rights. Like the prohibition of polygamy for one section of Indian citizens and its sanction for another section, the abolition of untouchability on the one hand and the sanction of excommunication on the other is a contradiction which points to the need for review of the relevant constitutional provisions.

Restitution of Conjugal Rights

Laws and the Constitution, it has been said, are what the courts say they are. Judicial interpretation plays an important part in a democratic polity. The courts, consisting as they do of individuals whose values and views vary, sometimes deliver liberal and forward-looking judgements, and at other times, unfortunately, the opposite. An instance of regressive interpretation by the Supreme Court, concerning the power of excommunication by the head of the Dawoodi Bohra community of Muslims, has been referred to. Another judgement of the Supreme Court which must, with respect, be deplored as unfortunate relates to what is euphemistically known as 'restitution of conjugal rights'. In practice this has meant the right of the husband to compel his wife, who may have left him on account of his cruelty or infidelity, to return and to share his bed and board.

Though the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 incorporated several radical refoms, it retained the provision for restitution of conjugal rights. Section 9 (1) of the Act read:

"When either the husband or the wife has, without reasonable excuse, withdrawn from the society of the other, the aggrieved party may apply, by petition to the district court, for restitution of conjugal rights and the court, on being satisfied of the truth of the statements made in such petition and that there is no legal ground why the application should not be granted, may decree restitution of conjugal rights accordingly."

The concept of restitution was derived from English law. In Britain itself, as noted by the Law Commission in a report[6] in March 1974, action for restitution was abolished under Section 20 of the Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act, 1970. In India, even the Marriage Laws Amendment Act of 1976, which liberalised the Hindu Marriage Act by providing for divorce by mutual consent, retained the provision for restitution and only made some changes concerning the burden and nature of proof.

In 1983 the very concept of restitution of conjugal rights was struck down by the Andhra Pradesh High Court. In the case of *T. Sareetha vs. T. V. Subbiah*, a single judge, Justice P. A. Choudhry, held that restitution was degrading, and violative of the right to privacy and individual dignity which should be regarded as part of the personal liberty guaranteed by Article 21 in the Fundamental Rights chapter of the Constitution.

Justice Choudhry pointed out that a suit for restitution by the wife is in practice rare and that this right has worked as an engine of oppression by the husband. Restitution, the judge said, deprives a woman of control over her body and constitutes the grossest form of violation of human dignity. "Among the few points that distinguish human existence from that of animals", Justice Choudhry said, "the sexual autonomy an individual enjoys to choose his or her partner to a sexual act is of primary importance.... Forced sex, like all forced things, is a denial of all joy... Nothing can conceivably be more degrading to human dignity and monstrous to human spirit than to subject a person, by the long arm of the law, to a sex act."[7]

This landmark judgement was, most regrettably, overruled by the Supreme Court in the following year.[8] A two-member bench comprising Justice S. Murtaza Fazal Ali and Justice Sabyasachi Mukharji held that restitution of conjugal rights "serves social purpose as an aid to the prevention of break-up of marriage", by giving "husband and wife opportunity to settle up the matter amicably". The two

judges further held that a restitution decree does not enforce sexual intercourse. The remedy, they held, aims at cohabitation in the matrimonial home and consortium, and not merely at sexual intercourse.

Retrograde Law on Muslim Women

If the Supreme Court's judgements in the excommunication and restitution cases are instances of regressive judicial interpretation of laws and the Constitution, the Muslim Women Act of 1986 is a monumental example of the government bringing forward, and pressing through parliament, a reactionary law so as to nullify the effect of a progressive judgement by the Supreme Court.

The Court was called upon to determine whether or not, under the Criminal Procedure Code of 1973, a Muslim husband who has divorced his wife is under an obligation to provide maintenance for her if she is unable to support herself. The Cr. P.C., like the Indian Penal Code and the Child Marriage Restraint Act, is applicable to all citizens irrespective of their religion.

The relevant portions of sections 125 and 127 read:

"125 (1) If any person having sufficient means neglects or refuses to maintain

a) his wife, unable to maintain herself.... a Magistrate of the first class may, upon proof of such neglect or refusal, order such person to make a monthly allowance for the maintenance of his wife... at such monthly rate not exceeding five hundred rupees in the whole, as such Magistrate thinks fit....

Explanation

For the purpose of this Chapter... 'wife' includes a woman who has been divorced by, or has obtained a divorce from, her husband and has not remarried.

2) Such allowance shall be payable from the date of the order or, if so ordered, from the date of the application for maintenance.

3) If any person so ordered fails without sufficient cause to comply with the order, any such Magistrate may, for every breach of the order, issue a warrant for levying the amount due in the manner provided for levying fines, and may sentence such person, for the whole or any part of each month's allowance remaining unpaid after

the execution of the warrant, to imprisonment for a term which may extend to one month or until payment if sooner made.... Provided further that if such person offers to maintain his wife on condition of her living with him, and she refuses to live with him, such Magistrate may consider any grounds of refusal stated by her, and may make an order under this section notwithstanding such offer, if he is satisfied that there is just ground for so doing.

Explanation
If a husband has contracted marriage with another woman or keeps a mistress, it shall be considered to be just ground for his wife's refusal to live with him....
127. (1) On proof of a change in the circumstances of any person receiving under section 125 a monthly allowance, or ordered under the same section to pay a monthly allowance to his wife.... the Magistrate may make such alteration in the allowance as he thinks fit....
3) Where any order has been made under section 125 in favour of a woman who has been divorced by, or has obtained a divorce from, her husband, the Magistrate shall, if he is satisfied that --

a) The woman has, after the date of such divorce, remarried, cancel such order as from the date of her remarriage;
b) the woman has been divorced by her husband and that she has received, whether before or after the date of the said order, the whole of the sum which, under any customary or personal law applicable to the parties, was payable on such divorce, cancel such order...."

In the Shah Bano case, it was argued on behalf of the husband Mohammad Ahmad Khan, a well-to-do advocate who had divorced her and who came in appeal against an order by the Madhya Pradesh High Court for payment of maintenance, that under Muslim personal law a husband who divorces his wife is under no obligation to pay maintenance beyond the period of *iddat* (three months, or until delivery of the child if the woman is pregnant). It was also contended that the *Mahr* which the husband undertakes, at the time of marriage, to pay to his wife is the sum payable on divorce, referred to in section 127 (3) (b), and that there can be no further claim on the husband even if the divorced wife is indigent.

The case was heard by a five-member bench of the Supreme Court comprising Chief Justice Y.V. Chandrachud, Justice D.A. Desai, Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy, Justice E.S. Venkataramiah and Justice Ranganath Misra. They held unaniomously in the judgement delivered on 23 April 1985 that:

i) Section 125 contains no words of limitation to justify the exclusion of Muslim women from its scope. Therefore a divorced Muslim woman, so long as she has not remarried, is a 'wife' for the purpose of section 125. The statutory right available to her under that section is unaffected by the provisions of the personal law applicable to her.

ii) The Explanation to the Second Proviso to section 125 (3) confers upon the wife the right to refuse to live with her husband if he contracts another marriage -- leave alone three or four other marriages. It shows, unmistakably, that section 125 overrides the personal law, if there is any conflict between the two.

iii) In fact there is no conflict. Muslim personal law which limits the period of responsibility to *iddat* does not contemplate or countenance the situation envisaged by section 125. It is only if the divorced wife is able to maintain herself that the husband's responsibility is limited to the *iddat* period.

iv) Any deferred part of the payment of *Mahr* becomes payable on dissolution of the marriage contract by the death of either of the parties or by divorce. *Mahr* is not the amount payable 'on divorce'. A man settles a sum on his wife as a mark of respect. He does not divorce her as a mark of respect. Therefore a sum payable to the wife out of respect cannot be a sum payable on divorce. Section 127 (3) (b) was apparently drafted on the basis of the misconception that dower is an amount payable 'on divorce'.

v) The true position is that if the divorced wife is able to maintain herself, the husband's liability to provide maintenance for her ceases with the expiration of the period of *iddat*. If she is unable to maintain herself, she is entitled to take recourse to section 125.

The judges cited English translations of relevant *Aiyats* of the *Quran* in Arabic, specially 241 and 242 which say that "in addition to her dower", adequate provision should be made for a divorced woman.

The judges noted with "deep regret" that some of the interveners who supported the appellant took up an extreme position: "... the All India Muslim Personal Law Board have gone to the length of asserting that it is irrelevant to inquire as to how a Muslim divorcee should maintain herself. The facile answer of the Board is that the Personal Law has devised the system of *Mahr* to meet the requirements of women and if a woman is indigent, she must look to her relations, including nephews and cousins, to support her. This is a most unreasonable view of law as well as life."

The Supreme Court's judgement concluded with these significant observations on the subject of a common civil code: "It is also a matter of regret that Article 44 of our Constitution has remained a dead letter. It provides that 'The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India.' There is no evidence of any official activity for framing a common civil code for the country. A belief seems to have gained ground that it is for the Muslim community to take a lead in the matter of reform of their personal law.... No community is likely to bell the cat by making gratuitous concessions on this issue. It is the State which is charged with the duty of securing a uniform civil code for the citizens of the country, and unquestionably, it has the legislative competence to do so. A counsel in the case whispered, somewhat audibly, that legislative competence is one thing, the political courage to use that competence is quite another. We understand the difficulties involved in bringing persons of different faiths and persuasions on a common platform. But, a beginning has to be made if the Constitution is to have any meaning. Inevitably, the role of the reformer has to be assumed by the courts because, it is beyond the endurance of sensitive minds to allow injustice to be suffered when it is so palpable. But piecemeal attempts of courts to bridge the gap between personal laws cannot take the place of a common civil code. Justice to all is a far more satisfactory way of dispensing justice than justice from case to case."

The Supreme Court reiterated its commendation of the enactment of a uniform civil code in the course of a judgement in another case the same year. It concerned a well educated tribal woman of

Meghalaya, a Christian who had married a Sikh and sought divorce from him. Christian women are governed by the Indian Divorce Act of 1869 which has no provision of divorce by mutual consent. The Act provides different grounds for the seeking of divorce by men and by women. For example, it is adequate for the husband to prove the commission of adultery by the wife in order to divorce her. But a wife seeking divorce has to prove incestuous adultery, or bigamy with adultery, or adultery with cruelty, or adultery with desertion. The Supreme Court pointed out that there is no provision in Muslim law, either, for divorce by mutual consent (such as is provided in the Hindu Marriage Act and the optional Special Marriage Act). "We suggest," the Supreme Court said, "that the time has come for the intervention of the legislature in these matters to provide for a uniform code of marriage and divorce and to provide by law for a way out of the unhappy situations which couples like the present have found themselves in."

Unfortunately, very few Muslims eminent in public life have commended a common civil code to govern all citizens of India. Among these few was Prof. M. Mujeeb, who advocated the gradual extension of the prohibition of polygamy to cover Muslims too. Referring to the prohibition of bigamy in the conduct rules for civil servants, he pointed out in the course of his inaugural address at a Seminar on Islamic Law in Modern India in January 1972 that there "has been no opposition from the Muslims against the law which forbids a government servant to have more than one wife." Prof. Mujeeb suggested that "the law could be extended to cover those employed in institutions receiving governmental grants and further still to those dependent on government assistance in any form."[9]

M.C. Chagla was another liberal thinker. A former Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court who served in the Union Cabinet, he wrote in favour of a common civil code in the course of his autobiography:[10] "I have... often strongly disagreed with the Government policy of constantly harping upon minorities, minority status and minority rights. It comes in the way of national unity, and emphasises the differences between the majority community and the minority. Of course, it may serve well as a vote-catching device to win Muslim votes, but I do not believe in sacrificing national interests in order to get temporary party benefits.... I am horrified to find that in my country, while monogamy has been made the law for the Hindus, Muslims can still indulge in the luxury of polygamy. It is an

insult to womanhood; and Muslim women, I know, resent this discrimination between Muslim women and Hindu women."

Similarly Mirza Hameedullah Beg, then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, said in the course of the third Motilal Nehru Memorial Lecture delivered by him on 15 January 1977: "I am one of those who hope that, in course of time, we will be able to have a uniform civil code governing all Indian citizens, and that religious labels will not stand in the way of enactment of laws which may be considered beneficial for Indian citizens as a whole." Commending the enactments of the mid-fifties for the reform and codification of personal laws, Justice Beg pointed out how Section 4 of the Hindu Succession Act expressly says that a Hindu by religion could be one professing "any of the forms or developments of the religion including Virashaiva, a Lingayat or a follower of the Prarthana or Arya Samaj". The Act made it clear that Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs are also governed by the provisions of the Act; however, it excluded persons who are Muslims, Christians or Parsis by religion, "This exclusion", Justice Beg said, "seems to be, to one of my way of thinking, an anomaly which is not quite consistent with Article 44 of our Constitution... I fail to see how a rule of succession which appears to be just in the case of a Hindu or Sikh family could be said to become unjust for another family merely because members of that family happen to profess another religion."

More recently, Baharul Islam, member of the Rajya Sabha and former judge of the Supreme Court, suggested in the course of the fourth Motilal Nehru Memorial Lecture delivered by him on 9 December 1987 a gradual advance towards a common civil code. The first stage would be to codify the Shariat and other personal laws and put them in one Code book. Initially people might be given the option to follow any set of laws as they wish, under marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance etc. This, when the minority communities including the Muslims agree, could lead to a uniform civil code. Stating that such a code, like the national flag and national anthem, has practical value for a sovereign nation, Baharul Islam said: "If the Muslims' fear that the community's identity will be in jeopardy under a uniform civil code is removed, and if the Muslims are convinced that a common code will not interfere with their religion and way of life, that on the contrary it will benefit the community, particularly women in terms of the Holy Quran, I believe the Muslims as a whole will come forward to welcome it."

However, voices like those of Mujeeb and Chagla, Beg and Baharul Islam, are rare. The Muslim community continues, by and large, to be under the sway of conservative and male chauvinist leaders. The reason was perceptively analysed by Baharul Islam in the course of his Motilal Nehru Memorial Lecture. "The Muslim intelligentsia", he said, "are in a dilemma. They do not have sufficient contact with Muslim masses. The latter do not follow them, but are easily misled by the ulema who talk to them politics in terms of religion. Paradoxically, the Muslim intelligentsia are also not much needed by the political parties unless they are fanatical enough to influence the Muslim masses who constitute the vote banks. The result is that the progressive Muslim leadership is torn between nationalism and communalism, between conscience and convenience. The Muslim youths, having no proper leadership and guidance to follow, are tending, some to fundamentalism and some to communism."

There was a howl of protest from the backward-looking and male chauvinist leaders of the Muslim community against the judgement of the Supreme Court in the Shah Bano case. G.M Banatwala, the Muslim League leader, speaking in the Lok Sabha on 26 July 1985 described the judgement as a flagrant violation of Muslim personal law. He said that after the husband's responsibility for a wife divorced by him ceased with the period of *iddat*, it was for the divorced woman's blood relations to take care of her.

Even a highly educated Muslim woman, Dr. Najma Heptullah who is Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, defended Islamic laws governing women and condemned 'extraneous interference'. Speaking at Nagpur on 16 January 1986, she said: "Islam was not made by Parliament or the Supreme Court. They have no right to interfere."

Instead of making the two judgements of the Supreme Court in 1985 the occasion for beginning to frame a common civil code, the then Government unfortunately bowed before the voices of unreason. It brought forward legislation, ironically titled the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, to nullify the effect of the Supreme Court's judgement. The discrimination against Muslim women implicit in the confining of family law reform to Hindus in the fifties became cruelly explicit in this legislation. Section 4 of the Act makes it the duty of everyone except the husband to provide maintenance to a divorced and needy wife. It reads:

"4 (1) Notwithstanding anything contained in the foregoing provisions of this Act or in any other law for the time being in force, where a Magistrate is satisfied that a divorced woman has not remarried and is not able to maintain herself after the *iddat* period, he may make an order directing such of her relatives as would be entitled to inherit her property on her death, according to Muslim law, to pay such reasonable and fair maintenance to her as he may determine fit and proper, having regard to the needs of the divorced woman, the standard of life enjoyed by her during her marriage and the means of such relatives, and such maintenance shall be payable by such relatives in the proportions in which they would inherit her property and at such periods as he may specify in his order:

"Provided that where such divorced woman has children, the Magistrate shall order only such children to pay maintenance to her, and in the event of any such children being unable to pay such maintenance, the magistrate shall order the parents of such divorced woman to pay maintenance to her:

"Provided further that if any of the parents is unable to pay his or her share of the maintenance ordered by the Magistrate on the ground of his or her not having the means to pay the same, the Magistrate may, on proof of such inability being furnished to him, order that the share of such relatives in the maintenance ordered by him be paid by such of the other relatives as may appear to the Magistrate to have the means of paying the same, in such proportions as the Magistrate may think fit to order.

"(2) Where a divorced woman is unable to maintain herself and she has no relatives as mentioned in sub-section(1) or such relatives or any one of them have not enough means to pay the maintenance ordered by the Magistrate or the other relatives have not the means to pay the shares of those relatives whose shares have been ordered by the Magistrate to be paid by such other relatives under the second proviso to sub-section(1), the Magistrate may, by order, direct the State Wakf Board established under Section 9 of the Wakf Act, 1954, or under any other law for the time being in force in a State, functioning in the area in which the woman resides, to pay such maintenance as determined by him under sub-section (1) or, as the case may be, to pay the shares of such of the relatives who are unable to pay, at such periods as he may specify in his order."

Persons of humane outlook and progressive views, men and women alike, felt outraged by the provisions of the Bill. Women's organisations came together to appeal to members of parliament to strive hard for the withdrawal of the Bill. They were: the All India Democratic Women's Association, the National Federation of Indian Women, the Committees for Protection of Muslim Women's Rights in Delhi and West Bengal, and the Muslim Women's Rights Protection Committee of Calicut.

A statement issued jointly by these organisations expressed regret that while Prime Minsiter Rajiv Gandhi had admitted that he had consulted 'religious leaders' before drafting the controversial Bill, he had not kept his word in this regard with the women's organisations. The statement said that such consultations with religious leaders were an entirely new phenomenon. The Government had misinterpreted the word secularism by giving it the meaning of *laissez faire* to the fundamentalists of all religions. The statement pointed out the anomaly of the Bill absolving a husband, who is entitled to inherit half of the wife's property in the event of her death, of any responsibility for her in the event of divorce.

Such protests notwithstanding, the Government pressed the Bill through Parliament. It was grimly ironic that the clout added to the party whip by the widely welcomed anti-defection law, enacted soon after the eighth general elections of December 1984, should have been employed to ram the retrogade Muslim Women's Bill through parliament. Arif Mohammad Khan, a member of the Council of Ministers, to his great credit resigned in protest against the measure in February 1986. In the course of the debate on the Bill in the Lok Sabha, he condemned it as "inhuman and unIslamic."

The Muslim Women's Act marked a severe set-back to the ideal of a common civil code binding on all Indian citizens. Emboldened by the Government's retreat, the Muslim League served notice that it would oppose even an optional civil code. G.M. Banatwala, as general secretary of the Indian Muslim League, issued a statement on 17 October 1986 in which he declared that the concept of a uniform code was "an attempt to appease the militant communal elements". He appealed to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi "not to succumb to any demand for a uniform civil code, voluntary or otherwise." Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait, president of the Indian Union Muslim League, went further and demanded at a party rally in

Madurai on 20 August 1989 that Article 44 in the Directive Principles chapter of the Constitution, calling for a uniform civil code, be repealed.

During the run-up for the elections to the ninth Lok Sabha that were held in November 1989, the Congress (I)'s manifesto avoided any reference to a uniform civil code. Silence was observed also, surprisingly, by the two Communist parties in their manifestos. The National Front, chief adversary of the Congress(I), spoke in two voices. Its manifesto said in the section entitled 'Protection of Rights of Minorities': "Religious minorities will enjoy the fullest protection and opportunity to pursue their modes of worship and their religious beliefs and practices, and develop their institutions -- whether religious, cultural, educational or welfare-oriented. Complete non-interference will be observed in their personal laws." On the other hand, the manifesto said in the section on 'Equal Status for Women': "A review will be undertaken of all social legislation concerning marriage, divorce, maintenance, custody, adoption, inheritance, etc., in consultation with women's organisations and all concerned communities, to enact new legislation to give women equal rights in all these matters." The Bharatiya Janata Party was the only one among the major contestants to promise to try and evolve a consensus for a uniform civil code. Item 8 of the BJP's programme for national unity says that the party will: "Appoint a Commission to examine the various personal laws in vogue in the country -- Hindu law, Muslim law, Christian law, Parsi law, Civil law, etc., -- to identify the fair and equitable ingredients in these laws and prepare a draft with a view to evolve a consensus for a uniform civil code."[11]

On the plane of practical election politics, the Janata Dal, principal constituent of the National Front, and the Congress (I) were equally assiduous in cultivating the Muslim vote bank through the conservative and male chauvinist leaders of the community. H.K.L. Bhagat, on behalf of the Congress(I), repeatedly called on the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid in Delhi to seek his support in the November 1989 elections. The Janata Dal's leader, Vishwanath Pratap Singh who later became Prime Minister, called on the Shahi Imam as often as Rajiv Gandhi's emissary did, in a competitive bid for securing the Imam's *fatwa* to Muslim co-religionists on which party to vote for. The Imam finally threw his weight on the side of the Janata Dal. In terms of political morality, the Congress(I) and the Janata Dal, both of which profess secularism, disgraced themselves equally. In the

Rama Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy, which was a major issue in the Hindi-speaking states, the Congress(I) was seen widely as having fallen between two stools, trying to appease both Hindu communal and Muslim communal feelings.

The ascendancy of communalism does not augur well for the cause of women's development. Religious fanaticism is irrational and inegalitarian, and is usually associated with the subordination of women. A case in point is Iran where women were forbidden to wear the veil since 1963. In 1967 the Family Protection Law allowed women to work without the husband's authorisation. But after the overthrow of the Shah in 1978 and the establishment of the rule of Islamic clerics, the *chadar* has returned and women have been reduced again to a subordinate status.

NOTES

1 *Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes*, 1986-87 (New Delhi: Department of Welfare), p.238.
2 *Towards Equality*, pp. 81-82.
3 *Year Book 1986-87* (New Delhi: Department of Social Welfare), pp. 205-7.
4 *Towards Equality*, pp. 328-9.
5 *Patriot* (Delhi), 16 October 1987.
6 *Fifty-ninth Report of the Law Commission* (Delhi: Controller of Publications), p. 55.
7 *All India Hindu Law Reporter* Vol. 9, 1983, p. 658.
8 *AIR 1984* SC 1563.
9 Cited in *Towards Equality*, p. 107.
10 *Roses in December* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1973).
11 G.N.S. Raghavan and G. Balachandran, *Forty Years of World's Largest Democracy* (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1990), pp.95-7.

11 Women's Status: Pluses and Minuses

Jawaharlal Nehru was disappointed by the small number of women members in the first Lok Sabha (1952-57), the directly elected house of the national legislature which had at that time a total elected membership of 489. There were only 43 women contestants, and 14 of them were elected.[1] In a letter to Chief Ministers (18 May 1952), Jawaharlal said: "I have noticed with great regret how few women have been elected. I suppose this is so in the State Assemblies and Councils also.[2] I think we are very much to be blamed. It is not a matter of showing favour to anyone or even of injustice, but rather of doing something which is not conducive to the future growth of our country. I am quite sure that our real and basic growth will only come when women have a full chance to play their part in public life. Wherever they have had this chance, they have, as a whole, done well, better if I may say so, than the average man. Our laws are man-made, our society dominated by man, and so most of us naturally take a very lopsided view of this matter. We cannot be objective, because we have grown up in certain grooves of thought and action. But the future of India will probably depend ultimately more upon the women than the men."

The principle of women's equality having been accepted, it hardly mattered that the presence of women in the first Lok Sabha was much less than their share in the country's population. Most of the legislation initiated by Jawaharlal Nehru for a radical improvement of women's social and economic status was passed by the first parliament, overwhelmingly male in composition.

Role in Public Life

In the Union Executive, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was a member of Jawaharlal Nehru's first Cabinet and held the portfolio of Health. Sucheta Kripalani was the first woman to become Chief Minister of a State, Uttar Pradesh, from October 1963 to early 1967. There have since then been other women Chief Ministers like Nandini Satpathy of Orissa and Sashikala Kakodkar of Goa.

The office of State Governor is largely ceremonial, though a Governor sometimes plays an important role as when President's rule is introduced in place of a popular Ministry. Jawaharlal Nehru chose Sarojini Naidu as the first Governor of Uttar Pradesh and she held the office till her death in 1949. Her daughter Padmaja Naidu later became Governor of West Bengal. Several women have subsequently served as Governors of other States.

In the first two decades of independence the office of Congress president carried great prestige and influence. The party was in power at the Centre as well as in almost all the States, and the Congress president had an important say in the choice of Chief Ministers and even of the Prime Minister. (It was after the Congress split of 1969 that the Prime Minister became supreme both in governmental and in Congress party affairs.) The first woman to be elected president of the Congress after independence was Indira Gandhi. This was in February 1959. Many eyebrows were raised at what seemed like Jawaharlal Nehru promoting his daughter. There had been a similar reaction when his sister Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was sent to Moscow as India's first ambassador to the Soviet Union, and was subsequently made leader of the Indian delegation to the United Nations, High Commissioner in London and ambassador to the U.S.A. But Indira Gandhi was to demonstrate her own political acumen and popular following after she became Prime Minister in 1966. She successfully asserted her authority as against a combination of Congress leaders who controlled the party machine in certain States. She got an Independent candidate, V.V. Giri, elected President of India in August 1969 defeating the official Congress nominee, N. Sanjiva Reddy.

Indira Gandhi continued as Prime Minister till the end of 1976 and, after a three-year interlude, regained the office in January 1980. She held it till her assassination on 31 October 1984 -- making a total of nearly 16 years as Prime Minister.

In Professions, Literature and Arts

Women's increasing participation in the modern professions is also remarkable. They no longer serve only as typists and clerks in government and commercial offices. Several of them are senior officers and heads of establishments. Women have risen to high ranks in a wide range of professions: law, medicine, banking, architecture and engineering; business management and industrial entrepreneurship; civil administration and the police.

A heartening sight in India's capital is the regulation of road traffic by smartly uniformed policewomen, performing their role with confidence and aplomb. On the other hand, newspapers have from time to time carried photographs of policewomen dragging by the hair women demonstrating in the vicinity of Parliament in defiance of prohibitory orders. Surely the participation of women in law enforcement duties should contribute to the civilizing of police methods rather than result in brutalization of the gentler sex. I recall Gandhiji's reservation about women entering certain professions; he said that he would not like to see a woman holding a rifle and being trained in its use.

There have been several women of high achievement in literature and the arts. They have been honoured over the years since independence by the three academies established in the fifties during Jawaharlal Nehru's prime ministership: the Sahitya Akademi (Academy of Letters), the Lalit Kala Akademi (Academy of Fine Arts) and the Sangeet Natak Akademi (Academy of Music, Dance and Drama). Among those honoured by the Sahitya Akademi with awards and/or Fellowships have been: Nalini Bala Devi and Indira Goswami in Assamese; Maitreyi Devi and Mahasweta Devi in Bengali; Kamala Das and Nayantara Sahgal in English; Mahadevi Varma and Krishna Sobti in Hindi; Amrita Pritam in Punjabi; Rajam Krishnan and Tripurasundari Lakshmi in Tamil; Saraswati Devi in Telugu; and Quarrtulain Hyder in Urdu.

Among those awarded by the Lalit Kala Akademi are Reba Hore in painting; Anila Jacob in sculpture and Zarina Hashmi in graphics.

Women have, through the centuries, contributed significantly to keeping alive the traditions of Indian music and dance -- classical, semi-classical as well as folk. Those honoured by the Sangeet Natak

Akademi include the singers Kesarbai Ketkar, Rasoolan Bai, Hirabai Barodekar, Siddeshwari Devi, Begum Akhtar, Gangubai Hangal and Sumati Mutatkar of the northern school of Indian music, and, of the southern school, C. Saraswati Bai, M.S. Subbulakshmi, D.K. Pattammal and M.L. Vasanthakumari.

In the field of dance, one of the earliest to be honoured by the Akademi was T. Balasaraswati, South India's supreme *danseuse* of the century. Others include Rukminidevi Arundale and Yamini Krishnamurthy. Rukminidevi (1904-86), born in a Brahmin family of high culture, defied orthodoxy. She married the theosophist Dr. George Arundale and learnt Bharata Natyam, the South Indian dance form associated till that time only with Devadasis. Rukminidevi made Bharata Natyam not merely acceptable but popular as an accomplishment of young women in the cultured circles of society. Jawaharlal Nehru got her nominated as a member of the Rajya Sabha, upper house of the Indian parliament, in which she served from 1952 to 1958.

An outstanding woman artist, whose name is well known even outside India, is the singer M.S. Subbulakshmi. She recalls how when she and her husband Sadasivam went to Delhi in 1955 in connection with her recital in aid of the Kamala Nehru Hospital, they stayed in the Prime Minister's House for over a week: "We went as guests and returned as relatives." She narrates an interesting incident during this visit: "Nehruji decided to hold in his house the final meeting of the top brass to decide categorically upon the linguistic reorganisation of States. The room he selected happened to be in the suite given to us. With his characteristic politeness, he himself came to ask us if we would mind moving to a smaller room. 'Not at all, Panditji,' replied my husband. 'Since we (of the composite Madras State) have to rest content now with a truncated Tamil Nadu in the reorganisation, it is but meet that we are moved from a bigger to a smaller room'! Nehruji took it in good humour and laughed.... From that stay onwards the bond of love between us and Nehruji and Indiraji grew all the stronger."[3]

Jawaharlal Nehru admired women who proved their mettle in any field of endeavour, artistic or scientific. And they reciprocated his appreciation.

A decade before independence, the renowned artist Amrita Sher-Gil (daughter of a Sikh father and Hungarian mother) wrote Jawaharlal a letter, on receiving from him a copy of his autobiog-

raphy, which throws interesting light on the personality of both: "A little while ago somebody said to me, 'You know Jawaharlal Nehru is ill.' I hadn't known it -- I never read the papers.

"I have been thinking of you a great deal but somehow, perhaps for that very reason, I hadn't felt like writing.

"Your letter came as a surprise, I need hardly add an extremely pleasant one.

"Thanks for the book.

"As a rule I dislike biographies and autobiographies. They ring false. Pomposity or exhibitionism. But I think I will like yours. You are able to discard your halo occasionally. You are capable of saying, 'When I saw the sea for the first time' when others would say, 'When the sea saw me for the first time.'

"I should like to have known you better. I am always attracted to people who are integral enough to be inconsistent without discordancy.... I don't think you were interested in my painting really. You looked at my pictures without seeing them.

"You are not hard. You have got a mellow face. I like your face, it is sensitive, sensual and detached at the same time." This verbal portrait captures the spirit of the subject as splendidly as any of the paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil.

Jawaharlal's health was already declining when Valentina Tereshkova, the Soviet cosmonaut, paid her first visit to India in 1963 at his invitation. It was a mark of his warm regard for this outstanding person, who had become the first woman to travel in space, that he had her stay at Teen Murti House as his guest. Jawaharlal responded with warmth and tenderness to women who dared to step into fields normally reserved for men.

Over the decades since independence many Indian women have distinguished themselves in sport and athletics, and even mountaineering and aviation.

Exceptions to the Rule

However, these women of high accomplishment in various fields are exceptions to the rule. They are no index to the condition of the generality of Indian women, who constitute the largest body of the poor and the illiterate among the world's women.

This is despite many women having served as Ministers and

Chief Ministers in the States, and Indira Gandhi having been Prime Minister of the country for as many as 16 out of the first 37 years of independence. The reason is mainly that the factors which make for inertia and impede progress are related to the economic structure in a country, and to the class bias rather than the sex of those in authority.

It is undoubtedly a great gain that the people in many countries of Asia have got used to women as leaders of political parties and as prime ministers. However, women in power have generally got there because of kinship with men already prominent in public life. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who became prime minister of Sri Lanka even earlier than Indira Gandhi in India, is the widow of a former prime minister. The leading personality of the opposition to Gen. Ziaul Haq's authoritarian regime in Pakistan was Benazir Bhutto, daughter of the former prime minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and she became prime minister in November 1988 as the result of democratic elections held after Gen. Zia's death in a helicopter crash. In Bangladesh, the two principal alliances of parties in opposition to President Ershad's government are both led by women: Sheikh Hasina Wajed and Begum Khaleda Zia, one the widow and the other a daughter of former heads of the government.

Family origin is also a factor in the success of Indian women who have done well in the modern professions. They are drawn from a small segment of the country's population -- the middle and upper classes who have access to good education. The majority of Indian women are, on the other hand, condemned to economic privation and lack of education.

Mass Poverty and Illiteracy

Poverty bears most harshly on women in India because of their stinting themselves in order to let the husband and the children have the most of the little that there is to share. Even among children, boys in the homes of the poor and the lower middle class get more of food, clothing and schooling than girls.

Poverty being a relative concept, a household classified as 'poor' in the U.S.A. might be regarded in India as being well-to-do. Differences in levels of economic development would therefore justify the definition of poverty at a lower income level in countries like

India than in affluent countries. But it will be futile for the rulers of any country to attempt an illusive reduction, or even abolition, of poverty through definition. Poverty, like murder, will out.

The definition of poverty that has held the field in India over the last decade considerably understates the extent of economic deprivation. The definition was formulated by a Task Force on Minimum Needs and Effective Consumption Demand appointed by the Planning Commission in 1977. Those were to be counted as poor whose per capita consumption expenditure could not provide a daily intake of 2400 calories in rural areas. The annual household income necessary for that level of consumption was computed at Rs.6400 per family of five in rural India at the price level of 1984-85, the base year of the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90). The monetary definition of the poverty line remains unchanged during a Plan period and is indexed for inflation only five years later, when the next Plan is drawn up. Mid-course evaluation studies of the number of families brought above the poverty line through various programmes can therefore be misleading. A family found to have crossed the rural poverty line of Rs.6400 may in fact be as poor, in terms of real income, as it was at the start of the Seventh Plan -- or even poorer. Moreover, the planners still calculate the family consumption expenditure for providing the minimum calorie requirement on the basis of five members per household, whereas the average rural household size has increased from 4.91 at the 1951 Census to 5.59 in 1981.

It was left to a simple newspaper reader to puncture the bubble of the Establishment economists' learned babble about Rs.6400 as the rural poverty line: "Anyone with a bit of humanitarian concern and common sense will be appalled at knowing the definition of the poverty line. How on earth do people coining such definition expect a family of five to survive on an income of Rs.6400 per annum which comes to approximately Rs.3.50 a person per day? Taking only food into account while defining poverty means that the aim is to just help a person not to die of sheer hunger. In that case, the 'poverty line' should be redefined as 'starvation line'."[4] One is reminded of the words of Jesus in the New Testament (Matthew 11:25) addressed to the Father: "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

Per capita Gross National Product is virtually irrelevant as an indicator of the economic condition of the masses in a country like India. A concept taken over from the industrialised and affluent part

of the world by economists in countries engaged in imitative development on the Western model, its usefulness is limited by two factors. First, GNP includes the value added in the production of every article, whether it be of goods of mass consumption like food and clothing, or luxuries (in the context of a poor country) like motor-cars and soft drinks, or of bombers, warships, guns and ammunition which do not enter into human consumption. Secondly, per capita GNP in a developing country is an average of the income of the many poor and of the few well-to-do. Though, for these reasons, the absolute figure of per capita GNP sheds little light on the condition of the people in any particular developing country, an international comparison of per capita GNP, based on uniform criteria, is of some value as a rough indicator of the relative position of different countries. Such an international comparison,[5] based on World Bank data, shows that India is twenty-second from the bottom in a survey of 161 countries of the world. Only four Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma and Nepal) have a per capita GNP smaller than India's, while most of the 17 countries similarly placed are in Africa. It is obvious that the leaders of successive governments in India, at the Centre and in the States, have largely disregarded Mahatma Gandhi's 'talisman', offered in August 1947, the very month in which India became free: "Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny?"[6]

Similarly disregarded has been Article 45 of the Constitution which called for the provision within 10 years (i.e. by 1960) of free and compulsory education for all children until age 14. This Directive Principle of State Policy reflected the high importance which Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru attached to education.

Gandhiji did not want the raising of women's consciousness to wait till they received formal education. On the other hand, he did not suggest that non-formal consciousness-raising rendered formal education superfluous. Speaking at the annual gathering of the Bombay Bhagini Samaj on 20 February 1918, he said: "Their first attempt should be directed towards awakening in the minds of as many women as possible a proper sense of their present condition. I am not among those who believe that such an effort can be made

through literary education only. To work on that basis would be to postpone indefinitely.... We can bring home to our women the sad realities of their present condition without, in the first instance, giving them literary education.... Many of our movements stop half-way because of the condition of our women.... But although much good and useful work can be done without a knowledge of reading and writing, yet it is my firm belief that you cannot always do without a knowledge thereof. It develops and sharpens one's intellect and it stimulates our power of doing good." The last four words are significant. Gandhiji did not regard education merely as an investment that will yield income to an individual. Education, to be worthy of the name, should enable a person to enhance the quality of his own life and contribute to the improvement of society.

Jawaharlal Nehru, in the course of the first Maulana Azad Memorial lecture delivered by him in 1959, discussed the importance of education for agricultural and industrial progress as well as for a change in outlook and attitudes. He said: "Millions of boys and girls are going through school and college courses and hundreds of thousands are being trained in Universities and technical institutes. These figures are only a part of India's population and much remains to be done. But, even so, the numbers are large and as they come out of school and college, they bring a new outlook to the business of their lives. Thus, slowly but inevitably, our social patterns are changing. The greatest and perhaps the most revolutionary change is through the enlargement of women's education. It is these girls and young women who are influencing and will progressively change the whole life of the people of India. For the present these changes have taken place more in cities and towns than in the rural areas, but even our villages are being affected by them and, in the course of another few years, basic education will cover the entire school-going age."

Jawaharlal's optimism has been belied. At the last Census, in 1981, the overall literacy rate (all ages) was only 36.23 per cent. It consisted of a literacy rate of 24.82 per cent among women as against 46.89 per cent among men. The Census revealed that seventy per cent of all illiterate adults in the country were women. It speaks for the callousness of the privileged classes who rule the country that they have not bothered to amend Article 45 so as to postpone the target date for universal and compulsory elementary education. Such amendment would have entailed inconvenient debates in parliament, with the Government having to explain why it failed to carry out the

Directive Principle.

Another reason for Article 45 remaining unamended is that it is only a Directive Principle and therefore not legally enforceable. The Article is doubtless morally binding, but of what avail is moral force for those whose social conscience has been deadened?

There are other disparities besides the lower literacy rate among women, taken as a whole, compared to men. In 1981, only 17.96 per cent of rural women were literate as compared to a literacy rate of 47.82 per cent among urban women. Moreover, only 10.93 per cent of Scheduled Caste women and 8.04 per cent of Scheduled Tribe women were literate, as against a literacy rate of 29.51 per cent among the rest of the women in the country. The majority of children of the elementary school going age not enrolled in schools are either girls, or belong to the most disadvantaged social groups like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Among those enrolled, girls from these three categories are the earliest to drop out.

Against this background, it is tragic that the 'National Perspective Plan for Women: 1988-2000 A.D.', prepared under the auspices of the Department of Women and Child Development, should have given up the objective of universal elementary education for women. The document says (p. 173): "Formal education as the path to human development is both costly and a long-term process. Thus, in a developing country like India it is critical to harness mass media and other forms of communication, including traditional folk forms of entertainment." In the U.S.A., where illiteracy is marginal, the mass media are pervasive and they do run some programmes of adult literacy and social education (Sesame Street is an often quoted example among TV serials). These are for the benefit of immigrant labour and of the poor among blacks. Here in India illiteracy is not marginal but is, along with poverty, the central problem.

Though illiteracy perpetuates poverty and vice versa, the vicious circle can be broken only by a concerted attack on poverty. This is because the poor cannot afford to send their children to school even if there is a school in the village or urban slum, and even if education is free. Every pair of hands, of a boy or girl, after the age of five, is put to work to eke out the family's living. What is called the 'opportunity cost' of sending a child to school is too high for those living at the margin of subsistence. To suggest that mass communication can substitute for formal education in the case of such out-of-school children and early school drop-outs is astonishingly naive, if

not disingenuous. Yet this is precisely what the much-bruited National Education Policy document of 1986 did: "It shall be assured that all children who attain the age of about 11 years by 1990 will have had five years of schooling, or its equivalent through the non-formal stream." Will the members of the Council of Ministers at the Centre and the members of parliament, who endorsed this policy, be content to let their children receive the non-formal equivalent of formal schooling? As noted earlier, Gandhiji had, with prophetic foresight, warned nearly seven decades ago against treating non-formal as a substitute for formal education.

While thus diluting the objective of universal elementary education, the Government is spending large sums on an expensive scheme of residential Navodaya Vidyalayas. They are designed on the pattern of the so-called 'public schools' which are highly expensive, with the difference that in the Navodaya schools everything is free -- from board and lodging to tuition, uniform, books and stationery. The direct expenditure on students per head was estimated in mid-1988 at about Rs.350 per month. The Navodaya Schools, which claim to admit only students from rural areas, start from Class VI. Admission is on the basis of a talent test. But there is reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which is supposed to reconcile the claims of equity with the claims of excellence. Considering that non-enrolment at the primary stage (Classes I to V) is highest among the S.C. and S.T. (with a few exceptions like the Scheduled Tribes of Mizoram), it is clear that the reservation can help only the children of those few Harijan and tribal families who can afford to send their sons and daughers to school and keep them there till Class V.

The Director of the Navodaya Vidyalaya Sanghatan claimed in January 1989: "Out of the 209 schools, it has been found that more than 40 per cent of the children's parents have an annual income of less than Rs 6,000."[7] This figure of family income is below the rural poverty line of Rs.6400 at 1984-85 prices. The hollowness of the claim is revealed by the findings of a research study in the course of which a cross-section of students in a Navodaya school, at Cancon in Goa, were interviewed. It transpired that 11 out of the 16 students interviewed had a television set at home; 14 homes had radio; two had cars; five had a cycle or scooter; and 15 homes took a daily newspaper.

That the Navodaya schools serve mainly the rural well-to-do is

shown by the fact that coaching institutions for the Navodaya entrance examination have come up, on the model of the coaching classes for aspirants hoping to enter the Indian Administrative Service and allied Central services. Crores of rupees have been lavished annually on the Navodaya scheme, while rural primary schools are starved of funds for teachers and buildings and blackboards. In 1986, as many as 1,48,033 (27.97 per cent) primary schools had only one teacher, while 1,71,389 (32.38 per cent) primary schools had only two teachers.

Such are the consequences of the elitist course of development pursued over the quarter century since the passing away of Jawaharlal Nehru. They are a mockery of the vision entertained by him of a broad-based development that would combine the humane values of socialism with those of free elections, civil liberties and a free press. According to some critics, the distortion of the pattern of development began in Jawaharlal's own time, and he cannot therefore escape his share of blame. Even if that be so, it is always more profitable to remind ourselves of and derive inspiration from the best insights and endeavours of the great dead, than to blame them for shortfalls in their achievement. An analysis of the reasons why Jawaharlal's goal of three-pronged development -- political, economic and social -- has not been realised can help us to correct the course of economic development and to refashion the tools of social engineering.

Disunity of Progressive Forces

The principal reason for the non-realisation of Jawaharlal Nehru's vision, it seems to me, is the disunity of progressive forces. Jawaharlal made repeated efforts after independence to secure the cooperation of the Left parties in building a new India. But sectarian ideology and personal egotism prevented the leaders of the non-Congress Left from responding positively to these overtures. As Jayaprakash Narayan put it while discussing the unsuccessful effort to bring together the socialist groups in pre-independence India, "The basic difficulty in the path of unity was the ridiculous idea held by every miserable little party that it alone was the real marxist party, and that every other party had therefore to be exploited, captured or destroyed."[8]

The first organised Leftist force in India was the Communist Party, formed in 1925 at Kanpur at the same time as the annual conference of the Indian National Congress. Several prominent members of the CPI functioned also in the Congress, and rose to be members of the All India Congress Committee. However, the attitude of the Communists towards the Congress was ambivalent. Unlike the present time when we see many faces of Communism in different countries, and even within a country, they functioned during the inter-war years as part of a world-wide movement directed centrally by the Communist International (Comintern). There were two views, of which one or the other predominated at different times in the Comintern, about the attitude that Indian Communists should adopt towards the national movement led by Gandhi and Nehru. One view was in favour of a united nationalist front with the bourgeoisie for bringing about a democratic revolution. The other view was against class collaboration. This sectarian approach was shared by leaders of the British Communist Party, who influenced the thinking of Indian Communists for several decades before, and for some years after, independence.

Next emerged the Congress Socialist Party. It was formed in 1934 as a group within the Indian National Congress. The annual conferences of the CSP sometimes used to be held alongside those of the parent organisation. In compliance with the sectarian line laid down in 1928 by the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, Indian Communists initially regarded the CSP as 'a Left manoeuvre of the bourgeoisie' and as 'social fascists'. Subsequently the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935 advocated a United Front strategy. Following this the CPI -- which was an illegal organisation at that time -- began to function through the CSP from the time of the Lucknow Congress of 1936. When the Communist tactics of planned infiltration became known, the CSP banned the further admission of Communists and later, at Ramgarh in 1940, decided on their wholesale expulsion. The Royists[9] joined the CSP in 1934 but left in 1937 to form the Radical Democratic Party.

Through all these years there was ideological affinity and personal rapport between Jawaharlal Nehru and the CSP and many of its leaders. Jawaharlal was in prison at the time of the party's formation. The first opportunity to comment on this new development in Indian politics was during a talk with students in London on 4 November 1935 when he was on a visit to Europe for the treatment

of his ailing wife. Jawaharlal said in reply to a question: "I am in general agreement with the Congress socialist group which has adopted scientific socialism with the Marxist outlook as its goal. Of course I cannot say that I whole-heartedly support it because I have not sufficiently acquainted myself with its work...." Soon afterwards, in an article on 'The Indian Situation' for the *Bombay Chronicle* (19 November 1935), he said: "... the formation of the Congress socialist group... seems to represent a working alliance between socialism and nationalism... as I am myself a confirmed believer in a socialistic solution of our problems I welcome the effort to bring this to the forefront in India."

The friendship between the Congress Socialist leaders and Jawaharlal Nehru during the late thirties and the early forties is evident from the correspondence that passed between them. Recounting the hostility of the provincial Congress Ministries towards the Leftists, K.M. Ashraf, a Marxist intellectual, says in a letter of 2 September 1938 from Allahabad, where he was working in the All India Congress Committee office at Swaraj Bhawan: "Practically all the Socialists of the North West Frontier Province have been arrested. The Madras Government has enforced the Criminal Law Amendment Act. The Bihar Government is going on merrily with their Zamindar agreement and the Kisan Movement is coming in for repression.... Nearer at home, in A.I.C.C. office, Muslim contact work and the Political and Economic Department have been formally abolished and I have practically no work to do.... My life is being wasted.

"Under these conditions I have decided to give up the office work in any case as soon as you are back in Allahabad.[10] I am therefore sending my wife and children to the village.... I think I better go away from Allahabad and take to writing books. This will maintain me. I will devote my leisure to Kisan work. We have yet to create a basis for the Socialist wing in the Congress."

Jayaprakash Narayan writes on 7 December 1941 from the Deoli Detention Camp in Rajputana to 'My dear Bhai (brother)': "I cannot but feel extremely happy at your being out when the country needs your guidance most. You must have learnt about Narendra Deva's health.[11] One of his greatest failings is that he cannot take care of himself.... What we call *sankotch* (delicate moral scruple) will prevent him from asking any of his innumerable friends to do anything for him. I am therefore writing to you to take a particular in-

terest in this matter and to pack him off to some suitable place. You must not leave this thing to his option. In this matter you must treat him as one treats a child. You may consult Bapu (Gandhiji) also in this connection as he has been taking a keen interest in Narendra Deva's health."

Jawaharlal writes on 17 April 1946 from New Delhi to 'My dear Rammanohar':[12] "When was it I wrote to you last or met you? It seems long ages ago and I have been wondering how you must look now and how you must feel. After all, the inner changes are more important than external ones.... It was a delight to meet Jayaprakash and to find the same dear and delightful person, so little changed and yet perhaps changed in many ways. We had two brief talks, much too brief, and then he went away.

"Are you still your old self, bright and intelligent and a little erratic and vagrant? Has life hardened you? But these are questions that you cannot answer. And I shall have to meet you to find out. I hope when we meet you will not look at me as if through a shell.

"I was in Assam when your father[13] died and memories of his kindly self came to me. I realised what a grief it must have been to you."

We socialists -- I was with them after 1942 though not formally a member of the CSP -- were opposed to the whole trend of post-war Congress policy. It seemed to us to be a repudiation of the struggle for complete independence that the Congress was ready to compromise with the Muslim League on the one hand and the British authorities on the other, in order to secure a negotiated transfer of power on the basis of Dominion status. Yet Jawaharlal continued to feel warmly friendly towards Jayaprakash Narayan, the tallest among the Congress socialists. An entry on 1 September 1946 in the diary of the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, records a conversation with Jawaharlal: "I said that I noticed that Jayaprakash Narayan had become a member of the Congress Working Committee: did this mean that Jayaprakash Narayan was going to become constitutional or that the Working Committee was going to be revolutionary? Nehru laughed and said: 'Both, I hope.' He then said that Jayaprakash Narayan was a very fine fellow and really not at all inclined to violence."

The Muslim League's call for observance of 16 August 1946 as Direct Action Day for securing Pakistan resulted in large-scale killings in Calcutta. This set off a chain reaction of Hindu-Muslim riot-

ing throughout upper India which induced the majority of the Congress leadership to accept partition as the price for getting the British to quit. But Gandhiji was unreconciled to the partition formula, and so were, among others, Maulana Azad, the Frontier Gandhi and the socialists. Recalling those days, Madhu Limaye, a surviving CSP leader, says that there was a fundamental difference in the attitude of Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai Patel towards the socialists: "There was deep empathy, the touch of loving kindness in Gandhiji which was absent in the Sardar. Vallabhbhai's admiration for the Socialists' sacrifice and courage therefore rapidly turned sour and he fell back on his old supporters. Those who were not conservative enough he dropped unceremoniously. Vallabhbhai had said that Socialists reverenced Gandhiji only as a saintly man and not as a political leader. Within a year it would be proved to the hilt that most of the Gandhian big shots, with the Sardar in the van, had abandoned the master's creed and had opted for big industries, efficient armies and high offices. On the communal issue which had set the country aflame the Sardar and the Mahatma would be poles apart, and Jayaprakash would undertake the work of pacification in Bihar, and Dr. Lohia, Aruna and their friends would function as Gandhiji's lieutenants in his mission of peace in Calcutta at considerable risk to their own lives, such is the irony of history."[14]

On a territorially diminished India attaining freedom, Jawaharlal Nehru as the first Prime Minister strove to secure the co-operation of persons from across the widest possible range of the political spectrum in the building of a united and progressive nation. Though he had earlier been derisive of Liberals who stood aloof from the freedom struggle, once independence was achieved Jawaharlal did not hesitate to seek their co-operation. The governments headed by him were not party outfits confined to Congressmen but, to the extent that others would respond, they were governments of national talent. The successive governments included Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the distinguished educationist prominent in public life; persons with administrative experience like N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar and V.T. Krishnamachari, and subject-matter experts like B.R. Ambedkar, John Matthai, C.D. Deshmukh and T.T. Krishnamachari.

Jawaharlal's non-sectarian approach to nation building is illustrated by a letter he addressed to Chief Ministers of States on 16 August 1948. Referring to the Reserve Bank (Transfer to Public

Ownership) Bill and the Banking Bill, giving the Reserve Bank control and powers over banking companies, he writes: "But more important than any particular legislative measure is the problem of how to deal effectively with the economic situation as a whole. In this matter, we are at present trying to consult important interests and experts. I am glad to inform you that we are consulting even those who are normally completely opposed to Government. We do not wish to proceed in this and other matters on a narrow party basis. Even if we are right in our policy but fail to win over large sections, our rightness will not take us very far. I would commend to you this example of attempting to win the cooperation of others."[15]

Jawaharlal likewise sought the co-operation of the Left. No constructive response was to be expected from the Communists. They had alienated themselves from all nationalists by their People's War policy and opposition to the Quit India struggle. Swinging to the other extreme, they refused, till the early fifties, to acknowledge that India became politically independent in August 1947.

Even the non-Communist Left, unfortunately, chose to be doctrinaire. Congress Socialists were puffed up by their success in the Bombay municipal elections. I remember Jawaharlal telling me that it was not proper for the CSP to have contested the elections as a separate party with its own flag and manifesto. He wanted the socialists to function, as they used to, as a group within the Congress. When objection was raised by some Congress leaders to dual membership, Gandhiji wanted the socialists to stay with the Congress. I expressed to him my fear that we would be used like a doormat. He was unimpressed by my objection, and reiterated his advice. Maulana Azad was also of the view that the socialists should remain in the Congress.

The Congress constitution was amended to prohibit dual membership. We did not realise then that it was a move by conservative forces to isolate and weaken Jawaharlal and the Congress Left by provoking the socialists to leave. When Gandhiji died a martyr's death on 30 January 1948, Jawaharlal lost not only a source of spiritual solace but his most powerful support within the Congress. Had the socialists bowed to the ban on dual membership and wound up the CSP as a distinct political party, they could have strengthened Jawaharlal's hands as against the Rightists. With the senior Congress leaders growing old, the socialists could well have acquired decisive influence in the party in a few years. But they decided at the Nasik

session in February 1948 to leave the parent body, thinking that they could offer an alternative to the Congress.

How we overrated our influence was to be demonstrated soon. Following the decision to leave the Congress, Narendra Deva and twelve other members resigned from the United Provinces Assembly to which they had been elected in 1946 on the Congress ticket. The socialists could not win any of these seats in the bye-elections that followed. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay says: "The socialists often kept out of the mainstream under the illusion of being purists. As active participants in the 1942 revolution, they assumed a certain arrogance and cockiness towards the older workers."[16] I recall with mortification how, in the early years of independence, I was among the critics of Jawaharlal who branded him as a potential Lenin fallen among Kerenskys. We of the Left did not realise that our own holier-than-thou attitude was responsible for his being thus stranded.

The exit of the socialists led to such developments as the election of Purshottamdas Tandon as Congress president in September 1950, defeating J.B. Kripalani whom Jawaharlal preferred. Kripalani left the Congress in May 1951 to form the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party. Feeling suffocated in the company of the conservative old guard, Jawaharlal resigned from the Congress Working Committee in August 1951. Since a Congress High Command without Jawaharlal Nehru was unthinkable for the great majority of Congressmen, Tandon resigned the presidentship. The All India Congress Committee, meeting in Delhi in September 1951, elected Jawaharlal as the new Congress president. He at once invited Acharya Kripalani, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and others, who had broken away to form the K.M.P.P., to return to the Congress. Jawaharlal explained in a letter of 27 September 1951 to Sri Krishna Sinha, Chief Minister of Bihar: "I am trying to build up something big and want every kind of person to help it." Kidwai responded to the invitation and rejoined the Congress, but Kripalani and many others did not.

Another negative consequence of Rightist dominance following the socialists' break with the Congress was that the Hindu Code Bill did not form a plank of the Congress election manifesto for the first general elections held on the basis of universal adult franchise in 1951-52. Conservative congressmen feared that the proposal to reform Hindu law in favour of women and to codify it would cost the party many votes. However, as noticed earlier, Jawaharlal in his own constituency of Allahabad East refused to compromise on the issue.

When the A.I.C.C. met in Calcutta in March 1952, after the Congress had swept the polls both to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies, Jawaharlal Nehru again appealed for the co-operation of progressive forces. He suggested that "new blood" be infused. For this the door should be kept open to people who agreed on the Congress ideals. He invited all, even if they were outside the Congress but believed in its basic principles, to join hands and work for national progress instead of frittering away their energies in strife.

The last great opportunity of forging an alliance of Left and progressive forces was thrown away in 1953. Jayaprakash Narayan, leader of the Praja Socialist Party formed by the merger of the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party and the Socialist Party, laid down rigid preconditions instead of responding positively to Jawaharlal Nehru's invitation to him to join the Government. The Congress party enjoyed at that time an overwhelming majority, of nearly three-fourths of the seats, in the Lok Sabha. Nehru had no special reason for making this generous overture except to hasten the country's progress towards socialism.

Many believe that in inviting Jayaprakash to join the Government, Jawaharlal wanted to indicate that he was worthy to succeed to the office of prime minister. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay recalls: "There were disinterested persons who asked him [Jayaprakash] to accept the invitation and after strengthening his position, to try to get implemented his other demands, but he declined.... So the opportunity was never given a trial. It is very difficult to say what course Indian politics would have taken, had Jayaprakash accepted Nehru's offer then."

S. Gopal says in his biography (Vol. III, p. 302): "Nehru could have achieved more if his hands had been strengthened, or even forced, by left-wing forces in the country; if, instead of licking the wounds which Nehru, to some extent, had helped to inflict they had assisted him in breaking down conservative resistance by promoting the mobilisation of the masses."

The fragmentation of progressive forces continued and worsened after the first general elections. The Praja Socialist Party split in 1955 when Dr. Lohia formed a separate Socialist Party. The two socialist parties contested the 1957 and 1962 elections separately. There was a merger of the two into the Sumyukta (United) Socialist Party on 7 June 1964, only for the two wings to separate again on 31 January 1965 into the old PSP and SSP comprising Lohiaites. The

two socialist parties once again contested the elections separately in 1967 and 1971. There was a fresh merger on 9 August 1971 into a single socialist party. But the unification was not complete. Splinter groups emerged in some States like Kerala, Bihar and West Bengal. Indian socialists were to lose their separate identity early in 1977 when most of them joined the newly formed Janata Party -- an alliance of ideologically disparate elements which succeeded in dislogding the Congress from power at the Centre for the first time, in the elections held early in 1977 at the end of the internal emergency.

The Communist movement too suffered a split, in 1964. The new CPI (Marxist) was inclined towards Marxism as interpreted by the Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung rather than by the Soviet leadership. A quarter century after the split, there is no sign of reunification of the communist parties.

The Congress split of 1969, from which the wing led by Indira Gandhi emerged as decisively stronger, seemed to herald the transformation of India's Grand Old Party into the largest single progressive force. But the Congress (I) lacked the cadres needed to mobilise the people for bringing about an economic and social transformation. The promise of 'Garibi Hatao' (Banish Poverty) evaporated into populist rhetoric since it depended on the charisma of a single individual and on the bureaucratic apparatus.

There has rarely been a joining of hands by such radical elements as there are in the Congress with the non-Congress Left groups to fight, with their combined strength, the forces of economic exploitation and of communal, caste and regional separatism. On the other hand, a number of Rightist parties have emerged and strengthened themselves both at the national and regional levels.

Consequences for Trade Unionism

A major consequence of internecine strife among Leftist parties is the growth of rival trade unions, to the detriment of working class unity and the healthy expansion of unionisation to cover the weakest sections. As many as seven all-India trade union organisations have been represented on the Standing Labour Committee formed by the Central Government as a consultative body: *i)* Indian National Trade Union Congress; *ii)* Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh; *iii)* Hind Mazdoor Sabha; *iv)* United Trade Union Centre; *v)* All India

Trade Union Congress; *vi)* Centre of Indian Trade Unions; and *vii)* National Labour Organisation.

Unionisation remains confined largely to urban centres and to employees of the large-scale sector of modern industries and services. Trade union workers of the different political factions have concentrated their attention on those whom it is easy to approach. There has been a proliferation of unions within the same industry or unit, instead of the movement spreading laterally to cover the rural proletariat and the unorganised areas of economic activity. Unionisation has hardly touched the millions of men and women who work as landless agricultural labourers or in small industrial units or as casual labour and domestic servants in urban centres. Yet it is they who stand most in need of being organised. They are unable to secure in practice the minimum wages prescribed under laws, or the observance of reasonable hours and humane conditions of work. It is also noteworthy that the trade union movement is virtually a men's affair. Trade union activists have made no special effort to understand the problems of women workers and to organise them. No wonder that there are very few women among the leaders of the trade union movement.

While the neediest among the working people remain unorganised, trade union leaders have found new pastures among the increasing number of the educated middle class working in the Central and State government services, banks, airlines and other public sector undertakings; in newspapers and in colleges and universities. The occupants of these islands of decent pay and working conditions in the ocean of mass poverty have been the recipients of benign attention from successive Pay Commissions, Wage Boards and the University Grants Commission. On the other hand, the vast body of working men and women who are truly needy have no hedge against inflation in the form of dearness allowance, nor paid holidays, leave encashment, bonus, gratuity or pension. Equally as in the case of men, this difference marks off from their less fortunate sisters, the educated women of the middle class, working in government offices and institutions.

With the growth of the civil services over the post-independence decades and of public sector corporations, Central and State, whose multiplication provides lucrative offices for politicians of the ruling party, a new breed of influence peddlars has emerged in the trade union movement. To these adventurers and

brokers, trade unionsim is a branch of the politics of power and money. They have hardly a shred of the idealism which impelled the pioneers in the labour field to organise the poor and the exploited.

The trade union movement, with its narrow base in the cities in the organised sector of modern industries and services, has been overtaken by economism, to the detriment of true political consciousness and socialist conscience. P.Ramamurthi, the Marxist leader, remarked sadly in 1975 that there was more trade than unionism in the trade union field. The situation has worsened since then.

Bourgeois Feminism

As with trade unionism, so, by and large, with the women's movement. It is divided on political lines, and is preoccupied mainly with the concerns of the middle and upper classes.

The National Federation of Indian Women was formed in 1954 as a radical alternative to the All India Women's Conference with its moorings in the urban middle class. The Federation was formed by women who were members of, or sympathetic to, the then undivided Communist Party of India. To some extent the Federation did succeed in widening the horizons of the women's movement. As noted by the Committee on the Status of Women, the Federation "aims at raising political and social awareness of women to fight for social justice and a social transformation, which alone can release them from their present restricted position in society. Their constructive programmes include mainly literacy but they have been active in mobilising women's protest against all types of injustice and social evils...The recent protests by women in different parts of the country against rising prices, hoarding, adulteration and corruption were organised as a result of an appeal from the National Federation of Indian Women."[17]

Yet as one who has been intimately and actively connected with the Federation for three and a half decades, I must confess that we have not really been able to strike roots and spread among the neediest sections of women who live in rural India and in the slums of our towns and cities. How I wish I could say that the All India Democratic Women's Association, formed by the CPI (M) after the 1964 split in the Communist movement, has done significantly better.

In addition to the three major all-India organisations, there are numerous local and regional associations of women. Some of them render social service in various fields, or provide legal aid for the vindication of women's rights, or espouse particular causes like ending the dowry system. But most of these women's groups are located in Delhi and other cities. Their coverage of rural India, or of urban slums for that matter, is very limited.

An example of preoccupation of the women's movement with the concerns of the middle and upper classes is the campaign against amniocentesis. It is an expensive medical procedure which enables sex determination and results in some cases in a decision to abort the female foetus. Another instance is the protest against the male chauvinist requirement by some banks that a woman wishing to open an account should give the name of her husband or father. The protest is legitimate, but the majority of Indian women have no bank accounts. Then there is the feminist pedantry of insisting on the terminology of chairperson and spokesperson. It is significant that, with the embourgeoisment of the women's movement, there is no longer opposition to but eager welcome of the policy of reservations in favour of women. The policy was first introduced in pre-independence days by the British rulers, when elections were held on an extremely limited franchise. I recall how Sarojini Naidu would tell us that women should not ask for reservation since it went against the principle of equality of the sexes which we affirmed. Indeed, Sarojini Naidu went to the extent of saying that there would be no need for a separate women's movement if men were broadminded enough and women confident enough to work jointly for overcoming the problems of both.

In a society marked by severe inequalities not only as between men and women but among women themselves, reservations in favour of women -- whether in the legislatures or in admission to educational institutions or recruitment to public services -- can benefit only women of the middle and upper classes. The reservation policy is no answer to the problems of poverty and illiteracy of the generality of Indian women.

Jawaharlal Nehru was basically in favour of an economic rather than caste or ethnic approach to the problem of deprived and exploited social groups. Speaking of the Harijans and the need for their emancipation, he said in the course of his presidential address at the Lucknow Congress on 12 April 1936: "For a socialist it

presents no difficulty, for under socialism there can be no such differentiation or victimisation. Economically speaking, the Harijans have constituted the landless proletariat, and an economic solution removes the social barriers that custom and tradition have raised." But at the time of the framing of the Constitution, Jawaharlal went along with the policy of special provisions for caste and ethnic groups as a transitional measure.

There is continuing poverty and illiteracy on a mass scale among the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes, despite reservations in their favour for four decades. There is, likewise, continuing poverty and illiteracy on a mass scale among the women of India who have not had comparable reservations made in their favour. This would suggest that what is decisive is the attitude and ideology of those who command influence and authority, and not the number of representatives of a social group in an elected assembly.

The primacy of attitude and ideology rather than numbers is illustrated by several instances. The Constituent Assembly convened in 1946 had a total strength of 296 -- excluding 93 representatives of the Princely States who were yet to be selected by consultation. The 296 included 80 persons elected to the reserved Muslim seats. The Muslim League had won 76 of these 80 seats, but boycotted the Constituent Assembly. In the result, only four Muslims -- belonging to the Congress -- attended the inaugural session on 9 December 1946. The virtual non-representation of Muslims did not stand in the way of the Constituent Assembly drawing up a Constitution which guaranteed not only equal political rights and the freedom of religion to all citizens but conferred (whether wisely or not is another question) certain special rights on the religious minorities.

Similarly, there were only 11 women members of the Constituent Assembly as on November 1949 when it completed its work. They were: Ammu Swaminathan, Dakshayani Velayudhan and G. Durgabai (from Madras); Hansa Mehta (Bombay); Renuka Ray (West Bengal); Kamala Chaudhri, Purnima Banerji, Sucheta Kripalani and Aizaz Rasul (United Provinces); Amrit Kaur (Central Provinces and Berar); and Annie Mascarene (Travancore-Cochin). The under-representation of women did not stand in the way of the Constituent Assembly incorporating, in Article 15 dealing with the Fundamental Right of non-discrimination as between citizens, Clause 3 which reads: "Nothing in this Article shall prevent the State

from making any special provision for women and children." This clause was inserted at the instance of B.N. Rau, constitutional adviser, who pointed out in a note on an early version of the present Article 15 that the wording as it then stood might affect adversely the establishment of separate schools, hospitals, etc. for women and children. This reflected the concern of members, irrespective of sex, for the vulnerable sections of society.

During the freedom movement, as noticed in Chapter 7, women leaders were against reservation of seats for their sex in the central and provincial legislatures. They regarded reservation as a badge of weakness and backwardness, which they repudiated. They wanted women to prove their worth as equal competitors with men, and were confident that they would do so. Those were years of anti-imperialist mass mobilisation. Many educated men and women from the middle and upper classes turned their backs on remunerative careers, preferring to work for the public good.

Resistance on the part of the sensitive and self-respecting among women leaders to protective discrimination in the form of reservations, on the pattern of those for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, continued till the early seventies. The Committee on the Status of Women (1971-74) rejected by majority the proposal for statutory reservation of seats for women in legislative bodies. It said: "The women's cause in India has always been championed by all progressive elements, men as well as women. A climate favourable for the betterment of women's status can best be created by their joint efforts.... Women's interests as such cannot be isolated from economic, social and political interests of groups, strata and classes in the society.... Women have been competing as equals with men since 1952. They must continue to do so and stand on their own merits and intensify their political and social life. A departure from this equality will be a retrograde step....Though they have some real problems of their own, they share with men the problems of their groups, locality and community. "[18] The Committee, however, called upon political parties to "adopt a definite policy regarding the percentage of women candidates to be sponsored by them for elections to Parliament and State Assemblies. While they may initially start with 15 per cent, this should be gradually increased so that in time to come the representation of women in the Legislative Bodies has some relationship to their position in the total population of the country or the state."

The limited relevance of the size, as distinct from the quality, of women's representation in legislative bodies is illustrated by the voting behaviour of women members in the eighth Lok Sabha. It had as many as 42 women members -- more than in any earlier House and more than in the present Lok Sabha elected in November 1989. Most of the women members of the eighth Lok Sabha belonged to the Congress Party named after Indira Gandhi. All the women members of the Congress Legislature Party voted in favour of the Muslim Women's Bill even though the legislation was blatantly unjust to women. As noticed earlier, a leading woman member of the Congress (I), Dr. Najma Heptulla, defended the exemption of the husband under Muslim personal law from responsibility for maintaining a divorced and needy wife beyond the period of *iddat*. She endorsed the position taken by the Muslim male chauvinists who denounced the Supreme Court's judgement in the Shah Bano case and who demanded in effect that, in the matter of family laws, the Muslims of India should be a theocratic sub-state within the secular Indian state.

Poverty and Population

Poverty breeds large families, since a pair of hands bring in more than it takes to keep a mouth fed at bare subsistence level. It has been found[19] that the general marital fertility rate in families with a per capita monthly expenditure of Rs.50 and below is as high as 190.8 in a year per thousand married women in the reproductive age group 15-49 in rural areas, and 183.0 in urban areas. In contrast, the rural rate is only 106.9 and the urban rate 87.9 in families with a per capita monthly expenditure of Rs. 101 and above.

Similarly, the general fertility rate among the illiterate is 140.4 rural and 117.2 urban, as against only 111.1 (rural) and 88.9 (urban) among the literate. Illiteracy goes with and perpetuates poverty as well as large family size. An analysis[20] of data on family size and the educational status of mothers showed that: "In the case of mothers who were illiterate or had education below or up to primary school level, the number of children worked out to more than six. This number came down to 5, 4 and 2 respectively for families with mothers having middle school, matriculation or university levels of education."

The Sixth Plan document (p. 373) compared the two States of

Uttar Pradesh and Kerala to bring out the socio-economic factors which influence fertility rates: "The birth rate is still as high as 40.4 per thousand population in Uttar Pradesh while it is 25.2 per thousand population in Kerala which is the lowest for the States in the country. Uttar Pradesh has also the highest death rate of 20.2 per thousand population while Kerala has a death rate of 7 per thousand.... The other important socio-economic factors influencing fertility rates are higher level of literacy and education, more particularly female education, better status enjoyed by women and greater availability of employment opportunities to them."

Since an elitist pattern of development has perpetuated both poverty and illiteracy, the small-family norm has been adopted only by the educated middle and upper classes. There has been an enormous outlay of public funds on the family planning and welfare programme from year to year and Plan to Plan. The expenditure each year since 1978-79 has been upwards of Rs. 100 crores, and stood at Rs. 392.1 crores in 1983-4; Rs. 428.9 crores in 1984-85; Rs. 574.5 crores in 1985-86; and Rs. 623.2 crores in 1986-87. The programme, by bringing primary health centres for the first time to rural areas, has resulted in a welcome reduction in pregnancy-related deaths of women, and in infant mortality. Contraception has enabled many women of the middle and upper classes to escape one out of the multiple enslavements to which a woman is liable, the enslavement by too many children. But the programme has been a failure in terms of population control because it has hardly touched the poor who constitute the majority.

In the seventies, a talking point supplied to government officials engaged in popularising family planning was that India was adding to itself each year an Australia -- whose population was at that time about 13 million. More than a decade -- and several thousand crores of rupees -- later, the parliamentary consultative committee attached to the Ministry of Planning was told by the then Health Minister, Madhavsinh Solanki, on 11 May 1989: "We are adding 17 million persons every year to our population."

The Flesh Trade

Poverty has reduced thousands upon thousands of Indian women to the ultimate degradation of prostitution. Ignorance and

superstition compound the problem in some parts of the country where girls from so-called low-caste homes are dedicated to temples as Devadasis, and become prostitutes in their youth and beggars after they age.

Prominent among women who, during the pre-independence period, mobilised public opinion against the Devadasi system was Muthulakshmi Reddi of Madras. She introduced a Bill in the legislature of the then Madras Presidency for the abolition of the Devadasi system. Muthulakshmi Reddi had the full backing of Gandhiji in her crusade. In a letter of 27 September 1937 expressing her gratitude to him for "your moving appeal in the *Harijan* in support of the Bill for the abolition of the dedication of girls to Hindu temples", she said: "I place the honour of an innocent girl, and saving her from a life of shame and immorality, even above Swaraj...I will value Swaraj in as much as it gives protection to these women by the speedy abolition of unhealthy and pernicious customs...."

Four decades and more after the winning of Swaraj, the Devadasi system continues to prevail -- along with poverty and illiteracy -- in many parts of the country. The persistence in Andhra Pradesh of the system of Jogins (the local name for Devadasis) is brought out vividly in the report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1986-87. Estimating the number of Jogins, who belong to the Scheduled Castes, in the Nizamabad district alone at about 10,000, the report says (pp. 235-6): "These unfortunate young girls are 'married' off to a village god by their parents as a sacrifice to ward off catastrophes like drought or epidemic. They are then sexually exploited by upper caste landlords and rich men of the village.... This system of prostitution is prevalent in large areas of Telengana, which adjoins Karnataka where a similar practice of Devadasis exists. But the system of Jogins is worse than that of Devadasis. Unlike a Devadasi who lives in a temple, a Jogin lives in her *jhuggi* with her parents where the landlords visit her. They take no responsibility for the children begotten of the union and the female children have no option but to become Jogins, thus perpetuating the system. This 'sanctioned prostitution' has been in existence particularly among Malas and Madigas (Scheduled Castes) for a long time, but it attracted the attention of Smt. Asha Murthy, Collector, Nizamabad, in 1985 while touring in some villages. Apparently the civil servants at Nizamabad and elsewhere in the State had earlier been aware of the existence of this atrocious system but

credit goes to this lady officer who took initiative to curb the evil and rehabilitate the unfortunate women and girls by opening a centre for them."

The findings of a survey conducted by the Joint Women's Programme, and made public in October 1986, bring out a linkage between prostitution, unemployment and illiteracy. Of the sample of 11,000 women who were interviewed in 12 States and two Union Territories, 89 per cent were illiterate. Only 11 per cent had some sort of education. Poverty, it was found, was the driving force behind the sale of the girls into prostitution by their own parents or other relatives. A spokesperson of the Joint Women's Programme said: "One can compare the movement of the flesh trade to any other economic commodity." It was found that the highest sale of girls took place in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, followed by Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Delhi and Bombay were the main transit points, the supply line running into the Gulf countries besides meeting domestic demand.

The survey conducted by the Joint Women's Programme also brought out a direct link between increase in the tourist trade and increase in prostitution. It is time to study the social costs of a reckless pursuit of foreign exchange through promotion of tourism. It is bad enough that there has been export of Indian nuns and maidservants to Western Europe, and of brides from needy Muslim families to the oil-rich countries of West Asia. It would be tragic if India should begin to figure in the list of countries which attract 'sex tourism'.

Until the law was amended in 1986, the prostitute was treated as a criminal, rather than a victim, under the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act -- lending itself to the atrocious acronym SITA -- of 1956. The client was not an offender, and rarely was there any punishment of the brothel keeper or the pimp. Though it is well known that prostitutes have to part with a portion of their earnings as bribes to the police, it is the prostitutes, and not the organisers and profiteers of the flesh trade, who are periodically arrested and prosecuted. A researcher who studied the records of the Vigilance Cell in Bombay found that only two out of the 469 brothel keepers arrested between 1980 and 1986 were convicted. Not a single pimp or landlord was arrested under the Act between 1980 and May 1984. On the other hand, many thousands of prostitutes were arrested, and convictions of the women were cent per cent.[21]

The 1956 Act was replaced in 1986 by the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act. Its provisions are more humane. Prostitution is defined as sexual exploitation or abuse of persons for commercial purpose, rather than the one-sidedly moralistic definition in the earlier law as the "act of the female offering her body for wanton sexual intercourse for hire, whether in money or kind." But, like the laws which prohibit the Devadasi system or the offer and acceptance of dowry in marriage, the law against the flesh trade is feeble in its implementation. In an economically unequal and exploitative society, laws intended for relief of the exploited -- whether they prescribe minimum agricultural wages or safe conditions of work in factories or prohibit dowry and the flesh trade -- will get implemented only if the consciousness of the intended beneficiaries is raised and they organise themselves to assert their human dignity and rights.

Prostitution is a form of traffic in human beings, which is expressly prohibited by Article 23 in the Fundamental Rights chapter of the Constitution. The Committee on the Status of Women said in its report in 1974: "Prostitution represents the exploitation of the poor by the rich and of women by men.... What must be emphasised is the growing commercialization in the exploitation of women and girls.... The increasing commercial aspect is represented in the host of intermediaries and allied trades which gather around prostitution. The most important ones are the procurers, pimps, landlords, musical instrument players, intoxicant sellers, panwallas, hotel keepers, flower sellers and the rough elements whose help is sought for protection.... It is essential to prevent the women caught under this Act (Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act) from returning to the profession by adequate rehabilitation arrangements. The persons who pay for their bail are invariably the procurers or brothel keepers. Instead of sending the women and girls to jails, it is necessary to send them to protective homes.... Women and girls, who do not wish to continue in this profession, but are compelled to do so for economic reasons should be rescued and engaged in remunerative work."[22]

Despite these observations and recommendations, the document on the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) made only a passing reference (p. 430) to "immoral traffic in girls and women" as one of the problems of social defence for tackling which the Central government extended financial support to the States. For the draftsmen of the Seventh Plan (1985-90), prostitution is one among a

miscellany of problems allotted to the voluntary sector: "It has been well established that blindness, leprosy, tuberculosis, polio, accidents, drug addiction and prostitution afflict vast numbers of our population.... Voluntary agencies, educational institutions and training centres would be involved and aided to take up various activities for promoting preventive measures."[23]

It is astonishing that there should be such inanity on the part of our planners fifteen years after the observance of 1975 as International Women's Year. Equally, it is strange and sad that the women's movement has not made the liberation of every unwilling prostitute, forced into the profession by family pressure or by her own helplessness because of poverty, a central and insistent demand. We in the women's movement should be goaded into action on behalf of our unfortunate sisters if only by the plight of the children of prostitutes, who are disowned by society and cannot enter good schools even if the mothers want to save them from their own ill fate.

The Liquor Lobby

Weaning the poor from the liquor habit which perpetuates their poverty was an important part of the Constructive Programme which Gandhiji drew up in 1922. This item of the programme read: "To organise the temperance campaign amongst the people addicted to the drink habit by house-to-house visits, and to rely more upon appeal to the drinker in his home than upon picketing."

Foremost among Gandhiji's lieutenants in the cause of prohibition was C.Rajagopalachari, popularly known as Rajaji. He presented incessantly in his writings and speeches, vividly and with pathos, the misery caused by the drink habit to the poor man, his wife and children. When the Congress was in two minds about accepting office in the provinces of British India following the elections held in 1937, Gandhiji supported the formation of popular Ministries on the ground that it would enable the implementation of some items of the Constructive Programme such as promotion of khadi and village industries, and Prohibition. In Madras, Rajaji became the Prime Minister (that was the designation of the heads of governments in the provinces those days, when there was no Prime Minister in Delhi). He implemented Prohibition in several districts, starting with his home district of Salem, and introduced a sales tax to off-

set the loss of excise revenue.

After independence, sales tax has not only stayed but has become a major source of revenue for the States and Union Territories. However, over the years, Prohibition has been virtually scrapped everywhere except in Gandhiji's home State of Gujarat. The consequences for the poor have been wholly adverse. S. Guhan[24] points out: "Liquor revenues of the order Rs. 3000 crores in India (1988-89) suggest that consumption may be of the order of Rs. 12,000 to Rs. 15,000 crores, assuming a general tax incidence of 20 to 25 per cent. This is as high as five per cent of the national income. Some studies indicate that liquor accounts for a particularly high proportion in the consumption of manual labourers and, among them those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Besides the other deprivations it involves, drink particularly affects the welfare of women and children." Wife beating under the influence of liquor has long been a curse of many homes, specially among the labouring classes.

Article 47 of the Constitution, in the chapter on Directive Principles of State Policy, calls for the "prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health." This directive has been disregarded by the Central and State governments. Referring to the opening of more and more sales outlets for country liquor as well as different varieties of what is quaintly termed as Indian-Made Foreign Liquor, V.R. Krishna Iyer, a retired judge of the Supreme Court, has justly remarked: "Godse was the physical assassin of Gandhiji but the State is the moral assassin of the Mahatma if it indulges in the business of corrupting the working class and the youth by persuading the citizenry to consume alcohol for the sake of making contaminated revenue."[25]

The liquor lobby has emerged as a powerful factor influencing political parties and governments. Not the Congress which keeps invoking the name of Gandhiji, but the Christian church in Mizoram took a stand against the growing drink habit in that State at the time of the elections held in January 1989. "The church, whose support had once ensured that Laldenga's insurgency was kept alive, came out against him. Concerned about the influence of alcohol on the younger generation, it wanted the government to shut down all liquor shops. But Laldenga (then Chief Minister) refused to clamp down on the lucrative Rs. 12 crore a year liquor trade."[26] In

Mizoram, as in other areas inhabited by tribal people, the use of home-brewn fermented beverages of low alcoholic content has been part of the traditional way of life. What is deplorable is the marketing of bottled liquor of high potency, introduced by contractors and traders with the advent of modern administration, and modern commerce, in tribal areas.

As we saw in Chapter 5, there was a time when women in large numbers picketed liquor shops as part of the Constructive Programme with which Gandhiji kept volunteers in the national cause busy in the service of the people, in the intervals between the rounds of political struggle for independence. That this has become a historical memory is a measure of the widening gap between those among the educated who are active in the women's movement, and the daily problems -- which in many cases include the husband's addiction to liquor -- of ordinary women who labour in the fields or, in urban centres, work as factory hands or domestic servants.

Media: Women as Sex Objects

A recent addition to the laws designed to protect the dignity of women is the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986.

Censorship is a ticklish area, since it is difficult to draw the line between art and pornography. Insistence on good taste is one thing, and puritanism another. Moreover, norms in sculpture and painting, advertising and poster art vary with time and place, even as the norms of dress and deportment vary in real life from one country or social group to another. The Committee on the Status of Women referred to a report of the Press Council of India which said, while discussing a complaint of the exploitation of sex in a soap advertisement, that the woman in the picture "was not less modestly dressed than several modern women one might see in the street, at parties and at shopping centres."[27]

Nevertheless, there is an obvious difference between the depiction of the human form in our temple sculpture or in the Ajanta murals or by modern artists, on the one hand, and the exploitation of the semi-nude feminine figure in many commercial feature films with their cabaret and rape sequences, or in advertisements promoting the sale of clothing or cosmetics or beverages.

When the Committee on the Status of Women gave its report in 1974, television in India was, as noted by the Committee in the chapter on the role and influence of the mass media, at a 'pioneering stage'. Since then the medium has grown by leaps and bounds. Though it is State-owned and run by the government, Doordarshan has become a purveyor of meretricious cinema entertainment. A decade after the Committee on the Status of Women, the Working Group on Software for Doordarshan said in its report (1984) that many films "are made to a formula of sentimentality, melodrama, violence and sex. They are an assault on aesthetic sensibility, and have a vulgarising and brutalising effect on viewers. It is a surprise that such films should get past the censors, and a greater surprise that Doordarshan should choose to screen them.

"Even worse than the third-rate feature films screened in full are the compilation from such films, many of which are a concentrated offering of love duets accompanied by obscene gestures and scenes of imbecile hero chasing imbecile heroine round bushes or down a city street, teasing and harassing and finally winning her....

"Unlike a pornographic book or journal read in privacy by an individual, or a lewd or sadistic film viewed by a person in the anonymity of the crowd in a darkened cinema hall, a film screened on television is often watched by three generations of a family. To watch these lewd scenes in a family group is highly embarrassing.

"It is unfortunate that most of the feature films and song-and-dance sequences telecast by Doordarshan reduce to repulsive public exhibition so private and precious an experience as the man-woman relationship. The objection is to vulgarity, and not to so-called permissiveness -- which has always existed in every society and entails relationships not sanctioned by a society's mores, specially the mores of the middle class which tends to be more prudish and hypocritical compared to working people or the very rich."[28]

Another offender among the media is a section of the press. The Second Press Commission observed in its report (1982): "There has been an increasing tendency to exploit sex appeal.... The exploitation of the female form in commercial advertising promotes the notion of women as sex objects and runs contrary to the news items and articles which many newspapers carry in support of treating women as equals, and respecting their personality as individuals endowed with as much human worth as males. It is a pity that all the rhetoric in the country during and since the observance of 1975 as

International Women's Year has had so little effect on advertisers and advertising agencies, and for that matter, on editors and publishers."[29]

I must admit with deep regret that among the offending newspapers in recent years used to be *Patriot*, with which I have been associated ever since it was founded in 1963 with the objective of defending Jawaharlal Nehru and propagating the values he stood for. Readers rightly objected to the vulgarity and lasciviousness of many of the cinema advertisements carried by the newspaper. One of them said in a Letter to the Editor: "There are blocks being published for films, especially English films and some of the Hindi films, and they are so vulgar that it has practically become impossible to keep *Partriot* at home... Some of the captions used along with such ads on sex movies are so vulgar that it shames even the most modern persons, what to say of the conservatives...Please look into the matter and see that such vulgar blocks should not be allowed to be published in your paper."[30]

My fellow directors of the United India Periodicals (P) Ltd. would tell me that the newspaper, which incurs losses year after year and runs on begged and borrowed money, could not afford to forgo the revenue from these 'yellow' pages. Here was a problem of ends and means. Should the continued publication of *Patriot* be an end in itself, rather than promotion of the values symbolised by Jawaharlal Nehru?

As far back as in the mid-thirties Jawaharlal wrote in his autobiography (p. 405): "I am told most of the Indian films, both silent and talkies, do not err on the side of artistry... I suppose they supply what is most appreciated by the city people." Subsequently, addressing the All India Newspaper Editors' Conference at Allahabad on 16 February 1946, he said: "The quality of advertisements appearing in some newspapers sometimes pains me. I appeal to the editors that they should exercise a stricter censorship over advertisements so that undesirable advertisements are not accepted. Personally I hope that when there is a popular government it will come down with a heavy hand on such advertisements and prohibit them without giving the press any choice in the matter."

I felt greatly relieved when, on receipt early in 1990 of a notice threatening action under the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, the cinema pages of *Patriot* became less lurid and vulgar.

There has lately been much debate on autonomy for the electronic media, specially Doordarshan, in the context of removing partisan bias in the presentation of news and current affairs programmes. Unfortunately little attention has been paid to other programmes. An autonomous Doordarshan will not be much of an improvement if it continues to promote consumerist gluttony through commercial advertisements many of which employ sex appeal to urge the purchase of this domestic gadget or that luxury cosmetic, and to purvey vulgar feature films and song-and-dance sequences. Beyond autonomy, which is desirable, it is necessary to redefine the role of television. It can be a potent instrument of adult literacy and social education if it is made accessible and relevant to the illiterate and the disprivileged. Unfortunately, the larger role of television has hardly figured in the discussion in parliament and the Press on autonomy for Doordarshan.

NOTES

1 *Women in India: A Statistical Profile 1988* (p. 173) (New Delhi: Department of Women and Child Development).
2 Of the 216 women contestants, for a total of about 3,000 seats, 82 were elected to the State Assemblies in the general elections of 1952.
3 Article in *Indira Gandhi*, commemorative volume published by the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust (New Delhi, 1985), p. 413.
4 D.K . Chauhan in a Letter to the Editor, *Indian Express* (Delhi), 8 May 1989.
5 *Women in India: A Statistical Profile 1988*, pp. 324-5, 338.
6 *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 89, p. 125.
7 Interview published in *Patriot* (Delhi), 24 January 1989.
8 Jayaprakash Narayan, *Socialist Unity and Congress Socialist Party* (Karachi: Sind Socialist Group, 1940).
9 Followers of M.N. Roy (1891-1954), who was at one time a member of the Politburo of the Comintern.
10 Jawaharlal Nehru was at that time in Europe.
11 Scholar, patriot and radical, Narendra Deva (1889-1956) was a theoretician of the Congress Socialist Party.
12 Dr. Rammanohar Lohia (1910-67) who was soon to turn a bitter critic of Jawaharlal Nehru.
13 Hiralalji, a nationalist and Gandhian.
14 Article on 'Sardar Patel and the Socialists' in *Sunday* (Calcutta), in a series later brought out in book form under the title *Prime Movers: Role of the Individual in History*.
15 *Letters to Chief Ministers*, Vol. I, p. 177.
16 Oral History transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
17 *Towards Equality*, p. 300.
18 *Ibid.*, pp. 303-4.
19 *Family Welfare Year Book 1986-87*, pp. 100-1.

20 National Institute of Nutrition, *Nutrition News*, March 1988 (Hyderabad).
21 Jean D'Cunha in an article in *Indian Express* (Delhi), 5 October 1986.
22 *Towards Equality*, pp. 94-96.
23 *Seventh Five Year Plan*, Vol. II, p. 328.
24 Senior Fellow, Madras Institute of Development Studies, in a paper presented at the National Seminar on Poverty Alleviation, New Delhi, December 1988.
25 Article in *Indian Express* (Delhi), 26 January 1985.
26 *India Today*, 15 February 1989 (p. 33).
27 *Towards Equality*, p. 349.
28 *An Indian Personality for Television* (New Delhi: Publications Division), pp. 159-60.
29 *Report of the Second Press Commission*, Vol. I (p. 22).
30 *Patriot*, Delhi, 6 October 1987.

12 Renewing the Gandhi-Nehru Legacy

The experience of India since independence confirms and illustrates a lesson of the history of political democracies the world over. It is that adult suffrage is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the economic and social liberation of the common people.

Emancipation of disadvantaged groups requires united action by those who stand for all-round development of the physical, mental, aesthetic and ethical potentiality of all citizens, women as well as men. Development thus understood calls for raising the consciousness of the masses and organizing them so that they secure in practice the rights which are formally theirs under the constitution, laws and governmental programmes. Without such consciousness-raising and organisation, the economically deprived and exploited tend to give their votes to demagogues rather than to true representatives of their interests. The privilege of casting a vote once in five years, or even oftener, brings them only crumbs of bread barely enough to keep them alive.

A Balance Sheet of Development

There are two indubitable achievements over the post-independence decades, despite the increasingly elitist bias of the pattern of development. One is the increase in the average expectation of life at birth of Indians, both men and women, with a gradual narrowing and recent elimination of the gap between the expectation of life of the two sexes.

This welcome change owes to two factors. One is the ending of mass deaths in periodic famines. This has been achieved through increased food production, and import of food whenever and to the extent necessary. The other factor is a considerable expansion of public

health services. Communicable diseases like malaria, plague, tuberculosis and smallpox which used to claim millions of lives each year have been either eradicated or controlled. The poor have also benefitted from these national health programmes since there can be no selective protection of the well-to-do against communicable diseases. Moreover, there has been a significant decrease in pregnancy-related deaths and in infant mortality. This is because of the provision of primary health care on an increasing scale in rural areas as part of the family planning programme. The cumulative effect has been to raise the expectation of life at birth (combined figure for both men and women) from 32.1 years in the decade 1941-51 to 54.4 in 1980. From the 1931 Census till 1971 men used to have a higher expectation of life (26.91 years in 1931 and 46.40 in 1971) than women (26.56 years in 1931 and 44.70 in 1971). But by 1980 the position was reversed. The anticipated average longevity of male children born that year was 54.10 years and of female children 54.70 years.

The right to live is precious, and these statistical indicators are heartening. But the duration of living is one thing, and the quality of life another. The majority of the people live in want, and are without education. Disparities in the standard of living are as sharp and visible now as at the time of independence. The disparities are most glaring as between the urban privileged, whether men or women, and the rural dispossessed of both sexes.

When Gandhiji was asked to address the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in 1947, he told the participants bluntly: "You, friends, have not seen the real India and you are not meeting in conference in the midst of real India."[1] Since then New Delhi has acquired more glitter. The domestic lounges of its airport burst at the seams with expense-account air travellers. There has been a proliferation of multistar hotels built in the name of earning foreign exchange from tourism, which in fact earn the greater part of their revenue in rupees from the new rich. Thanks to the neglect of public transport, the roads in Delhi and other large cities are clogged up with cars, scooters and other privately owned or hired motorised vehicles. Running on petrol refined from imported crude oil paid for with borrowed foreign exchange, they pollute the atmosphere and cause an increasing number of road accidents claiming human lives and limbs. Even individuals like myself, who work for social causes, are compelled to use personal vehicles because decent public

transport is not available. Those who have no other option suffer bestial crowding in Delhi's buses, with women often having to suffer indecent harassment. Alongside upper-crust urban development, there has been a vast increase in the number and population of slums in the cities. The village poor, seeking escape from unemployment and hunger, gravitate to the metropolises where they live in squalor.

China, which is the only country more populous than India, is better off in terms of per capita GNP as well as adult literacy, both among men and women. An inegalitarian pattern of development has thus marked India with the stigma of entering the last decade of the 20th century with the largest numbers of the destitute and the illiterate. Is it any wonder that the common people fall prey from time to time to incitement and are gripped by hatred and fear in the name of religion or caste?

Turning from Vote Brokers to the Masses

This assessment of the pluses and minuses of post-independence development might seem harsh. But even more caustic was the summing up by Rajiv Gandhi, who was at that time Prime Minister, speaking in his dual capacity as Congress president at the centenary session in Bombay on 28 December 1985.[2]

After surveying the depressing scenario of what he described as tax-evading industrialists, trade unions which have ceased to be socially relevant, an education system in which teachers seldom teach and students seldom learn, and civil services and police that shield the guilty and oppress the poor, Rajiv Gandhi said: "We have looked at others. Now let us look at ourselves. What has become of our great organisation? Instead of a party that fired the imagination of the masses throughout the length and breadth of India, we have shrunk, losing touch with the toiling millions.... Thereby, we have weakened ourselves and fallen prey to the ills that the loss of invigorating mass contact brings.

"Millions of ordinary Congress workers throughout the country are full of enthusiasm for the Congress policies and programmes. But they are handicapped, for on their backs ride the brokers of power and influence, who dispense patronage to convert a mass movement into a feudal oligarchy. They are self-perpetuating cliques

who thrive by invoking the slogans of caste and religion and by enmeshing the living body of the Congress in their net of avarice.... Corruption is not only tolerated but even regarded as the hallmark of leadership. Flagrant contradiction between what we say and what we do has become our way of life.... At every stage, our private self crushes our social commitment.... The revitalisation of our organisation is a historical necessity."

It is not only the Congress party that needs revitalisation. Over the decades since independence, Congress dominance has yielded place to governance of many States by a variety of political parties, ideology-based and regional. And at the Centre there has been an alternation of Congress hegemony and of rule by a combination of non-Congress forces. Most of these non-Congress parties, too, have tended to rely for the winning of elections on influential vote brokers among castes, religious communities and ethnic groups, rather than on continuous work for and among the common people. These political parties need, as much as the Congress does, if the nation is to develop on right lines, to turn away from power brokers and to derive strength from the masses by serving them.

Need for Cadres

Gandhiji always attached less importance to the role of legislators and Ministers than of consciousness-raising constructive workers -- or cadres, in the vocabulary of the Leftist parties. He deeply distrusted political power because of its tendency to corrupt. After watching the performance of Congress legislators and Ministers in the provinces under the scheme of provincial autonomy, he wrote on 3 September 1938: "It looks as if Congressmen are not able to digest the power that has come to the Congress. Everyone wants to have a share in the spoils of office.... This is not the way to win Swaraj...." The Congress Ministries resigned in 1939 in protest against India being dragged into Britain's war, but resumed office in 1946. Soon afterwards Gandhiji said: "... a man who wants to be good and do good in all circumstances must not hold power." Asked whether, then, government should come to a standstill, he replied: "No. He (the man of non-violence) can send those to the Government who represent his will. If he goes there himself, he exposes himself to the corrupting influence of power. But my representative

holds power of attorney only during my pleasure. If he falls a prey to temptation, he can be recalled. I cannot recall myself.... There are about half a dozen constructive work organisations. I do not send them to the Parliament. I want them to keep the Parliament under check by educating and guiding the voters."[3]

In the autobiography, written in the mid-thirties, Jawaharlal Nehru rightly diagnosed the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh wrangles as a reflection of the fact that "the middle class job-seekers in each group are afraid of being ousted by the other group." He optimistically expected that the final solution would come "by a diversion of interest to social and economic issues." But such a diversion of interest from the vertical divides of religion and caste, to the material problems faced in common by the masses, required an army of consciousness-raising cadres.

During the struggle for independence the Congress paid insufficient attention to the raising of a corps of dedicated volunteers who would be willing to forgo lucrative careers and to work for the cause of national regeneration on a modest allowance. Jawaharlal Nehru recalls in his autobiography a suggestion made in 1924 that the Congress general secretaries should be paid: "I happened to be one of the secretaries then, and I welcomed the proposal. It seemed to me quite wrong to expect whole-time work from any one without paying him a maintenance allowance at least. Otherwise some person with private means has to be chosen, and such gentlemen of leisure are not perhaps always politically desirable, nor can they be held responsible for the work... But there is in India an extraordinary and thoroughly unjustified prejudice against receiving salaries from public funds (though not from the State), and my father strongly objected to my doing so."

Spontaneous and widespread nationalist fervour made up, during the freedom struggle, for the absence of organised cadres. On the other hand, after independence the absence of cadres for working among the masses has been among the major reasons for the failure to realise the Gandhi-Nehru vision of broad-based human development.

Gandhiji prepared on 29 January 1948, and revised the following morning -- the day of his martyrdom -- the draft of a new constitution for the Congress. It envisaged the disbandment of the Congress as a propaganda vehicle and parliamentary machine, and the setting up in its place of a Lok Sevak Sangh (Association of Servants of the

People). It was not as if Gandhiji had no use for the political process of democracy. He wanted the Sangh's volunteers to check the voters' roll and encourage people to acquire the legal qualifications for the right of franchise. (This was before the coming into force in 1950 of the post-independence Constitution which conferred universal adult suffrage). The Sevaks were to promote "equal respect and regard for all religions and equality of opportunity and status for all, irrespective of race, creed or sex." On the question of funds for the Lok Sevak Sangh, Gandhiji's draft said: "The Sangh shall raise finance for the fulfilment of its mission from among the villagers and others, special stress being laid on collection of the poor man's pice."[4]

It was not to be expected that the advice would be heeded by the Congress leaders who had already, in August 1946, entered the Viceroy's Executive Council and were, by January 1948, in full control of the government. But even while continuing as a political party, the Congress could have raised a corps of Lok Sevak volunteers. They could have been trained to act both as an aid to the implementation of the government's programmes, and as a corrective through candid feedback about the people's felt needs and their reactions. At a meeting of the All India Congress Committee at Calcutta in March 1952, Lal Bahadur Shastri, then general secretary, moved a resolution which envisaged the formation of a cadre of national whole-time workers who would be trained in Congress policies and programmes. But little came out of this initiative.

Not only did the Congress not raise a corps of volunteers for work among the masses, it lost such cadres as it had when, early in 1948, the Congress Socialists broke away from the parent body. I recall how Jawaharlal Nehru, thrown on the resource of only the bureaucracy for programme implementation, used to address successive batches of recruits, young men and women, to the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Foreign Service. He tried to imbue them with something of his own burning zeal for building a new India that would play its part in a brave new world of independent nations living in peace and co-operation. Unfortunately, the post-independence generations of the well-to-do and educated, from whom most of our civil servants as well as public leaders are drawn, have by and large opted for the softer of the two choices open to the two-faced middle class about which Jawaharlal spoke at the Lucknow Congress in 1936. The dominant impulse of educated persons of the middle class, he had said, was to do well and to climb up in the

established order but there was also the other impulse of idealism, which impels some to transcend self-interest and to work for the betterment of the deprived and exploited.

No great undertaking in history, whether religious or secular, has succeeded without a large band of committed volunteers who opt for social work as a cause rather than a career. The cadres of Buddhism, as of Christianity later, were their monks, nuns and lay missionaries. In the twentieth century, the Communist revolution in Russia and China was sustained in its early years, before bureaucratisation and corruption set in, by cadres who devoted themselves to the political education and mobilisation of workers and peasants.

The economic and social transformation that we seek in India, through the democratic process, calls no less for dedicated cadres. To bridge the gap between social reform legislation and social reality, and for effective implementation of programmes to assist the economically deprived, there is need for social activists, men and women, in every village and urban locality. When the political consciousness of the common people is raised, it will no longer be possible for political parties to draw on vote banks through the traditional leaders -- most of them conservative and male chauvinist -- of religious, caste and ethnic groups.

Where, it may be asked, will the desired cadres come from? Each year, among the tens of thousands of young men and women who complete their education, there are hundreds who would like to apply their energy and talent to the betterment of society. If they find no outlet for constructive expression of their social concern, some of them turn to the barren path of violence, Naxalite or other. Others get sucked into the rat race of careerism, in public or private employment. Their social concern soon evaporates and they begin to look back on their early enthusiasm with a mixture of guilt and of cynicism. There is need, therefore, for fostering organisations that will enable, by providing an appropriate living allowance, educated and socially concerned young persons to apply themselves to nation building and consciousness-raising work among the local communities to which they belong.

Encouragement of the voluntary sector should not be left entirely to the Central and State Social Welfare Boards. They tend to function like government departments, with bureaucratic rigidity and last-minute release of funds towards the end of a financial year. Corporate undertakings in the public and private sectors should extend

liberal financial support to non-official nation building activity. Well-to-do individuals with a social conscience constitute the other great reservoir of financial support that can be drawn on. I can testify from my experience of organising adult literacy among women, and health care for urban communities in depressed localities as part of the work of the Dr. A.V. Baliga Foundation, that many among the well-to-do are willing to loosen their purse-strings in aid of good causes if they feel confident that the money will be wisely and honestly spent.

The work of voluntary organisations of integrity is vastly more cost-effective than that of bureaucratically run welfare departments. Examples range from Sanajit Roy's Social Work and Research Centre at Tilonia in Rajasthan and the Hoshangabad experiment in rural health and education conducted in Madhya Pradesh by Dr. Anil Sadgopal and his colleagues, to the community health project initiated by Dr. R.S. Arole at Jamkhed in the Ahmadnagar district of Maharashtra and, in the same district, the impressive demonstration at Raleganslddhi by Anna Hazare, a simple ex-serviceman, of the possibility of rural regeneration through people's self-help. Moreover, voluntary workers, unlike civil servants in the welfare departments of the government, raise the level of social consciousness among the people besides promoting welfare. This is known to potential donors, who would like to help with money even if they cannot give their own time to social causes.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Volunteers drawn from the local community, who share its culture and ethos, are essential for effective communication with the people in their own language. The language of the common people of India is shot through and through with the images and metaphor of the religions of India and the scriptures and epics associated with them. Even modern concepts like democracy, secularism and socialism are best propagated among the masses by employing analogies and anecdotes drawn from tradition and folklore. I recall a remark made by Kailash Nath Katju, a veteran of the freedom struggle who later served as Union Home Minister, that the Communists would succeed in India only when they interpreted Marxism in terms of the *Gita*. The same thought was expressed by the well-

known Leftist novelist, Krishan Chander. He wrote that if and when *kranti* or revolution comes to India, she will come wearing *kum kum*, the auspicious mark in red worn on the forehead by Indian women.

Jawaharlal Nehru was repelled by the claims of divine status and infallibility made on behalf of the scriptures, but acknowledged their great value if approached and interpreted sensibly. "I have always hesitated to read books of religion", he says in *The Discovery of India* (pp. 79-81). "The totalitarian claims made on their behalf did not appeal to me.... I could not approach these books, or any book, as Holy Writ which must be accepted in their totality without challenge or demur.... I was much more friendly and open to them when I could consider them as having been written by human beings, very wise and far-seeing, but nevertheless ordinary mortals, and not incarnations or mouthpieces of a divinity, about whom I had no knowledge or surety whatever.... Looking at scripture then as a product of the human mind, we have to remember the age in which it was written, the environment and mental climate in which it grew, the vast distance in time and thought and experience that separates it from us. We have to forget the trappings of ritual and religious usage in which it is wrapped, and remember the social background in which it expanded. Many of the problems of human life have a permanence and a touch of eternity about them, and hence the abiding interest in these ancient books. But they dealt with other problems also, limited to their particular age, which have no living interest for us now."

In contrast to this guarded and self-consciously rationalist approach, Mahatma Gandhi's attitude to and use of the scriptures was positive and radical. He cheerfully accepted tradition, and went on equally cheerfully to interpret and reform it, often beyond recognition. Thus Gandhiji endorsed the ideal of Sati, but gave it his own creative interpretation: "Self-immolation at the death of the husband is not a sign of enlightenment but of gross ignorance as to the nature of the soul.... She (the ideal wife) would prove her satihood not by mounting the funeral pyre at her husband's death but she would prove it with every breath that she breathes from the moment that she plighted her troth to him at the *saptapadi* ceremony, by her renunciation, sacrifice, self-abnegation and dedication to the service of her husband, his family and the country. She would... by completely identifying herself with her husband, learn to identify herself

with the whole world.

"Such a sati would refuse to give way to wild grief at the death of her husband but would ever strive to make her late husband's ideals and virtues live again in her actions and thereby win for him the crown of immortality.... Satihood is the acme of purity. This purity cannot be attained or realised by dying. It can be attained only through constant striving, constant immolation of the spirit from day to day."

This was a typical instance of Gandhiji accepting a traditional scheme of values and exercising the liberty of interpretation so as to give them a deeper and humanist meaning. We must note how he extends the true Sati's loyalties so that they proceed, in concentric circles, from service of the husband and his family to service of India and of the whole world.

Gandhi's rootedness in tradition even while striving to purify it by removing the dross was in accordance with his philosophy of Swadeshi. He said in 1916: "Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is the use of my immediate religious surroundings. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects."[5] This is what he tirelessly worked for till his last breath.

Gandhiji's philosophy of Swadeshi was close to the view of Rabindranath Tagore who was, like Jawaharlal Nehru, an articulate internationalist. Tagore said in the course of a comment on technology and culture: "What is merely modern -- as science, and methods of organisation -- can be transplanted; but what is vitally human has fibres so delicate and roots so numerous and far-reaching that it dies when moved from the soil."[6]

As in the case of Sati, so of Pativrata (a chaste wife devoted to her husband), Gandhiji accepted the traditional concept and enriched it through his interpretation. The ideal of Pativrata, he said, would imply refraining from remarriage after widowhood, even as the counterpart concept of Ekapatnivrata (devotion to a single wife) would require that the husband should not remarry after the death of his wife. Condemning the custom that allows old widowers to remarry but prohibits the remarriage of even girl widows, "who are really like unmarried maidens", Gandhiji wrote in *Young India* of 5 August 1926: "Voluntary widowhood (refraining from marrying

again), consciously adopted by a woman who has felt the affection of a partner adds grace and dignity to life, sanctifies the home and uplifts religion itself. Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke and defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion."

Gandhiji brought the same approach of radical re-interpretation to bear on the traditional social institution of caste. He accepted the concept of Varnashrama: adherence to the ancestral caste (Varna) occupation for the purpose of earning one's livelihood, and the four stages (Ashramas) in the cycle of life -- Brahmacharya or studentship during which a person should remain celibate; Grihastha or the state of the householder, whose pursuit of wealth and pleasure is governed by Dharma; Vanaprastha or retirement to a forest to lead a life of calm reflection; and Sanyasa, the renunciation of worldly interests. But Gandhiji rejected the notion of high and low among the castes, crusaded against untouchability, and affirmed the right of members of all castes to learning instead of its being a monopoly of Brahmins. He wrote in *Harijan* of 12 October 1934: "If we must talk in terms of Varna, there is only one Varna today for all, whether men or women; we are all Shudras." In other words, we must all serve.

Mahatma Gandhi not only re-interpreted scripture but rejected those portions of it which violated humanist norms. "The saying attributed to Manu", he wrote in *Harijan* of 12 October 1934, "that 'For woman there can be no freedom' is not to me sacrosanct. It only shows that probably, at the time when it was promulgated, women were kept in a state of subjection."

On one occasion Gandhiji made the radical suggestion that the scriptures should be re-examined from the standpoint of humanism, and that anti-humanist injunctions should be expurgated. He wrote in *Harijan* of 28 November 1936: "... all that is printed in the name of scriptures need not be taken as the word of God or the inspired word. But everyone can't decide what is good and authentic and what is bad and interpolated. There should therefore be some authoritative body that would revise all that passes under the name of scriptures, expurgate all the texts that have no moral value or are contrary to the fundamentals of religion and morality, and present such an edition for the guidance of Hindus."

Though Gandhiji confined his proposal for a critical examination

and pruning of the scriptures to the Hindu religion, the need has been felt for a humanist interpretation of the books of other religions too. Thus, Muslim feminists have sought support in the Quran for their affirmation of equality of the sexes, as against those features of the Shariat, as generally understood, that are less than just to women. At a women's conference[7] in Islamabad in November 1980, delegates said that many scholars had wrongly interpreted Quranic verses to favour men unduly. They sought a re-interpretation of passages dealing with the role, status and rights of women. They expressed concern at reports that a 1961 law, enacted during the Ayub regime and putting a check on indiscriminate polygamy, might be repealed since the Ministry of Law and Religious Affairs held it to be un-Islamic. The Family Laws Ordinance of 1961 required a man to get permission from the authorities before taking a second wife, although Islam permits four wives. It also required compulsory registration of marriage, prescribed a minimum age of marriage, upheld a wife's right to maintenance, and allowed a woman to seek divorce if the husband took another wife in contravention of the provisions of law.

Begum Rais Ahmed, a senior civil servant of Pakistan who attended an international conference in New Delhi in April 1985 on the Role of Women in Development, said in the course of a newspaper interview[8] that the struggle in Pakistan was not so much between men and women as between the progressives and obscurantists. Referring to the controversial law of evidence which equates the worth of two women with one man, she said: "They (the obscurantists) say it is there in the Quran. That is not true. This discrimination has been derived from a certain interpretation of the Quran." Begum Rais Ahmed made a remark which underscores the need for cadres to work among the masses. Asked how women could be awakened, she replied: "If only we had less of the privileged class who go to seminars, and more who volunteer for grassroots work, half the battle will have been won."

Ms. Haleh Afsher, an Iranian feminist who teaches at the Bradford University in England, said in the course of a discussion on 'Women and Fundamentalism' in New Delhi on 13 February 1986 that the Quran is the best weapon with which to fight the oppression of men. According to her, a feminist interpretation of the religious text would attract more women than western concepts of law and secularism. "The trouble is", she said, "that Islam has been hijacked

by men."

The same is the case with Christianity. Contributors to a volume on 'The Emerging Christian Woman'[9] point out that the official theology of the Catholic church cannot be objective because it is dominated by the perspective of male priests required to be celibate, in a church where the overwhelming majority are married, with women constituting about 50 per cent. Hence the protest in the form of feminist theology. The writers develop their thesis with the message of Jesus, based on justice and love, as the central criterion.

It is not only with regard to women's status that Christian scripture needs humanist interpretation. Two examples might be cited of other questions that need to be considered. In the New Testament, Luke 11.23 says: "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." On the other hand, Mark 9.40 says: "He that is not against us is on our part." Is the fundamentalist or fanatical position suggested in the gospel according to St. Luke in the spirit of Christ's teaching, or the liberal and tolerant position suggested in Mark?

Again, how does the injunction of Jesus, "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor" (Luke, 18.22) square with the Matthew principle (25.29), "Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath"?

In the spirit of Gandhiji's plea for a humane interpretation of the scriptures, Rajnath Sonkar Shastri, a member belonging to the Lok Dal, introduced in the Lok Sabha a non-official Bill on 24 February 1984 "to provide for a review of Hindu scriptures and other religious literature and for that purpose establish a Commission... with a view to identify and omit or amend such words, sentences, paragraphs, stanzas, chapters, etc., from the scriptures and other religious literature which tend to encourage or propagate hatred, discrimination, inequality, or untouchability among citizens on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, vocation or place of birth...."

The motion for consideration of this non-official Bill was finally withdrawn by the mover on 23 March 1984, after it had served the purpose of provoking debate on a subject of vital importance.

Among the points made during the debate were:

Rajnath Sonkar Shastri: Whatever is happening to the lower castes, despite the Constitution, is because of the derogatory

remarks about the Sudras in the Manu Smriti, Gautam Sutra, etc. If such things are present in scriptures of other religions, those also should be removed. The religion of humanity should be established.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Our Constitution is the latest Smriti and we abide by it and by no other Smriti.

Harish Kumar Gangwar: If the portions of religious literature that deal with caste are not deleted, then we will not be able to achieve what our Constitution says. As long as such things are there, priests and Brahmins will continue to take advantage.

Harish Rawat: Whatever has been written is according to the conditions in the particular period in which the particular scripture was written. We should disregard the bad points.

Abdul Rashid Kabuli: I respect the spirit of religious books. The House has no right to discuss them. If we try to change or delete what has been written, we will invite more problems. It is also a matter of interpretation. If there is a wrong interpretation, the book should not be condemned. Sometimes, history books and novels and films also encourage communalism.

Ajit Kumar Mehta: The study of religious scriptures should not be allowed in educational institutions.

B.K. Nair: The caste system has not died. A doctor wants his son to be a doctor, a politician wants his son to be a politician. It is part of our culture.

Banarsi Das: We are all with you (mover of the Bill) in your revolution of ideas, but you cannot do it through law.

Ram Dulari Sinha (Minister of State, Home Ministry): Our Constitution ensures justice and equality. It has special provisions for weaker sections. Government takes cognisance of the activities of persons or organisations propagating religion in the form of publications only when these activities threaten public order or are otherwise illegal. It is not proper to amend classical litera-

ture. Sutras and Smritis are sources of ancient history. Books of historical value cannot be re-written. I request Shastriji to withdraw the Bill.

In this connection, and in the context of recent developments in the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe, I am reminded of a remark made by Jawaharlal Nehru more than half a century ago. He wrote in his autobiography (pp. 591-593): "I dislike dogmatism, and the treatment of Karl Marx's writings or any other books as revealed scripture which cannot be challenged, and the regimentation and heresy hunts which seem to be a feature of modern communism."

Women's Movement: the International Dimension

The women's movement in India was, from the beginning, not insular but outward-looking. It expressed interest in and solidarity with movements for women's rights in other countries. This was a counterpart of the international awareness to which Jawaharlal Nehru contributed chiefly, because of which the national movement identified itself with the global struggle against imperialism and fascism.

The Women's Indian Association organised a London Committee in 1928 to maintain regular contact with women's organisations in Britain and to seek the support of British public opinion for reform of Indian electoral laws. A prominent part was played in the work of the London Committee by Dorothy Jinarajadasa, English wife of the well-known theosophist; Rameshwari Nehru, during the years that her husband Brijlal was posted in London; and Dhanvanti Rama Rau, wife of the distinguished civil servant Benegal Rama Rau. The Women's Indian Association also had friendly links with the International Women's Alliance.

Five delegates from the All India Women's Conference attended the International Congress of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship in Berlin in 1930. They were Sarojini Naidu, Margaret Cousins, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Dhanvanti Rama Rau. Nearly a thousand delegates from more than forty countries heard their exposition of the problems and aspirations of Indian women. This helped to correct the gruesome picture of India drawn by imperialist propagandists like Katherine Mayo.

A visit to England in 1933 by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Dr Muthulakshmi Reddi and Begum Hamid Ali, to tender evidence before the joint parliamentary committee on the franchise question, evoked warm sympathy and support from progressive individuals and organisations of women in England. It resulted in the formation of a Liaison Group for cooperation between the A.I.W.C. and its well-wishers in England. Grace Lancaster was the liaison officer in England, and Amrit Kaur her counterpart in India. The liaison group did useful work for 17 years in promoting Indo-British friendship at the people's level. With the establishment of equal relations between independent India and Britain, the group was dissolved in 1950.

On the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the British section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom adopted a resolution urging the government "to make clear its intention of bringing India into free and equal partnership in the family of nations." This was an endorsement of the position taken by the Indian National Congress that the war should be for promoting democracy and not for perpetuating empire.

The 1940 session of the All India Women's Conference passed a resolution expressing distress at the horrors of war, and urging upon the women of the world to exert their moral force on the side of permanent peace in the world.

With the end of the war and India's attainment of independence, Hansa Mehta was appointed to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. In 1947, the All India Women's Conference became the first Asian organisation to be accorded consultative status, as a non-governmental organisation, by the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's leadership of the Indian delegation to the world organisation, and her subsequent election as the first woman president of the U.N. General Assembly, was greeted with satisfaction by women in India and the world over. With an increasing number of former colonies becoming free, the links of women's organisations in India with their counterparts abroad expanded greatly over the post-independence decades.

The observance of 1975 as International Women's Year stimulated considerable activity. The report of the Committee on the Status of Women published in December 1974, on the eve of IWY, evoked widespread discussion followed by legislative and executive action. Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister, took keen interest in the

formulation of programmes during the IWY and the Women's Decade that followed. The creation of a separate department in the Central Government to promote Women and Child Development put on a continuing basis, and gave institutionalised expression to, the concern with women's problems.

I have recalled in Chapter 8 the friendly guidance I received from Rameshwari Nehru in my first steps into the larger world of social and political work. After independence, the two of us worked together in several international forums: the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society which was formed in 1952, the Indian Association for Afro-Asian Solidarity, and the world peace movement. In these activities we received both encouragement and candid criticism from Jawaharlal Nehru.

The critical dimension of Jawaharlal's response stemmed from his deep and uncompromising commitment to a non-aligned position in world affairs. It is not widely known that he formulated and articulated the philsophy of a non-aligned foreign policy for an independent India much before the country became free. As far back as in 1929, he advised the All India Trade Union Congress to steer clear both of the Second International which had identified itself with the Western powers and the Third International which was directed by the Soviet Union.

Jawaharlal said in the course of his presidential address in Hindi at the 10th session of the A.I.T.U.C. at Nagpur: "The question of affiliation troubles us. If I may venture to suggest it would be best for us not to be affiliated to either International.... The main preoccupation of the Second International is no longer the fight against capitalism but the fight against communism.... Should we then ally ourselves to the Third International?.... Personally, I am a strong admirer of the general trend of policy in Russia. Soviet Russia today, in spite of heavy blunders and many sins, holds out the bright promise of a better day to the world at large and to the worker specially, more than any other country.... With all my sympathy for the communist viewpoint, however, I must confess that I do not appreciate many of their methods. The history of the past few years in China and elsewhere has shown that these methods have failed and often brought reaction in their train. To affiliate with the Third International must mean an adoption of their methods in their entirety. I do not think this is desirable for us...."

After independence, notwithstanding harsh comments on him

and on Gandhiji during the Stalin era with its ideological rigidity, Jawaharlal Nehru strove patiently for Indo-Soviet understanding and friendship. His second choice for Indian ambassadorship in Moscow proved right. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan with his broad sympathies succeeded where Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit with her westernised ways and temperament had failed. In a letter to State Chief Ministers on 15 April 1952, Jawaharlal said about Radhakrishnan's meeting with Marshal Stalin on the eve of his departure from Moscow: "This was an unusual event as Stalin hardly ever sees foreign Ambassadors. It was a testimony of the good work done by Dr. Radhakrishnan. Very brief reports of the interview were flashed across the world and all kinds of interpretations were made. We have had a longer report of this interview. From this, it would appear that Marshal Stalin desires peace in the world, but is highly suspicious of the Western Powers. It would also appear that he wanted to make a special gesture of friendliness towards India."

When Stalin died on 6 March 1953, Jawaharlal Nehru responded positively to my suggestion that an appreciatory reference which he would doubtless make in parliament to the departed Soviet leader might be followed by adjournment for the day as a mark of respect. This gesture by the Indian parliament at Jawaharlal's instance attracted criticism from anti-Soviet circles.

Because of his commitment to an objective and non-aligned position in the Cold War, Jawaharlal was averse to the intrusion of partisan politics into the peace movement. On 1 March 1956, Rameshwari Nehru wrote to Jawaharlal seeking his advice on an invitation she had received to attend a peace conference in Moscow: "At one of the meetings here in Delhi, I suggested that the Peace Committee could send an appeal to all the powerful countries belonging to both the blocs to make a beginning in unilateral disarmament with a plan for its gradual progress in coming years. The Indian Peace Committee did not take any notice of this suggestion, but it was urged by Ilya Ehrenburg and some others that such a proposal could be made from a wider international platform like the one provided by the proposed conference at Moscow.

"I have a feeling that the world is not prepared for such a proposal at the present time and even if it is made from an international platform it will not be accepted or even heard. Nevertheless the suggestion is that the proposal may be placed for discussion.

"I am not quite clear as to what I should do. I, therefore, leave

the decision in your hands."

Jawaharlal replied on the same day. He said: "If you wish to go to Moscow for this meeting, you can go there.

"I do not myself see any positive good emerging from these meetings of the Peace Conference Committee. It is too much of a one-sided Committee representing one bloc of countries to create an impression on others. In fact the impression is often the reverse and some people begin to think that all this talk of peace is a subterfuge and a political manoeuvre.

"I had a long talk with Ilya Ehrenburg when he was here and I explained to him my viewpoint. He said that it was true that in the past the Peace Committee had interfered in political matters, but he hoped this would not be so in the future. I now find that the Indian Peace Committee is organising meetings to condemn the Baghdad Pact and also to show disapproval of Dulles. This is pure politics.

"As for unilateral disarmament, it would be excellent if some big power had the courage to do so. But it is quite clear that no power is going to do so."

Jawaharlal Nehru was equally forthright in expressing his doubts about the Afro-Asian solidarity movement. On 11 February 1960, Rameshwari Nehru wrote to him seeking his moral support if not material assistance from the Indian Government: "Somehow the word has gone round that it is a Communist-dominated organisation but I know for a fact that it is not so.... In India we have a very large number of prominent Congressmen who are our members. I have talked the matter over with Dhebar Bhai[10] and Indu[11] both of whom have taken a neutral attitude and maintain that the Congress members are free to take part in this movement at their individual level. Still there is a lurking fear in the minds of all concerned that those who cooperate with this movement are put under the black mark of the Congress High Command....

"At the Cairo conference of 1957-58, the delegations from Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia and Sudan were all financed and sponsored by their respective Governments. The representatives from Ethiopia also were Government-sponsored.... Even those who were not financed or sponsored by their Governments carried the messages of goodwill and greetings from their Prime Ministers or Presidents but we from India were unfortunate enough not to be able to carry even a message of greetings from our Prime Minister....

"... for the conference at Cairo we were able to give a token con-

tribution of Rs.4,000 only. Since then we have not paid a single pie for the international expenses of this organisation.

"There are great difficulties in the way of collections.... I personally went to Ghanshyam Das Birla to ask for a sum of Rs.10,000. He thought over it for a day and then refused to give it.... Even if your moral support is given to this movement, the climate of suspicion will change...."

Jawaharlal replied on 16 February 1960: "Your letter of February 11 about the Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement. I knew something about this, but I wanted to refresh my memory, and so I have gone through a number of papers in connection with it which were in our Ministry. From these papers it appears that the facts are not quite in line with what you have written to me, and a number of Asian Governments are against this Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement. I understand that Egypt is now against it, and so are Ethiopia, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco and some other countries.

"We have had some reports about this conference which have not been encouraging from our point of view. It was probably because of the Egyptian Government's discouragement that the conference has moved to Guinea.

"I am prepared to enquire further into this matter and ask for fresh reports, but I fear it is not possible for us as a Government to be associated with it in any way or for me to send a message to it. I am sorry to disappoint you, but after careful consideration I see no other way."

I see now that the peace movement into which Rameshwari Nehru and I were drawn did not meet Jawaharlal Nehru's test of a non-partisan and universal humanism. It was this humanism that inspired his effort to promote peaceful and cooperative co-existence between nations on the basis of freedom and equality. His pursuit of a non-aligned foreign policy was the external counterpart of his striving to build within India a just and humane society through democratic and peaceful means.

Joining of Hands by the Humane

After independence, Jawaharlal did not take a formal view of democracy as rule exclusively by the party that secures a majority of seats in a national or provincial legislature. In Chapter 9 I have

recalled how he sought the cooperation of persons and parties from both the Right and the Left of the political spectrum in the tasks of nation building. He commended the same approach to the Chief Ministers of States.

Even as Jawaharlal's concept of socialism was not doctrinaire but humane, his understanding of secularism was comprehensive. He wrote in 1956: "We call our state a secular one. The word 'secular' perhaps is not a very happy one. And yet, for want of a better, we have used it. What exactly does it mean? It does not obviously mean a state where religion as such is discouraged. It means freedom of religion and conscience, including freedom for those who may have no religion. The word 'secular', however, conveys something much more to me, although that might not be its dictionary meaning. It conveys the idea of social and political equality. Thus, a caste-ridden society is not properly secular."

Jawaharlal's was a compassionate yet revolutionary humanism, entailing change of the social and economic structure, as distinct from a condescending do-goodism. This profound humanism was the thread that ran through, and held together, the domestic and external policies pursued by him as India's first prime minister and prime nation builder. The policy mould shaped by him has endured, by and large, even if the practice of later governments may have fallen considerably short of professed principles.

Indira Gandhi once spoke of how ideology, like religion, could lead to conflict and disguise a struggle for power. She said at an international meeting in New Delhi on the Role of Women in the Education of Young People for Peace, Mutual Understanding and Respect for Human Rights on 7 December 1981: "Why are wars fought? In earlier days for sources of food, for larger kingdoms, for what was considered honour and the glory of victory.... All major religions have been experiments in brotherhood. But ironically religion has also divided humanity and there have been wars in the name of religion.... Today, the confrontation is sometimes said to be based on ideology. But a second look proves the hollowness of this theory. The conflict is more over what are considered to be national interests. It is for power and influence...."

Only humanism and a joining of hands by the humane can overcome conflicts within a country or between nations, whether in the name of religion or of ideology. It is significant that the discarding of Stalinist ideological rigidity and intolerance within the Soviet Union

was accompanied, at the close of the eighties, by the withdrawal of Soviet armed forces from Afghanistan and the countries of Eastern Europe. The humanism of the movement towards openness and democratic restructuring at home found its counterpart in the loosening of Soviet hegemony over countries of what used to be the Soviet bloc.

During the years between the two World Wars the Communists and the Social Democrats of Western Europe shunned each other, with the result that Hitler and Mussolini were able to capture power in Germany and Italy. There is a lesson here for us in India. There is no place for the practice of political untouchability by persons motivated by basic human goodwill in a situation where innocent men, women and children fall victim day after day, as in Punjab and Kashmir, to murderous religious fanaticism. One of the consolations in the later years of my life has been the opportunity of organising *jathas*, of women drawn from different parts of the country and professing different religions or ideologies or none, for peace marches through several towns and villages of Punjab. During this experience, the thought impressed itself on me of the relative unimportance, if not irrelevance, of religious or political belief in a situation of stark confrontation between decency and brutality, fellow-feeling and inhumanity. I am more and more convinced that group conflicts can be overcome primarily at the person-to-person level, by men and women of human fellow-feeling and compassion, in each village and urban locality, rather than at the macro level of political parties or national or state-level integration committees.

An example of united action by disparate ideological groups in order to try and correct an intolerable human wrong was cited by Lakshmi Menon, a prominent figure in the movement for national freedom as well as women's emancipation in the course of her Sarojini Naidu Memorial Lecture. Lakshmi Menon observed: "You may raise the whole country above the poverty line in terms of calories, but without literacy you cannot make democracy a reality." Recalling that a Directive Principle of State Policy in our Constitution had called for the universalisation of elementary education by 1960, she said: "Unable to bear the humiliation of mass illiteracy, nine national women's organisations, while maintaining their separate identity and continuing their programmes, came together and registered ourselves as the All India Committee for the Eradication of Illiteracy among Women. We have been working for more

than three years. We regard our effort not as a programme but as a movement in which the entire population of India should be involved one way or the other."

There can be no conflict between the genuinely religious of different faiths. Nor between religion and secularism since the latter is but a religion of humanism without god or scripture. On the other hand, the competition for votes can lead political parties away from their professed principles. We witnessed in 1986 the spectacle of the Congress(I), committed to secularism, sponsoring legislation in parliament for freeing the Muslim male from the obligation to pay maintenance to a divorced and needy wife. And we saw in 1989 the emissaries of the Congress (I) and of its chief adversary, the Janata Dal, begging the Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid for support in the impending elections. Other leaders were meanwhile calling on Hindu religious leaders and Catholic bishops to solicit similar help.

As far back in 1934, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in his autobiography (p. 159): "... elections are extraordinary phenomena. They have a curious way of upsetting tempers and ordinary standards. The more I see of them the more I wonder, and a wholly undemocratic distaste of them (elections) grows within me."

After independence, Jawaharlal was distressed by the tendency on the part of some of his own partymen, no less than several other political parties, to seek votes by appealing to narrow sentiment on the basis of religion and caste. He said in a letter to Chief Ministers of States on 5 May 1957, soon after the second general elections: "Democratic elections seldom bring out the best in people taking part in them. The desire to win an election overcomes many a scruple and standards fall. The larger vision gives place to narrow and parochial outlooks, and ideals are sometimes sacrificed for the expediency of the moment. We have seen in these elections casteism often triumphant, communalism throwing its weight about, and in some places violence.... These are bad signs for the future.... Our old and historic failing has been disunity and the tendency to think along smaller group lines, forgetting the larger good of the country and the people.... I am not thinking in terms of parties, but rather of the picture of the country as a whole, as it emerged during these general elections.... I am not distinguishing between some of us and some others."[13]

Again, in a letter of 3 September 1962 to Chief Ministers, after the third general elections, Jawaharlal said: "It amazes me that some

people in this age of swift transition should still cling to ideas which have no relevance today; should be attracted to communalism and provincialism; and should be powerfully influenced by caste. That itself shows how backward we are and the great distance we have to cover. It is distressing that elections turn on caste and communal aspects. The chief value of election propaganda is to lay stress on our basic objectives and our programmes to reach them. I think that our people generally in the mass are sound and have a good deal of commonsense. Even in the general elections, it was my experience, and it may have been yours also, that when the approach is on that level, they were greatly interested and reacted favourably. But, unfortunately, this was seldom done, and narrow slogans and appeals took the place of reasoned arguments.... Many of our Opposition parties especially, and sometimes even the Congress, approached the electorate in a narrow way, imagining that they would gain advantage thereby. It is possible that occasionally they gained some advantage. But, even if they did so, it was only for a very short time. They laid no foundations of the future."[13]

These wise words are of poignant relevance today. One must hope that the tragic events of recent years in Punjab and Kashmir will induce the leaders of our political parties to heed Jawaharlal Nehru's counsel. But the crisis has reached a point where the country cannot wait for the politicians to improve. The people must take into their own hands the task of arresting the drift towards self-defeating violence and chaos. This can be done if men and women of goodwill in every local community come together irrespective of their political inclination and decide that, whatever the problem, there shall be no resort to killings. The National Integration Council can accomplish little by itself beyond platitudinous speeches and resolutions. Its objective can be translated into social reality only if thousands upon thousands of peace groups function actively at the grassroots.

In creating and preserving a climate of peace, the volunteers for nation building (envisaged in the section on 'Need for Cadres') will have to play a crucial role. So specially should women among them. As the bearers of life, women are instinctively against brutality and killing. This innate impulse needs to be mobilised for organised intervention on the side of peaceful and cooperative living in every village and town of the country.

Humanism knows no national frontiers. The humane should,

ideally, join hands for peace between, as within, countries. It must be acknowledged, however, that the citizens of a country, both men and women, are prone to unquestioning support of the government of the day on issues of foreign relations. Each Nation State evokes the veneration of its citizens, even though Nation States are but products of history, and are as liable to error as the human beings who govern them at a given time. Pakistan was one Nation State till 1971 when it broke into two, while North and South Korea, ethnically and linguistically one, are separate Nation States; so were West Germany and East Germany. When the governments of two countries are locked in conflict, each will tend to claim that it is wholly in the right and the other wholly in the wrong.

Despite these constraints, non-governmental associations like those of intellectuals and artists, trade unions, and women's organisations can help to keep the lines of communication between a country and its neighbours open, stem the tide of chauvinism, and promote understanding of each other's viewpoint. This will help to create a climate of tolerance in which problems between countries can be resolved peacefully through negotiations.

Mahatma Gandhi used to say that women should lead, if we want a non-violent society in our country and peace in the world. And Jawaharlal Nehru regarded women's awakening as a crucial factor in social transformation. It is for us, men and women, to live up to the values upheld by these two great visionaries of the twentieth century, who were at the same time relentless social activists.

NOTES

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2 *Inaugural Speech at the Centenary Session*, All India Congress Committee (I), 24, Akbar Road, New Delhi.
3 Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, Vol. II (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1958), p. 677.
4 Smallest division of the rupee before the decimalisation of Indian currency in the fifties.
5 From Gandhiji's address at a Missionary Conference in Madras on 14 February 1916, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XIII, p. 219.
6 Quoted by P.C. Joshi in speech at a seminar on Culture and Communication, Pune, 22-24 July 1983, and published in *Communicator* (New Delhi).
7 Report in *The Statesman*, 24 November 1980.
8 *Patriot* (Delhi), 12 April 1985.
9 *ed.* Stella Faria and others, Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, Indore.

10 U.N. Dhebar, Congress President during 1955-58.
11 Indira Gandhi.
12 *Letters to Chief Ministers*, Vol. 4, pp. 484-5.
13 *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 517.

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