

OF

THE WORKING WOMAN

Orissa
Adivasi Women
Workers
Join
Trade Union



World Congress of Women
Prague 1981

Says:

NO

To

Nuclear War

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Women Freedom Fighters In Pakistan Jails

AT least fifty per cent of the women inside Pakistan jails are there for alleged political offences, and quite a few of them have been subjected to torture. According to the London *New Statesman*, the practices have now been institutionalised by the Zia regime. No previous regime pre-partition has ever resorted to such systematic torture of women.

The increase in the number of women political prisoners began six years ago. The first two women to be tortured were two sisters, Saeeda and Farida Sheikh, both in their early twenties, both members of the Pakistan People's Party. They later jumped bail, fled to Afghanistan and finally sought asylum in West Berlin. Another victim, Farkhanda Bukhari, married to a poet, was arrested off the streets one day before she was to attend her brother's wedding. A suit was filed on her behalf in the High Court and the judge asked that she be produced in court. The army refused. She was kept in Lahore Fort, used as an interrogation centre by the military intelligence, and tortured. Her body still carries marks of cigarette burns. Farkhanda was one of the prisoners whose release was demanded by the hijackers of the PIA plane. Because she had two daughters to look after, she did not want to leave Pakistan, but despite her plea she was bundled on to the plane.

Two other victims were Mrs. Nasera Rana and Mrs. Arif Bhatti, both of them wives of office-bearers of the PPA. They have now gone underground after having been subjected to electric shocks and sexual assaults.

These are only a few of the most glaring cases. ☐

SEPTEMBER 29

All-India Protest Day

AT the call of the AIDWA, September 29 was observed as an All-India Protest Day in various parts of the country on the issues of price-rise, against corruption, against molestation of women, for protection of fundamental rights, withdrawal of ESMA, etc.

● **IN BOMBAY**, the day was observed in a big way. Dharnas of women were organised in three central areas, Sion, Dadar and Andheri. At each place effigies of the Chief Minister symbolizing corruption, repression and authoritarianism were to be burnt. The police got wind of the plan to burn effigies and swung into action. At Wadala the effigy was removed by them from the house in which it was hidden. A large procession of women from Mahim, including many fisherwomen, had their effigy snatched from them by the police. At Sion the effigy had to be abandoned because of the police bandobast.

Over 500 women participated in the dharna at Dadar which was led by Ahilya Rangnekar, Tara Valanju and Asha Vartak, who also made rousing speeches to the huge crowd that had collected in spite of the large police presence. At Sion about 250 women joined the dharna led by Prabha Sawant and Mangala Gurjar. At Andheri about 75 women led by Ratna Prabha Dabare, Vijaya Gorivale, Avanlike Kamble, Paru Fero, Shamsunnisa, Yellubai Kale and Subhashini Ali participated. They carried the effigy in a 'funeral procession' to the place of dharna where a large crowd collected. The police arrived and tried to forcibly snatch the effigy but the women resisted and after pulling it out of the police hands, they burnt it. The effigy was full of crackers which exploded once it was set alight, much to the delight of the crowd and dismay of the police. As a result warrants of arrest were issued against Ratna Prabha Dabare and Subhashini Ali and a CITU activist Nandu Ghosh, who were later released on bail. There were also demonstrations in Beed, Ichalkaranje, Kolhapur and other districts.

● **IN KANPUR**, there was a successful meeting and demonstration outside the residence

of the District Magistrate, in which nearly 100 women took part.

● **IN TAMIL NADU**, demonstrations were held in 11 districts at 31 centres, mobilising 5,000 women; 33,000 leaflets and 21,000 wall posters were printed. □

NOVEMBER 22

All-India Convention of Working Women

AN All-India Convention of Working Women will be held in Delhi on November 22, 1981, from 12 p.m. to 7 p.m.—on the eve of the united trade union March to Parliament on November 23, 1981.

The All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women, had wanted that the convention should be a joint convention of working women belonging to different trade unions, and the CITU had accordingly put forward such a proposal to all other central trade unions. Unfortunately our efforts were not successful. Subsequently at the time of the meeting of the CITU General Council in Howrah, West Bengal in August 1981, and the All-India Coordination Committee held conjointly, it was decided to go ahead with the holding of the convention.

The Convention will focus on two questions :

- (1) The Problems specific to Working Women,
- (2) Participation of Working Women in Trade Unions.

It is to be hoped that a substantial number of working women will be included in the delegations of workers from the States to participate in the March to Parliament, so that a good number of working women will take part in the Convention.

The response from States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and U.P. has been encouraging. The meeting of working women from different industries and occupations will be of immense help in coming to grips with the problems of working women, the different conditions in different parts of the country, the different forms and methods of tackling these problems, and will enrich and deepen the understanding and solidarity among working women, between the women and men tradunionists and women and their unions. □

Facing Repression For Demanding Bonus

A number of struggles in textile mills in Maharashtra on the question of bonus, are meeting with repression on the part of the employees and police. In ICHALKARANJE on October 17, power loom workers were lathi-charged, teargassed and a number of their leaders arrested. Section 144 was declared throughout the town. The next day, men and women workers offered satyagraha demanding the release of their leaders and the immediate starting of negotiations on the bonus payment, in which about 200 women workers played a prominent part.

In Madhavnagar, near Ichalkaranje, more than 500 women beedi workers took out a procession in solidarity with the powerloom workers, despite the repression. Later, to circumvent Section 144, a public meeting was held outside the town, attended by 10,000 workers, including a large number of women, which issued a warning to the employers, police and the goondas that unless their leaders were released, the repressive measures withdrawn and proper negotiations started on the question of bonus, the struggle would continue with thousands of women and men launching satyagraha.

In the PRAKASH COTTON MILL, Bombay, the workers spontaneously walked out of the factory in a demonstration, as soon as bonus of 8.33 per cent was announced, against 10 per cent paid in the previous two years. The decision was taken then and there to gherao the Manager, in which 200 women participated. No sooner had the gherao begun, then lorry-loads of police and SRP arrived, adding fuel to the fire. The atmosphere became tense. Suddenly the police lathi-charged, injuring a number of men and women badly enough for them to have to be hospitalised. One woman worker, Tarabai

Nadoskar, in particular, was severely injured. More than 30 workers were arrested. Despite this, led by Ahilya Rangnekar, trade union leaders A.B. Savant, Dalvi and others, 300 women marched to the police station demanding the release of their leaders. □

An Important Agitation By A.G. Employees

EMPLOYEES of the Accountant General's (AG) office all over India have been agitating for their demands for a long time. The AG employees have always been in the forefront of the struggle of Central Government employees and often been victimised for this. This time also, apart from their specific economic demands, their resistance to Government's attempt to curb scrutiny by the Accountant General's office of the accounts and expenditures of State Government and public sector companies, is an action in defence of democratic practices and therefore represents the interests of all sections of society. It is interesting to note that women employees constitute a sizeable section of AG employees, all over India. This is especially true in Ahmedabad and Bombay which has one of the largest concentrations of women AG employees, where women have not only been active participants in all struggles and action programmes, but their representatives are also union leaders.

In the recent three-day dharna programme on September 16, 17 and 18, hundreds of women participated in the dharna as well as the lunch-hour and evening meetings, addressed among others by Ahilya Rangnekar and Subhashini Ali, President and General Secretary respectively of the Maharashtra Working Women's Coordination Committee.

While their immediate demand relates to upgrading of their designation from that of clerks to that of auditors, in keeping with the (on page 5)

work actually performed, the main thrust of their agitation is against what the Central Government deceptively calls "reorganisation". The real meaning of this measure is not only that it will cause widespread retrenchment, but more significantly, it will put an end as mentioned earlier, to all scrutiny of accounts and expenditures incurred by State Governments and the public sector. Instead the work is reduced to formal auditing of already-prepared accounts. If it is remembered that the recent Antulay scandal was unearthed when the AG office questioned the propriety of the Maharashtra Government giving a grant of nearly Rs. 2 crores to a private trust, the "Indira Gandhi Pratibha Pratishthan", without any pre-conditions regarding how and on what it should be spent, the desire to "reorganise" will be understood.

Incidentally, the first measures of reorganisation took place during the Emergency period when Government Departments such as Income Tax, Airport Authority, etc., were removed from the purview of accounting by the A.G. office. The current agitation of the A.G. employees thus merits the support not only of the trade union movement but of all democratic sections of society. □

Attack On Women Commuters

ON 11th September the Working Women's Coordination Committee, Bombay, held a demonstration at the V.T. Station to protest against the growing insecurity of the women commuters. About 10 days earlier a very shameful incident had taken place when a man entered the ladies' compartment in the morning and tried to rape one of the women in the presence of hundreds of others. In spite of the chain being pulled the train did not stop and the man ran away at the next station.

The demonstrators called upon women commuters to take steps to protect themselves and to push out men who try to travel in their compartment. Large numbers of women responded and joined the demonstration. The Divisional Manager, Central Railways called the demonstrators to his office to discuss security measures and assured them that police action would be taken.

We have had reports since then that there is some improvement in the situation and that women themselves are also becoming more vigilant.

□ □

Discrimination Against Rly. Mazdoor Women

THE South Central Railway Employees' Union taking up the question of discrimination in the matter of scales of pay against women mazdoors, has demanded immediate rectification in the matter by the General Manager. The Railway Board in its order of June 20, 1980, had fixed that the monthly pay scales of all casual labourers should be that of Gangmen in the scale of Rs. 200/250, for all mazdoor men and women who work on the track. At present nearly 200 mazdoor women are employed, working only on the track.

In the Bezwada division, all casual labourers working under Public Way Inspectorate were given this scale from 1.1.73, and arcears paid, except the mazdoor women. In fact no order was issued for payment of this scale to the mazdoor women despite the order of the Railway Board. The Union has condemned this discrimination against these mazdoor women only on the basis of their sex and demanded immediate intervention to bring it to an end.

□ □

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Adivasi Women in Trade Unions

IN Jharsuguda in the district of Sambalpur (Orissa), there is a spinning mill, Bhaskar Textile Mills Ltd., employing some 2500 workers. About 500 of them are women. Most of these women workers are local Adivasis, coming daily from their villages from a distance of 2-3 kms; others are of high caste. Some of them are engaged as permanent workers, some are *badli* (daily workers) and some temporary.

The mill started production in 1965 and there was a recognised union. Wages were very low and workers in general harassed, women workers particularly so. Given the general backwardness throughout the State, the women workers of course did not come forward for union activities, more particularly since none defended them against molestation to which they were constantly subjected.

The First Steps

The CITU union began working in the factory in 1977; after carrying on a prolonged struggle during 1978, it wrested an agreement and recognition from the management in 1979. As a result, from a monthly wage of Rs. 182, though because of the wage structure women workers drew only Rs. 150, the minimum emolument was raised to Rs. 400. From the beginning the union made efforts to mobilise the women and overcome their antagonism and lack of interest in union activities. In 1977 itself, it made a provision for representation of 3 to 4 women in the Executive, gradually increasing the number to the 10-12 today. Although this represents only a small percentage of the total of 70 Executive members, this is not so much because the male members are reluctant to have women, as the difficulty of the women given their other household responsibilities, plus their own hesitations. At the first conference in September-October 1977, the women attended for some time, one or two after much persuasion spoke a few words, and then they returned without waiting for the elections to be over. The three, four women elected to the Executive, for the most part used not to attend meetings.

The Change

From March of this year things began a little to change. In June 1981, some women workers attended the State CITU Conference. In July 1981, the new agreement was signed. It was a

joyous night when in the procession to welcome the negotiating committee back from Gauhati, were the Adivasi women workers dancing in their traditional style. Following this in July came the murderous attack on the President of the Union, Ajay Raut and other union leaders, and a great change came over the women workers. They looked upon this incident not simply as an attack on the union office, or some leaders, or even as one solely on the president of the Union, but as an attack on all the workers of the mill, upon themselves, against their bread and butter. The attack had taken place at 3.30 p.m. after they had left the factory, at the end of their 6 a.m.—2 p.m. shift, and had returned to their village. The next day when they came to learn of the attack, they immediately joined the general workers in the dharna, which continued till management consented to intervene along the lines demanded.

Growth of Militancy

Since then they have been very active. For one month regularly in batches of 30 to 40, they used to go to the hospital to visit the wounded workers; they come now regularly to the union office, stand up to the management and administrative officers with one voice. Some, though not yet all, attend the Executive meetings, and except for a handful, will not tolerate a single word against the union or their leaders. They have started going for collection of subscriptions and even for negotiations with the management. Being new they make mistakes, but their courage and love for their fellow-workers is indisputable and is a sight worth seeing.

Educating the Women Workers

The union leadership is trying to nurture and educate them, instilling them with self-confidence. There is no woman organiser and the women are for the most part illiterate, so the process is slow. But everything is done to encourage their participation and development.

This is our experience. We are confident that as they come to know their real friends and their foes, they can be brought to leadership levels. But most particularly they must be treated in a homely and most respectful manner, then only will their interest deepen and can their education as workers begin. ○

Women of Garhwal

—Madhuri Swaminathan

Oil is really used almost exclusively by the rich nations who meet 98 per cent of their energy needs from this source. The greater part of energy requirements for poor countries is met by firewood and charcoal, which leads to cutting down 15 million hectares of forest every year, *i.e.*, 1,50,000 square kilometres—an area greater than that of some 80 countries in the world.

In Nepal and Tanzania, and among the poorer families in large parts of India, one member in each family is employed full time from 230 to 300 days a year, in looking for fuel for the family. And in most cases it will be the women or a girlchild —U.N. Report.

I arrived in the little hamlet of Dwing one afternoon to find the place deserted. A few men came and chatted for a while. By late evening as dusk fell upon the village I met the women returning home, some carrying a load of wood or a basket of leaves for fodder on their back, others bringing in their harvested wheat crop with their cattle following behind.

In the two villages I studied, 50% of the adult male population was migrant and only 13% of the remaining gave agriculture as their occupation. The main tasks of the women are working in their fields, collecting firewood which is used for almost all domestic purposes. They have also to look after the cattle and finally manage all the other household activity.

From 5 a.m. to 9 p.m.

The nearest forest to the village of Dwing is 5 km. away and a steep uphill climb. Invariably the women were up by 5 a.m. and departed early to collect wood from the forest returning after 6-10 hrs. by 2 p.m. Trips to the forest are made roughly thrice in 4 days and on each trip a minimum load of 25 kg. is carried. Some men also help out in this activity but in 75 to 85 per cent of the houses *only* the women go out to collect firewood. Very often women go in pairs as a measure of protection against wild animals en route.

In Pakhi village I met a woman going to collect wood 20 days after childbirth leaving her little baby with her old mother. In Pakhi however the forest is a little nearer and it takes 4 hours on an average to collect wood. Women make a trip to the forest on 243 days of the year. Collection of firewood varies with the seasons, with more collection during the lean agricultural seasons. Surprisingly, even the better-off families rarely purchased wood, and in no family with more than 6 members was there any purchase at all. Thus collection of wood is a

near universal task with a greater burden on larger families. In winter the open chula (or fire) is the only source of warmth, and although the villagers used the wood sparingly, an average of 25-30 kg. is needed in every household every day.

Often it becomes unbearable to sit and cook beside the chula with the pungent smoke burning the eyes. This has led to a major health problem; the spread of eye troubles, especially among women.

As mentioned above some women spend an 8-hour day just in the collection of wood, after which these village women set out to work in their fields. In the month of May, the wheat crop was being harvested and the land being prepared for the new crops, rice and munduwa.

It was a busy time of the year. In one large joint family where ownership of land was one of the largest comprising an area of 5 acres, there were only two relatively old women left in the village to handle all matters. One of them had tripped while reaping the crop and hurt her foot on some rocks. We arrived just in time for there was no one even to help her home. Her foot was swollen and she retired to bed bearing a great deal of pain. The other woman had to finish the day's work in the field, return as late as 9 p.m. and then cook her own meal. It was nothing less than a 16 hour day!

For Women, the Back-breaking Jobs

Agricultural techniques here are very simple and highly labour intensive. Traditionally ploughing has only been the domain of men, and most of the back-breaking activities like weeding, hoeing, application of cowdung as manure and reaping are done by the women.

All these activities show up in deteriorating health, with the women ageing very rapidly. There were no medical facilities in either of the (on page 18)

Women Workers Frustrate Closure

—Ranjana Nirula

AN attempt by Le Mount Garments Factory at Sarai, Faridabad, to cheat the workers of their pay and bonus, and avoid meeting their other demands, was frustrated by the vigilance and militancy of the men and women employees. It has become a favoured trick of the employers to avoid meeting workers' demands by relocating a factory, surreptitiously removing its machines, etc., overnight. In the Le Mount case on the morning of September 16, the 80 workers, women and men found themselves locked out and police in occupation of the premises.

The union had been anticipating trouble, with the management delaying discussion on their charter of demands for over a month, and the time for bonus payment drawing near.

Lay-off Notice

The whole of that 16th the workers sat on dharna outside the factory gate. At five p.m. the owner came, and instead of explanation, had a policeman post up a notice of lay-off till September 30, on grounds of lack of orders, with no attendance to be credited for this period. The women were immediately suspicious because of past experience with other garment factories playing this trick on other workers, leaving the workers without dues paid and no jobs.

The management refused to discuss the matter and called in two truckloads of police for 'protection'. Till one in the morning the women refused to allow the owner to leave, some of them returning home to fetch their babies. At 1 a.m. the employer agreed to mark their attendance, and accepted some other demands.

24-Hour Vigil

Every day after that the women workers came to the gates from distances of 25-40 km, to guard against the machines being taken away; at night their places were taken by the men tailors. This continued till September 30 during which time the owners did not dare to come to the factory. Several big gate meetings were held and workers from other CITU-affiliated unions nearby, came forward with help in different ways. The INTUC tried to wean away the women, but were rebuffed with the reply that real workers' unity could be built by the INTUC supporting their struggle.

On the morning of October 1, at 2 a.m., another notice went up extending the lay-off for another six weeks to November middle. The workers were naturally very angry. The management representatives had failed to turn up at the office of the Deputy Labour Commissioner when the union called for intervention, or in the Court where an application for a stay-order had been filed to prevent removal of the machines, and in other ways refused to negotiate. Finally on October 6, the Union leaders caught the employer at the SSP's office, and obliged him to accompany them to talk with the workers. He was ultimately compelled to agree to reopen the factory on October 9. A last-minute attempt to create trouble through some goondas was met by the women driving away the goondas in a day.

Factory Re-opened

At present the workers are back at work and have collected their bonus. However they are still fighting for full payment for the period of the lay-off, and plan a wider agitation for winning their charter of demands. □

NUCLEAR War Threatens Every Woman,

"TAKE action to ensure that working women, rural women, housewives and intelligentsia are accorded a worthy and equitable place in society and the family and equality of rights and duties; this would promote the full development of their activities and talents for the benefit of the countries in conditions of democracy and national independence.

Peace is the most important prerequisite for the attainment of these our objectives."

This is the voice of millions of women all over the world expressed by the World Congress of Women held in Prague, October 8-13, 1981, in the capital of the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia. Every speaker whether from Latin America, or West Asia, South Africa, East Asia, Europe, the Americas, echoed this point. "The danger of nuclear war overshadows the whole of humanity as never before. . . . The arms race threatens to accelerate to the point of no return," says the Appeal to Women of the World, adopted at the Congress.

Can you imagine that one million dollars is spent *every minute* on armaments, robbing people of food, clothing, hospitals, schools, jobs, and women of the conditions necessary to win their rights?

One Thousand Delegates

There were more than a thousand delegates from 132 countries, representing 274 organisations, 96 regional and international organisations, the ILO, UNO and the WFTU—women trade unionists, the youth, students, professionals, housewives, and the courageous freedom fighters from the ravaged, oppressed, US imperialist-ruled puppet dictatorships. This gigantic Congress was held in the "Palace of Culture", festooned with flags and streamers and posters of different colours welcoming the women from all over the world. Nearly 500 journalists were on hand from the media to record the proceedings and everywhere children in the hall, in the streets, with red roses in their hands, to welcome you.

The Congress Opens

Freda Brown, President of the Women's International Democratic Federation, opened this Congress. Among the chief guests was Gustav Husak, President of the Czechoslovakian Republic, Valentina Tereshkova, the Soviet and only woman astronaut, Wenche Sargrand of

Norway who had participated in the Copenhagen—Paris Peace March.

Laughter and applause greeted Norma Spector, the delegate from the USA, when in her welcoming speech she asked the delegates—"Can you imagine the President of the United States coming to welcome this Conference in the capital of my country?"

Six Commissions

Quickly settling to work, the Congress set up six commissions, with unanimously elected Chairwomen, viz., Equality of Women in Society; Women and the Family; Women and National Independence and Development; Women and Peace and Disarmament; Women and Work; and Non-Governmental Organisations and the U.N. agencies. There was also a special Commission "to discuss and act on the problems of women and children in countries currently fighting for their freedom."

Women and Work

In this Commission, of the 179 delegates who participated in the three days of debate, 112 delegates spoke, on questions of employment opportunities, technological changes affecting women's employment, unequal wages despite existing legislation, inadequate social security benefits and provision of creches, nurseries, lack of leave facilities and the continued employment in unskilled, low-wage sectors, greater and more brutal exploitation of women by the transnational corporations. And by contrast, the vastly better and constantly improving conditions status and rights of working women in the Socialist economies. Particular emphasis was laid on active participation in and close cooperation of women's organisations with the trade unions.

Time does Not Wait—Act Soon

The Special Commission attracted particular attention. Here speakers came direct from the fields of battle, vividly describing their agonies, their sacrifices, and their indomitable resistance. The words from just one speech by the delegate from El Salvadore is enough for all to understand what is happening in these countries.

"In our small country, already 33,000 people have been killed, nearly one third of them women. Men, women, even children have been brutally tortured, burnt, killed like animals and

Every Man, Your Child Every Child

thrown on the roadside. my house was burnt; my whole family is in prison, my mother was raped; I must defend myself to save my people. . . comrades and friends we want your support." Women from Vietnam, Kampuchea Laos spoke; Palestinian women from the "occupied areas"; and thunderous applause greeted the Israeli women delegates, support to the cause of the Palestinian women.

On behalf of our Indian women who have

not experienced such savage and ruthless horrors of war and its effects as those who spoke, we could only salute these courageous women and pledge our full support to their liberation struggles, and to the common fight against imperialism, for the preservation of peace and national independence which must be carried forward if equal rights for women are to be won.



How To Solve The Problem of Unemployment—U. S. Style

A lot of news is available now about the racial problems in USA and Great Britain. The Black people are hounded and badly treated. One of the delegates, BERNYCE B. AAMBIN, from Pittsburgh, USA works in the kitchen in a Government PARAMEDICAL CENTER as food service worker. A well-built tall woman with a good heart, she wanted to talk with me, and I with her. So we sat at a coffee table.

"How many hours do you work?"

"I am as good as a Chief in the Kitchen, so I have to work long hours."

"Were you working at some other places before joining here?"

"Oh, I was working at different jobs such as house cleaning, maid servant in a shop and at a number of such places."

"What is your problem now as a working woman?"

"My problem is a big one, and comes under the term racial. You are aware that there are millions of unemployed whites in America along with Blacks. A plan had been chalked out under Nixon, to hand over Government hospitals to contractors. But he could not do that. Now, Reagan is interested and has planned to hand over my hospital, too, to the contractor. . ."

"What changes will there be? Will the contractor throw you out and engage some other people?"

"Ten per cent of the jobs will be given to the

unemployed whites. Reagan wants to solve the problem of unemployment, of course of the white people, by throwing us Blacks out of jobs!"

"But you have been working here more than 26 years. What will you do? Your husband has already retired, your son is married and staying separately". "You will be surprised to know, Vimal, that though 80 per cent of our staff is Black, we are all trained, including the engineers working with us in the hospital. My own salary is 18,000 dollars a year. Good pay. But when we are chucked out, the newly-appointed whites will be untrained personnel, and they will be employed on lesser pay. But even with less pay they will accept the jobs. . . . They are unemployed. They will be on the job, we will be out. We are black they are white."

"But, surely, your union will fight for you?"

"Our Union, the National Unfair Labour Union, is not so strong. Then you know we have a law, "EXCORDER", like your ESMO in India as you mentioned. A ban on strikes, this is a special law for banning a strike in Government hospitals. . ."

"Then what will you do?"

"A peaceful demonstration."

"So, the new President Reagan is acting now. . . ."

"Yes, he acted and won. I am working in a hospital controlled by Reagan, but I must tell you, I did not vote for him."

MUSLIM WEAVERS OF BARABANKI

—Sahba Hussein

JUNNATUN is a muslim weaver living in Barabanki with her husband, two unmarried daughters and one son. She has, since early childhood, been engaged in weaving and certain pre-weaving tasks. She is now adept at it and has taught both her daughters who help her, one of them operating one loom herself. Her husband is a tuberculosis patient and not able to share much work.

Junnatun is of extremely frail health. Her elder daughter, aged 13, also seems unwell and far beyond her age. They are not the only ones. Ill-health, deprivation and over-work are common problems among most of the families for whom weaving is the only source of income. Local medical services are rarely availed of, mainly due to lack of resources. Women complain of various kinds of ailments but refrain from treatment: "The money is better used to bring food into the house".

The Double Yoke

Since women are responsible for 80 percent of the production, they spend long hours weaving on the loom. Men also engage in weaving but do it for a daily wage on a contract basis outside the home. They are mainly involved in marketing and allied activities. After the men leave for work, the women complete all the household chores and then settle down to weave, so there are no fixed hours but normally the loom is operated for at least 12—15 hours daily. For women, the average working day stretches from 5 in the morning to 11 at night. The time not spent on the loom is often utilised by them to mend and stitch clothes. The work is so distributed among the women in a family that they are able to supplement each other on the loom and not leave it idle even for a few minutes. One tired, overworked woman likened herself to the loom, "What is the difference between me and the loom? I also do not have any rest or respite."

Completely Cloistered

Purdah is strictly observed and women do not step out of the house except in emergencies or for occasional visits within the neighbourhood. Even where women are members of weavers cooperatives the membership only implies a ritual status, as they do not participate in any discussions or collective decisions because of the restrictions on their participation and mobility.

Apart from 'purdah', overwork and lack of time prevents the women from even visiting each other despite the close proximity in which they live. This has led to a feeling of loneliness and isolation among them. But the feeling that they could call upon each other any time is precious to them. The women are not normally aware of the marketing process, which is considered to be the men's responsibility. One or two women who had expressed interest in it were reprimanded by their husbands and "challenged" to take over the responsibility of selling the products.

No Time for Family

The relationship between men and women is marked by restraint and distance and sometimes communication is confined to only indispensable conversation. Women complain that the men hardly ever talk with them and are often only "visitors", to which a man responded by saying, "Where is the leisure time for me to be with my wife or children?" Meal times being flexible, does not bring the family together as whoever gets free, eats first. Women often happen to be the last ones to eat as they keep busy on the loom while the men come home, eat and leave again.

Most families are large with as many as 7 children. Whenever hungry, some children, even upto the age of five, suckle their mothers as there is not enough food to feed them.

Wretched Housing

The houses have, on an average, two small rooms. Apart from the looms the rooms are bare except for small necessities. In most houses, there is no separate kitchen due to which the rooms remain full of smoke, at least for part of the day as firewood is used for cooking.

In one or two households where men are employed in Government service, at least one room is furnished with a sofa-set, table, two chairs and a cot with a mattress, a small piece of 'decoration' perhaps on the walls. Men, women and children are relatively better dressed and do not seem so unwell.

Since electricity and water connections can only be had on certain cost payment, very few houses have these facilities. There are four wells in the area from where some women fetch water. In the evenings, women work on the loom by the light of small kerosene lamps.

(on page 20)

RAPE AND DOWRY AMENDMENT BILLS

— A. Nazimuneesa

UNDER the joint sponsorship of the Kerala Working Women's Coordination Committee and the Kerala Mahila Federation, we successfully conducted a two-day seminar on September 22 and 23, 1981 on the proposed Amendments to the Dowry Prohibition Act and the Criminal Procedure Code Act. The seminar was also attended by eminent lawyers, trade union leaders and social workers, and attracted wide notice in the press and on the radio. The Principal Acts, the amendments proposed, the social aspects of the problem, all were discussed at length, on the basis of the keynote papers presented at the Seminar. The Seminar was inaugurated by the Kerala Governor, Smt. Jyothi Venketachellum.

New Proposals

P. Govinda Pillai, Editor, Deshabhimani and Director A. K. G. Centre, Trivandrum, presented the paper on Dowry Prohibition. In the ensuing discussion, while there was general support to the amendments, the following suggestions were made for incorporation in the Act:— Non-exemption of gifts in assessing the amount of dowry should be retained: there should be a limit fixed on the amount spent for marriage expenses; in making the demand for dowry a cognisable offence, voluntary organisations and the State should also be given the right to take cognisance; both the bride and groom and their respective parents should sign a declaration before the marriage to the effect that no dowry had been demanded, offered or paid; drastic changes should also be made in companion laws governing individual communities which deny an equal share in the ancestral property for girls, and which thereby encourage the dowry system.

The Laws on Rape

On the next day the discussion on the amendments to the laws relating to rape was inaugu-

rated by Smt. Rosamma Punnoose. Mythili Sivaraman, well-known women's leader of Tamilnadu, and a member of the All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women, in her paper pointed out many of the favourable recommendations of the Law Commission which had not been accepted by the Government. Some of the notable criminal lawyers who spoke, were of the opinion that a basic change in the approach which held the accused innocent till proved guilty, must be effected. The strength of a rape case in court it was pointed out, often depends on the question of proving or disproving consent on the part of the victim; but a woman often becomes too terrified to make a sound as a man sexually assaults her, and her silence is often taken as a sign of consent. In most cases, the women and her family prefer not to lodge a complaint even when there are substantial marks of physical injury to prove resistance on the part of the victim. The lawyers suggested that a complaint of rape by a woman should be accepted by the court and that the burden of proof should be shifted to the accused.

Required Changes

Other points related to exclusion of any reference to past sexual history of the victim, the presence of women's welfare organisations at the trial proceedings, with the consent of the victim where the trial is held in camera; maximum press coverage of the case, while not revealing the name of the victim, the Law Commission's recommendations relating to the arrest of the accused and the method of investigation, and finally the Government enactment of legislation for the rehabilitation of rape victims.

The Seminar was attended each day by about 250 women. The State Government had also issued orders allowing women employees working in the city to leave their offices at 3 p.m. on both days, to enable them to participate in the Seminar. □

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Washington, USA

SEPTEMBER 19, 1981 was a memorable day in the U.S. . . . In Washington half a million people from the States of the industrial north east of the USA, the middle north-west, from distant Florida in the south and from the northernmost point of the country gathered in one of the biggest demonstrations in recent American history. It was a day of protest against the Reagan Administration's economic policies, against the merciless cutbacks in social programmes in order to increase defence spending and favour the monopolists—the first mass action taken by the working people in the 80s.

Thousands more demonstrated in San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Salt Lake City, Denver and other cities throughout the States.

Half a Million in all

There were steel workers from Pittsburgh, automobile builders from Detroit, garment makers from New York, farm labourers from Florida and California, 6000 striking air traffic controllers, metal workers from New Jersey, municipal employees from Middle West cities, actors and others, representatives of Black American organisations, and thousands in the columns from the National Organisation of Women, the Coalition of Labour Union Women, as well as from the National Council of Senior Citizens, and many other public bodies.

At 12 noon sharp the one-and-a-half-mile long column flooding the wide Constitution Avenue from end to end, moved off towards the Congress Building. Ninety minutes later the marchers reached the meeting place—the western wing of the Capitol, the American Parliament. The will of workaday America was clearly expressed in the posters and streamers carried by the marchers—"Jobs Not War", "Jobs and Justice", and "Fed up, Can't take it any more".

"We're Angry"

"I am unemployed and I'm angry", said George Martinez, a 23-year old mechanic from Chicago. "My wife is five months pregnant and she's also unemployed. It's rough on us, but we get welfare, (payments by the State), and now they want to cut that". Thomas Ramsay, a sugar refinery worker from Florida: "He (the President) is taking bread out of the mouths of American people". And Joyce Miller, President of the Coalition of Labour Union Women pointed out that more than 60 per cent of the country's women

are now in the workforce. But no matter how hard we work we still earn only 59 cents for every dollar a man earns, and that is discrimination".

The confidence felt by these workers was expressed by John Pattison, an engine driver from Pittsburgh, when he said:

"If this march doesn't work, WE'LL BE BACK AGAIN!"

Peace March, 1981

THE Peace March-81 through Western Europe started in Copenhagen on June 22—the day, 40 years ago, Nazi Germany invaded the USSR—covered a distance of more than 1,200 kilometres and passed through villages and towns in Denmark, West Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, reaching Paris on August 6—the day, 34 years ago, the US dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima.

Women's Initiative

The initiative for the march came from an ordinary Norwegian woman, Rachel Pedersen, who suggested to her teacher friend, Wenche Sargrand and University professor Eva Nordland, a people's protest against the deployment of the new American nuclear missiles in Europe, by organising a peace march. The proposal met with widespread support and the sponsors received hundreds of letters from people wishing to take part in the march.

On June 21, a rally was held in Copenhagen's City Hall Square after which thousands of its participants led by the three Norwegian women, marched through and out of the capital with banners streaming. There were many Japanese, Americans, Britons, Italian and other peoples among the participants. The march met with difficulties time and again, but it was helped along by a great many volunteers. The Norwegian Doctors' Association sent a bus with medications. Trade union, women's and youth organisations, politicians, cultural workers and ordinary people set up a fund to assist the march. When the marchers entered Holland, bells were rung all along the route.

At Brussels, the organisers sent telegrams to President Ronald Reagan and President Leonid Brezhnev, to start negotiations, prevent the deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe, with the objective of establishing nuclear free zones in Northern, Eastern and Western Europe.

(on page 16)

Same Fight against Discrimination Sexual Harassment

WHILE the proportion of women in the total work-force is increasing (37 per cent in 1980, compared to 30 per cent in 1966), they are overwhelmingly concentrated in just five occupational categories. Women still continue to receive lower wages than men for similar work, despite the equal pay legislation passed during 1974-75. Women's wages now stand at 70 per cent of the male wage rate; in addition men are given a greater amount of overtime than women workers, at a higher rate, which adds to the disparity in their wages, e.g. while women get \$ 6.95 an hour, men get \$8.33 per hour.

SINCE the beginning of this year Australian women have launched several struggles to defend their rights and improve their conditions. A major campaign launched in May, was the one against Government's cut in the Adult Secondary Education Assistance and the Tertiary Education Assistance Schemes. Till now, women have been upgrading their qualifications for employment through these adult education schemes. Therefore they are the hardest hit by these cuts. Other agencies facing cuts which will also affect women, are curriculum development, women's units in Government departments, employment agencies, translation bureaus (for migrants), educational research, etc. The women are also planning more intense struggles for full funding by the States of services earmarked for women.

IN June about 160 women delegates from 50 unions met in Melbourne during the ACTU (Australian Confederation of Trade Unions), meet, to discuss issues concerning women's participation in the trade union movement. This meeting took place five years after the Working Women's Charter was formulated. The discussions centred around the problem of women workers not being recognised as 'real workers', and recommendations included: the formation of women's groups in the unions; women officers in ACTU state branches; code of conduct for male unionists; organising to gain equal access to decision-making bodies; medical services in

work places to consider the needs of women; encouraging women's right to work in traditional male occupations. Earlier an intense debate within ACTU led to its acceptance of women's right to safe abortion.

AUSTRALIAN women have raised the issue of aboriginal women and girls being sexually exploited by white cattle station owners.

The Women's Department of the Australian Union of Students also launched a campaign in June against sexual harassment. A survey conducted through phone-ins showed that women, mainly unmarried, have been forced to leave their jobs owing to sexual harassment. Male offenders in workplaces are generally married, middle-aged men or the employers. There is a distinct lack of support from the unions on this issue. Besides there is a need for agencies where complaints can be launched since the police in most cases refuse to 'interfere'. A large number of women fear loss of jobs if they complain against sexual harassment. □

PEACE MARCH . . . (From page 15)

On August 5, 7000 sunburnt and tired peace-marchers entered the suburbs of Paris and went into the camp prepared for them. On August 6, in the streets of Paris, Peace March 1981 was joined by thousands of French men and women, and more than 20,000 gathered in the garden of the Chateau de Vincennes, to be addressed by the well-known British peace-fighter, Professor Edward Thompson and members of a number of international organisations. The reply telegram received from Leonid Brezhnev supporting the peace march, its objectives, and pledging full support and readiness for talks with the USA, was greeted with prolonged applause. But from President Reagan, there was no word.

There were more meetings and discussions on possible joint actions by European nations to prevent nuclear war. The Peace March ended at the Pantin Race Course late in the evening of August 9. In the words of Eva Nordland, summing up the results :

"We shall plant trees, build bridges and fight in order to live without fearing that we shall be annihilated. We shall march across the world for the sake of peace. The Peace March continues." □

Save Ana Maria Gomez —El Salvador

ANA Maria Gomez, 24, founder-member of the Association of the Women of El Salvador, and one of the leaders of the People's Revolutionary Block was kidnapped in San Salvador on September 18, 1981 and detained in prison. Like all prisoners there, her life is in danger. While every day kidnapping, torture, rape, murder are the crimes committed by the ruling Junta against the Salvadorian people, the President of the Junta, Napoleon Duarte, is busy in the U.S. obtaining an additional Rs. 24 crores for military and economic use.

International public opinion is being mobilised to prevent this genocide and also get Ana Maria Gomez out of prison. The All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women has added its voice to this protest through a telegram to the Salvadorian President demanding the immediate release of Ana Maria.

Arrested—Dr. Nawal El Saadawi, Egypt

Another victim of reaction and oppression is Dr. Nawal El Saadawi of Egypt, a well-known medical doctor, novelist and writer on Arab women's problems and their struggles for liberation, and an anti-imperialist fighter. Dr. Nawal El Saadawi, who helped develop the women's movement in Egypt and other countries in North Africa, has been arrested in the recent round-up of Muslim fundamentalist and leftist opponents of the Sadat regime.

She played a particularly remarkable role in writing on and exposing the harsh impact of the practice of female circumcision on the minds of female children, on the basis of her experience as a doctor, and in awakening public opinion against this practice. For this she lost her job as Director of Public Health in Egypt. She is one of the founder-members of the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), which took up the task of investigating the dimensions and socio-cultural implications on this social custom and mobilising public opinion against it. Fluent in both Arabic and English, she has since written extensively on women in the Arab world.

A well-known figure in international women's conferences in Asia, Europe and USA, as well as her native Africa, it is her opposition to imperialism, religious obscurantism and her championing of women's rights that has made her the target of attacks by Egyptian authorities. A world-wide protest movement against her arrest has also begun, and the All-India Coordination Committee has made its protest to the Egyptian authorities.

Homage to Martyrs—Lidice, Czechoslovakia

Here in this place used to stand a small village, in which several hundred ordinary, modest, diligent people lived with their families and children. Thirty-nine years ago, on June 10, 1942, Nazi columns headed by the S.S. and Gestapo officers, surrounded Lidice and because a German officer had been killed, shot 184 men on the spot, abducted 196 women and 96 children, most of whom never returned, and sent them into concentration camps. They razed the village to the ground; they re-routed the bed of the stream which used to run through Lidice, so that—as they proclaimed—there should forever be no reminder that people had lived here.

The Indian delegation to the World Peace Conference of Women in October 1981, along with others, laid wreaths and flowers in memory of those who had been killed by the Nazis for no fault of theirs.

Shameful Exploitation— Canada

As many as 5,000 juvenile prostitutes, *some as young as eight years*, are walking the streets of Montreal. An investigation conducted by the Quebec Justice Department said 1000 young people are full-time prostitutes, some of them earning as much as 1,000 dollars a week. The report recommends that the authorities consider juvenile prostitution a social, rather than a criminal, problem.

Women Present Charter of Demands To LIC Management

WOMEN working in the offices of the Life Insurance Corporation of India, Kasturba Gandhi Marg, New Delhi, have, for the first time, submitted a 5-point charter of demands to the management, under the leadership of their Union and with the help of the Co-ordination Committee of Working Women, Delhi.

1. They are demanding the arrangement of creches-cum-day centres with well-equipped staff in the premises of the office building, for the children between the age group of 6 weeks to 6 years.

2. Immediate appointment of a medical officer in the office during office hours, as it has happened that a number times, in emergency

cases of illness or accidents, there is no medical officer to treat the patient on the spot.

3. The timing of maternity leave should be left to the choice of the women employee, as in other public sector undertakings.

3. Maintenance of toilets, wash basins, mirrors and waste-bins.

5. End discrimination between the office staff. The employees of the LIC office get Saturday half day off while the women employees doing cleaning jobs have to remain in the office for the whole day.

The employees have decided if their demands are not met sympathetically they would take further steps to get their demands fulfilled. ○

WOMEN IN GARHWAL . . .

(From page 8)

villages I visited despite Pakhi, being on a major highway. No word of complaint is even uttered when the women return after a long day with scorched feet and sunburnt faces.

Young girls just out of middle school, when put to this daily grind raise their voices to declare the drudgery of it all. After spending hours caring for their cattle, collecting green leaves and fodder from a long distance, the average yield is only a half to one kg. of milk per day and not sufficient even to meet the needs of a family.

I could go on citing the daily tasks of a woman. Some very laborious activities like oil pressing and grinding of flour by hand are being slowly given up with the large share of grinding being done in indigenously constructed water mills.

The Backbone of the Economy

However the women in Garhwal being the backbone of the economy, have also achieved a strong social position as compared to some of their urban sisters. Their voice is heard in the making of many decisions. The system of paying

a bride price in marriages, shows the relative importance of women in the area.

The women of the Garhwal villages have a traditional acceptance of the current state of affairs. But they are not ignorant of the economic and ecological problems of the area. Although they have not been associated with the management of the forests, their greatest wealth, still in 1974 at Reni, the women demonstrated their understanding of the ecological base of their economy by hugging the trees and protecting them from one of the contractors who had come to cut them down. All over the Garhwal Himalaya, where the Chipko movement has spread, the women have been in the forefront of the movement, actively participating both in protecting their forests and in programmes of planting and afforestation. But the Indian Forest Service, incidentally, does not have a single woman officer.

When I think back, the soulful words of a Garhwali folk song come to my mind: "O Father! Do not give me to the mountains", where a young girl pleads with her father not to marry her to a man in the hills for she knows what a hard life it is. ○

Expulsion of Sewa from the N.L.O.

We print below extracts from a letter from Ela Bhatt to Vimal Ranadive.

DEAR Vimalben,

It is no wonder that the expulsion of SEWA from the Textile Labour Association has been followed by the expulsion of SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) from the National Labour Organisation, a Gujarat-based federation of unions.

As per our bye-laws, we were federated with NLO. We very well knew our fate in NLO after the expulsion from the TLA, but the way it has happened is revealing of the feudal attitude of male domination.

We realised that :

(a) NLO is only an extension of the TLO, controlled by the same leadership;

(b) The self-employed and/or organised labour has hardly any place in the NLO, much less the women workers;

(c) Women unionists will not be able to grow in the NLO set-up;

(d) There is hardly any scope for dissent, discussion or debate in the NLO set-up.

I myself had experienced it before; now SEWA as an organisation experienced it. I would like to share our recent experience with you.....

The Vadatal General Council meeting of NLO

On July 18 SEWA received a circular notice for the Third General Council meeting to be held in Vadatal on August 16; the previous Council meeting had been in summer 1978, after which no meeting of the NLO had been held.

On July 28, SEWA sent three draft resolutions to NLP for inclusion in the agenda: on the Employment Guarantee Schemes for Agricultural Labour, Legal Protection for Contract Labour, and one Regarding the Receipt of Fraternal Aid from International Workers' Unions.

The reason for these particular resolutions was the fact that nearly one-third of our members are agricultural labourers, unable to organise mainly because of the huge seasonal unemployment, another one-third are home-based piece-rate workers who are unprotected by labour laws, or where they exist the laws are not implemented, and lastly the policy of NLO regarding receipt of aid was unclear and a proposal for international funding of a training programme for SEWA women organisers was pending for six months. On the grounds that the agenda was already fixed, SEWA was to be permitted to move them at the meeting if the Chairman permitted.

Disaffiliate Or Be Expelled

Two weeks before the General Council meeting, a verbal message came to SEWA's General

Secretary from the NLO President asking her to disaffiliate SEWA from NLO, "as the more dignified way of leaving NLO," which had decided to expel SEWA anyway. Far from meeting this demand, the SEWA Executive Committee decided to go en masse to the General Council meeting together with SEWA organisers. Accordingly on the 16th, three delegates and 25 SEWA members proceeded to Vadatal. Because of heavy rains they arrived 45 minutes late. **With the Chairman's permission the observers also were admitted to the meeting.**

Protection of Contract Labour Unnecessary

Discussion on the 4th resolution on the the agenda on agricultural labour was just ending and the 5th resolution on contract labour was taken up. While I argued for protection of contract labour, the worst exploited among workers, under existing labour laws, and others spoke of the abuses prevalent in industrial units, the mover of the resolution from the TLA rejected legal protection for contract labour on the grounds that (a) as house-based workers they did not qualify for minimum wages, (b) as they worked at home the demand for good working conditions was unnecessary, and (c) they were not organised. When I tried to counter this, my raised hand was counted as the sole vote against the resolution, despite my stating to the contrary. The Chairman also rejected my special request to speak on the earlier resolution as we had arrived too late to participate in its discussion.

Sewa Observers Expelled

Following this the General Secretary of the TLA raised an objection to the presence of SEWA observers in the hall, was upheld by the Chairman and the SEWA women were forced to leave. Again my protest on this reversal of the Chairman's original ruling was construed as an insult; I was asked to apologize or leave, so, under protest, I left.

Sewa Expelled

From outside we could still hear the proceedings which consisted of the passing of the remaining resolutions, without discussion; rejection of SEWA's three resolutions by the Chair and instead the presentation of another resolution not included in the printed agenda. Finally, on the grounds of supposed allegations by Ela Bhatt nationally and internationally about TLA, which constituted an act of indiscipline, SEWA's expulsion from NLO was moved and passed without discussion.

Two days later there was a news item in a local paper, 'Jan Satta', that SEWA had been dismissed from NLO due to indiscipline.

Here.....And.....There

* The two basic agricultural implements used by women—the khurpi and the sickle—have not changed or been improved over the ages. Women still continue to use the same blunt instruments which require a greater expenditure of energy.

* Three Indian women successfully climbed the 25,645-foot high Nanda Devi, showing they have the perseverance, will, daring, stamina and the strength required for such a feat equal with men.

* At the recent elections to the General Council of the Sooti Mill Mazdoor Sabha (CITU), three seats were allotted for the 36 women and 60 young men working as casual contract labour in the New Victoria Mills. Six nominations were received—two women and four men. Election by secret ballot gave one seat to a women worker Srimati Kamala, and the other two to the men candidates Kanhya Lal and Quaiyyam. Kamala was one of the militant women workers who played a leading role in the recent three-month struggle against the contractor, resulting in re-employment and an increase in wage.

In October, a women sweeper, Mrs. Moughli, was elected President of the Srinagar Municipal Workers' Union. She is the first woman to head a trade union today in Kashmir, succeeding her husband who died last month.

* Binny's, makers of internationally famous readymade cotton textile garments, closed down their garment manufacturing unit at Bangalore, in June, throwing 350 skilled women workers out of jobs. The management had pleaded "continuous financial losses" in the closure notice put up on April 4, as required under the Industrial Disputes Act.

The Binny's Garments Workers' Union, led by Ms. Nandana Ishbiliya moved into action. The women had three options before them: (i) to reopen the unit (ii) to enter into a workable marketing agreement with a third party for the units, and (iii) to form an industrial cooperative. After six months of debate they decided to take over the unit under an industrial cooperative. Even as the multi-purpose cooperative society was formed to take over the unit it was faced with a total lack of response from the cooperative credit institutions. Ultimately the Industrial Development Bank of India agreed to

to give long-term credit to the society in ratio of 1:10. Thus the Cooperative, having a working capital of Rs. 5 lakhs will get a loan of Rs. 50 lakhs from the TDBI.

* Sikh girls have been prohibited from visiting cinemas legally in the Khandiva region Madhya Pradesh, and families violating the decision would be socially boycotted by the community members. A decision to this effect was taken by the Gurdwara Prabandh Samiti at a specially convened meeting here on August 12 under the presidency of Sardar Tara Singh.

At Akola, Maharashtra, at a meeting of local leaders and workers of the Muslim community held during Ramzan, and presided over by Mohammed Ali Kazi, a local Muslim League leader and advocate and attended by prominent social and political workers, it was decided to "restrain women from seeing films." A social organisation called Anjuman Sulahul Muslim Shahas, was also formed. A house-to-house campaign was launched which gained success during Ramzan, on the impression that the restraint would last only for the month of Ramzan. Accordingly after Ramzan, burkha-clad women again began visiting cinema houses, but volunteers of the new organisation began the picketing of movies trying to persuade Muslim women not to see films.

WOMEN IN INDUSTRY

(From page 12)

Junnatun, when visited, had already been weaving for four hours since the morning. She had, in a bid to combat the sweltering heat, attached a hand-made fan to the loom and with each stroke of the hand, it flapped and offered her some respite from the heat. When the fan was noticed, she laughed and said, "I have learned over the years, to create such small comforts for myself and others in the family".

For Junnatun the major problem is the care and survival of her family, which means continued overwork and struggle. Many other women share both her perception as well as her experience of hardship too.

[This article is part of an on-going research project on "Community's Perception of Women's Roles", conducted by the Centre for Women Development Studies.]