

A WOMEN'S THEATRE WORKSHOP

THIS month, a group of us in Delhi came together in an attempt to evolve a play out of our concerns. We decided not to work on any social issue, however important, unless it was also a personally felt issue. So we began by talking to each other about our lives, our problems, our anger. This was difficult, often painful to begin with, but even though we are women from very different backgrounds, gradually we began to see a commonness in our predicament. At some point or other, we had all felt constrained and imprisoned by the fact of being women in this society—whether it was in the family, on the roads, in college or school, in male-dominated professions or with male friends.

As we began to see this commonness, we developed a script which expressed our feeling of oppression and our need to break out of it, by coming together in struggle. The experience of making the play was a unique one because most of us had never acted before. We improvised and acted out situations from our own lives in our mother tongues, ranging from Malayalam to Punjabi, and then translated them into Hindi. The play was a collective creation with no 'director' or 'script writer'.

Most significant was the fact that we who were absolute strangers to each other, could in 15 days develop a sense of sisterhood, become intimately involved with each others' personal problems. We were able to see that these problems were not peculiar to any individual but were our common problems as women.

We did face many difficulties because some of us were prevented from participation by our parents and had to confront traumatic situations at home. At times, it seemed near impossible to



"Sambhal kar Chalo, Dekh kar Chalo"—Our Tensions on the Streets.

complete the project but we carried on. And amazing as it may seem, we too began to change in this short period. As one of us put it: "The conditions at home have not changed. But there is a definite change in me." She was learning to assert herself more. We had begun to analyse and question what we had been taught to accept, we began to see that it was possible to challenge unjust authority, that other women had challenged it. And we began to do things we had never imagined we were capable of doing, even if it was just a quiet girl learning to sing and speak loudly, or to find her way home alone.

We had a few rehearsal performances for small audiences of women, followed by discussions. We hope to expand the group through such discussions and gradually to develop a women's theatre which can be a means for women to reach out to each other.

If you would like to join us, to help in any way, to talk to us and offer suggestions, you can contact us at Madhu Kishwar's house-C1/202, Lajpat Nagar Part 1, N. Delhi-110024

—*Tripurari, Asha, Anita, Ancy, Fatima, Madhu, Deepti, Sanjeevani, Ruth, Seema*