

opposition stand was : “We don’t take this panel into account at all.”

The two Congress (I) panels were known as the Ryot panel and the Chhatrati panel. The latter made personal slander of women candidates its chief propaganda.

The Mahila Sangharsh panel held meetings in every ward, with women’s liberation songs, discussion of the situation of women, middle peasants, landless labourers and how their problems can be solved. The opponents made fun of this method of propaganda, comparing the women to film actresses, thus trying to inflict mental torture on them.

Whenever the women’s panel held a meeting the Ryot panel would organise a meeting nearby and would try to disrupt our meeting. In such situations, women doubted whether a woman would be able to chair the meetings but one woman, Vithabai Dinkar Saluke, who has experience of facing such hostility over the years, agreed to take the chair and did so with grace and courage.

The women’s achievements were two. First, the opponents, who normally only put up men of their own communities, were forced to put up the husbands of the women candidates who had withdrawn earlier. Thus poor men of low castes, poor peasants, landless labourers were given a chance to contest elections. The opponents had to change their policy.

Second, the people of Indoli realised that women can come out of the house and work in the political sphere, and that organised women, even if they are poor and uneducated, can achieve many things.

Though they knew they would be defeated women candidates of Indoli dared to confront two powerful panels. This in itself was a big victory. They will again stand with fresh enthusiasm at the next election because they know what they can do.

(translated from Marathi)

UMA BHATT

Only The Wife Of A Drunkard Knows...



In Manushi No. 24 we published an article by Uma Bhatt on the antiliquor movement in Uttarakhand. Here we present a brief interview with 36 year old Munni Tiwari, who is very active in the movement in Nainital, despite opposition from her family.

What are the problems caused by liquor ?

I have personally experienced many problems. I was brought up by my uncle after my father’s death. My uncle was a good man but he drank a lot. Once drunk, he would trouble my aunt, mother, grandmother and all the children. So, from childhood, I hated liquor. I was married at the age of 16. I opposed the marriage because my husband drinks, and also because he is a farmer whereas I wanted to marry a person in service. But my objections were overruled by my uncle. He was impressed by my husband’s big farm and his status.

Did you . oppose your husband’s drinking after marriage ?

Yes, I did. Though my uncle drank, he encouraged me to oppose my husband’s drinking. He told me not to be afraid of my husband. But my opposition had no effect. One night I locked him out but he broke the door down. I tried every method—weeping, threatening, persuading, pleading, but nothing could stop my husband from drinking.

Do you think drunkenness of men is a special problem for women ?

Yes. Only the wife of a drunkard knows what a big problem it is. The atmosphere at home re-mains

disturbed and tense. The children become timid because the father perpetrates all kinds of violence when he is drunk. The mother and children are constant-ly in a state of fear. There is no peace until the man goes to jleep. My husband’s two elder brothers both died of drink. One died in an accident while he was drunk, the other destroyed his lungs.

How did you join the movement ?

I saw a demonstration and heard the songs being sung but I could not make out what it was about. When the demonstrators sat on hunger strike in the court an acquaintance told me about it. He knew that I too was suffering due to liquor so he said : “You should join up.” I went to the court and sat with the demonstrators. I felt that what they were doing was very good and I determined to help them as much as I could.

Did you feel any hesitation in joining ?

No, I did not. I felt as if somehow, I had been associated with these people for a long time. Earlier, too, I used to oppose drunkenness but I did not have the atmosphere of a movement to support me.

Do you think women play a special role in the movement ?

No man wants a woman to rise above him. I think the movement will show people what women can do.

How did your family members 'when you joined the movement' ?

They were very hostile. My husband, all my family members and relatives opposed me. Some said : "You must be paid to do this activity. We know all the movement people are selfish, and have their own vested interests." Women of the family too said: "Don't you feel ashamed to walk in a demonstration ?" In their hearts they thought I was doing right but they did not openly support me. No woman can open her mouth against the men of the family. Everyone believes that a woman should never say a word of protest so they were bitterly opposed to my activity.

My elder brother-in-law said : "No woman of our family has ever crossed the threshold of the house. You have brought our honour to the dust." My husband threatened to divorce me. I said : "Go ahead. I will take my share

of the property, live independently, and do what is right." Men think a woman is a precious possession

'Which should be the ideal and looked after but I do not agree with this idea. My husband and I have always had different ways of thinking.

Do you think women should have their own separate organisation ?

They should, but it is difficult to get the support of women. When I went from house to house during the signature campaign, I found that women cannot work up the courage to step out of the house. Even if her husband beats her or defames her she cannot oppose him.

How can women be brought into the movement ?

The issues should be discussed with the women in the presence of those men who oppress them. If you talk to a woman alone, afterwards her husband argues against her and she finds herself unable to refute him. So it is better to thrash out the matter in the presence of the men.

The biggest problem is women's economic dependence. This problem confronts her whenever she tries to take an independent decision or undertake any action. If women were economically independent they would not put up with so much oppression.

What are the other issues for struggle apart from drunkenness ?

I have always struggled against different forms of injustice. When my father-in-law was unjust to the poor labourers on his farm, I always helped them. I fought so that they should be treated with equality. I have always hated moneyed people because they suppress others. A poor man knows that if his wife leaves him he will be in trouble because he will have to perform double labour. But a rich man can threaten to divorce his wife and marry again. Even if she leaves him he has servants to run the house. So our fight is not against liquor alone. It is against all those evil forces which are our enemies. □

(translated from Hindi)