

# REPORTS

## PAKISTAN

### 'No' to Chadar and Chardiwari

The present marital law regime in Pakistan has suspended the 1973 Constitution which guaranteed women no discrimination on the basis of sex, as a fundamental right. Instead, Shariat Courts have been set up which are not governed by any code of civil or criminal procedure. They are to be guided by Ulema (religious leaders) most of whom are illiterate. There is not a single woman Ulema or woman judge in the Shariat Courts. General Zia's official philosophy regarding women is 'chadar and chardiwari', that is "keep them behind the veil and the four walls of the house".

Concessions painfully won by women are being withdrawn. During the formulation of the 1973 constitution, religious leaders had vehemently opposed the inclusion of women in the Islamic Council, a body which helps decide whether laws conform to the Holy Quran and Sunnah. A massive campaign by Pakistani women led to the inclusion of one woman. After the imposition of martial law, the woman member has been dropped. So women are not represented at any decision making level. One of the parties working with the government, Jamiat-e-Ulema-i-Islami does not even admit women as party members. Women are seldom given senior administrative or policy-making positions in teaching departments and there is not a single woman Director of Education, even though one-third of all teachers in Pakistan are women.

The National Assembly has 200 members chosen by general election. 10 additional seats reserved for women are indirectly elected by provincial members of the National Assembly. The military government is now trying to confine

women to voting for, and being elected to only these 10 seats thus depriving women of a vote for the general seats in the National Assembly.

Political activity is banned in Pakistan. People are afraid to whisper a protest - penalties include whipping, amputation of limbs. Several women have already been imprisoned. Part I of the Report of the Women's Rights Committee, 1976, was dubbed 'un-Islamic' and Part II was never published. The November 1979 elections are important for Pakistani women. Contesting is very expensive and thus impossible for women - the contest is left to a wealthy male minority. Foreign observers and journalists need to come to Pakistan and report on the elections.

**We say No to chadar and chardiwari. We refuse to stay behind a veil and in the four walls of the house.**

## TAMILNADU

### Different Languages, One Fighting Spirit

The CITU held an All India Working Women's Convention in Madras on April 19 and 20. 440 delegates came from 16 states.

The main demands were : the right to work as a fundamental right; an eight hour working day; equal wages and equal opportunities for women; maternity leave with full pay for four months for all working women and medical expenses all paid; crèches; security in coming and going from work should be the direct responsibility of the Government; health protection where the work women do is hazardous; free training facilities; provision to include at least one woman on executive committee of the union, wherever women work; reserved beds for women in hospitals; Government hostels for



-Kathe Kollwitz

working women in rural and urban areas.

"You spoke in so many different languages", said Ahilya Ranganekar in her summing-up, "but we could feel the righting spirit behind the varied tongues...to whatever organization a woman may belong, she must come to the platform of united struggle."

**Follow-up :** In response to the call given by the convention, Working Women's Demands Day was observed all over the country. Tens of thousands of working women came out of their workplaces, staged demonstrations and dharnas, took our processions, raised slogans in support of their charter of demands and presented the charter to the local authorities in various places. The most significant were perhaps the demonstration of more than 3,000 women from insurance, telephone, textile, woolen and engineering industries, nurses and members of women's organizations in Bombay, and the rally at Jaipur by 1,000 working women, which was the first of its kind in Rajasthan. Meetings were held in many other places, including many towns in Andhra, Kerala, West Bengal,

Tamilnadu and Bihar, as also in Gauhati and Delhi. Women wore badges to work.

The co-ordination committee met at Hyderabad on June 23 and 24. It was decided to hold an all India demonstration of working women before Parliament to submit the charter of demands some time in November 1979, and also to organize state-wise co-ordination committees wherever they are not already formed.

*(from People's Democracy)*

## BIHAR

### Women against Obscenity

On April 12, hundreds of students from various women's colleges in Patna demonstrated against molestation and sexual harassment of women. This was the first time women students came out together on the streets of Patna to demand their rights – in the context of Bihar with its feudal value system and near purdah situation of women.

The protest was sparked off by an incident of March 22. A woman student of the Psychology Department, Patna University was molested by some boys while coming out of her class. When she resisted, the boys became more aggressive, pulled her anchal and threw her down on the steps. The girl issued a press statement and publicized the incident. The next day, a memorandum signed by about 200 women students, was submitted to the Chancellor, demanding a special enquiry into the incident. One arrest was also made, but the girls went ahead, held meetings and decided to demonstrate on April 12.

The girls set out at 6 a.m. from Patna University Women's Hostel. They marched under a banner which proclaimed: "Woman is also a living being, not an object of consumption". The main slogans were: "A society free from exploitation will be built only when women awaken", "Any change is incomplete without women's participation", "Stop the use of women's bodies in obscene advertisements,

"Gundagardi nahi chalegi" (we will not tolerate any more molestation) and then a general call to citizens: "Sathiyon, Saath do" (Comrades, support us).

Girls joined the procession at various points – Patna College, the Postgraduate Departments, Magadh Mahila Mahavidyalaya. Girls from Patna Women's College also boycotted their classes and joined the procession which



**The first women's demonstration in Patna against sexual harassment and obscenity**

culminated in a meeting at Patna College. The meeting was addressed by representatives of various student organizations. Kumudlata Das, speaking on behalf of the women students who organized the demonstration, explained that the protest was not just against this one incident, but against all such incidents, which are so common, and against the entire social system, the psychology which destroys a woman's awareness of being a human being.

This protest demonstration shook up the student and youth organizations. Can these organizations, who are so anxious to fight for change in society, succeed without the participation of women? If not, how do they plan to fight for women's freedom? In what ways can they support women's struggle for their own freedom?

On April 20, the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini organized a discussion on the topic: "Do the present relations between men and women students tend to strengthen or weaken the movement for the equality of women and men?" While some were of the opinion that the struggle for women's freedom obstructs the basic struggle for

change of the social system, most others felt it was a part of this wider struggle.

The same day, immediately after the discussion, the girls blacked out a big hoarding in front of Patna Women's College. It was an advertisement for a jeep which displayed a half-naked woman's body together with several motor parts. Some boys also supported this action. On April 26 and 27, a group of women and men students went around the whole city, blacking out all the obscene hoardings and expressed their anger against the sale of women's bodies. They were led by Kanchan who is the Patna district level co-ordinator of the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini.

The agitation is much talked about in the city. Most people say, "Well, the obscene advertisements have been covered with black paint, but when will

the exposed bodies of women be covered?" Men, who themselves walk around on the streets in a langoti, exposing their bodies, want women to keep themselves covered. Is it the birthright of men to dress as they please, to expose themselves or not as they please?

**Men try to justify violent behaviour by pointing to the way women dress. Actually, it is these men who are sexually and mentally diseased. Do women attack men who expose themselves? No. So it is the men who are sick and need to be cured.**

And the cure is only one – a widespread and sustained women's struggle around the demand : "Give us our legitimate place in society."

- Mani

## KARNATAKA

### Obscenity in the Garb of Religion

Chinchansur village of Anand Taliuka is 15 miles away from its district headquarters Gulbarga. There are 1,000 families in the village, of which 300 are harijans. 75 per cent of the harijans are landless labourers.

A renowned temple of a deity called "Maapur" Tai is situated in the village and attracts streams of devotees. Every year, in April-May, the fair of the deity is held. It is said that the deity goes of to her temple about two miles away and, after staying there for five Fridays, returns in a grand procession.

The virgin daughters of harijans are forced to become 'Joginies' are 'serve the goddess during this period; in other words, they have to serve as prostitutes. When the goddess is brought back to the village in a procession, harijan women have to 'serve' her by marching around the temple in the nude in broad daylight. This procession takes two forms. In one, the women, completely naked, apply sandalwood on their bodies and participate in the procession; in the other they cover their bodies with neem leaves. Thus the procession runs throughout the day.

These practices are engineered and

nourished by upper class, upper-caste men to degrade the 'low' castes and sexually exploit the women of these castes. The poverty, ignorance and illiteracy of the harijans adds to their helplessness.

The *Dalit Sangharsh Samiti* of Gulbarga decided to fight this inhuman practice which is more than a century old. Samiti members visited Chinchansur and got information about the festival. The Samiti wrote articles and letters to all to leading Kannada newspapers. Memoranda were submitted to the Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police and other officers in the district. Organizations in the district like *Samaj Sudharan Kriya Samiti*, *Samudaya* – a cultural organization – and the local unit of the Students' Federation of India gave their full sympathy and support to the Samiti campaign.

The district officers took action and succeeded in prohibiting the practice. Though it has been stopped this year, it may raise its ugly head again in years to come. The *Dalit Sangharsh Samiti* and other such organizations must work among the devotees of the temple and among the dalits so that they resist such barbarous practices.

- Manglura Vijaya

## PUNJAB

### Alienated from Our Own Issues

The police in our country has a glorious record of committing atrocities on the poor and weak and of trampling underfoot whatever minimal laws exist for their protection. Therefore, the rape and torture of two dalit women in Patiala was nothing new. But it gave rise to a significant protest movement – significant both in its potential and its limitations.

16-year-old Darshana went to the local Kali Mandir to celebrate Ramnavami. During the prayers, the theft of two gold chains was reported to the police. Suddenly, some policemen pounced upon Darshana and accused her of the theft. She was searched there and then, and though nothing was found on her,

the police beat her up brutally in the temple precincts. The acting head priest testifies to this and the police do not deny the charge. Darshana was then arrested and taken to the police lock-up.

Here crime? Not just that she was poor, but also that she is a dalit – of the dheha community, who are considered the lowest among the dalits – even dalits – even balmikis (sweeper community) do not intermix with them. Dalits belonging to three different subcastes – balmikis, chamars and dhehas live in Patiala's harijan basti, Dhuru ki Majri. They are sharply divided along caste lines and notions of 'higher' and 'lower' are ridiculously strong among them. But this incident is helping to bridge the social distance between them.

The dhehas are the most backward of the dalit community in Punjab. The literacy rate among them is zero, whereas among the balmikis and chamars one comes across some educated young men, even a few B.A.s and M.A.s. Dheha women mostly pick garbage and sell the junk for a living. The traditional occupations – chhaaj (basket for winnowing) making by women, gleaning after harvest and hunting by men – are being eroded due to the impact of industrialization. Darshana's mother has brought up five children and supported a consumptive husband with her meagre earnings from garbage picking.

In the police lock-up, Darshana was thrashed and made to 'confess' the names of her accomplices. Terrified, she is supposed to have named her friend and neighbour, Seema. Though Seema had been out of town the whole day, her house was raided in the absence, and she was arrested the next morning at 4-30.

The girls allege that from then onwards, they were tortured and raped every night in the Kotwali away from the female lock-up. Once they were taken to the interrogation centre at Mai ji ki Sarai – a place meant for the most 'hardened' criminals. They were made to lie with their faces downwards, wooden beams were



put across the backs of their knees and their legs bent backward. They were stripped naked, their legs and arms pulled apart, tied to the ends of a hollow charpai, and three or four men sat on their backs in turns.

In the Kotwali dungeon, the girls say, they were tortured, beaten up brutally, given electric shocks and left in a semi-conscious state – all this under the personal supervision of the Assistant Sub-Inspector, Dharam Singh, who would then rape them, turn by turn. While all this was going on, the police raided Dhiru ki Majri four times in order to intimidate the residents. Many arrests were made and all kinds of threats held out. This created much anger in the basti. On April 6, the residents marched in procession to the Deputy Commissioner's office. They were assured that everyone would be released, and in fact all except Seema and

Justice Dina Nath, that they could be medically examined. The report mentions injuries, abrasions and bruises on their thighs and breasts – all four to seven days old. Little could be established about the rape, because both girls were married and the examination was so belated.

The girls were also forced to 'confess' having sold the chains to six goldsmiths in and around Patiala, from whom the police extracted large sums of money. The fact finding committee of the local Citizens' Council for Democratic rights, which investigated the incident, confirmed this and found other instances of the police fabricating evidence.

The attitude of the Government and ruling party has provoked much anger among the dalit community. The last three months have seen a sustained and militant agitation by the dalits. On April 17, an 11-member coordination

level demonstration took place. Since then, relay hunger strikes and dharnas outside the Commissioner's office have been resorted to. The SP and ASI have both been transferred – a convenient way of cooling down the agitation without punishing the rapists according to law.

But the significance of the struggle lies not just in its visible success or failure. It has exposed the instruments of State violence. More significantly, in spite of all attempts at terrorization, the dalit community of Dhiru ki Majri has refused to be intimidated and has started a new tradition of struggle by the three communities unitedly, which, even in its beginnings, is a political breakthrough. Sardara Singh, the youthful president of the Balmiki Sangh, spoke candidly of the tremendous difficulties he faced in getting the other dalits to support a cause which immediately concerns only the dhehas. It was not easy to project the cause of the dheha girls as that of the entire dalit community. But attempts are now being made to make the coordination committee a permanent platform of united struggle.

Another encouraging feature is that though valuable support came from a group of progressive middle class intellectuals in Patiala, the leadership of the movement remained with the dalits themselves.

And yet the movement betrayed a major shortcoming – a feature characteristics of the history of most mass movements. Even though this agitation was sparked off by atrocities committed on two women, women's participation in the struggle has been kept peripheral. When I questioned the president of the Balmiki Sangh as to why there was not even a single woman on the coordination committee, his reply was, "You don't know how backward our women are." But how is this backwardness to be combated if even such momentous periods of unrest are not made use of to let women come to the fore ?

About 250 women did participate in the two demonstrations, and on May 13,



**Seema and Darshana**

Darshana were released.

The same day, both girls were produced in the court of Justice Dina Nath. The girls were in such a pathetic condition that they could hardly walk. Seeing this, the judge refused to give further remand, ordered a medical examination and asked that they be produced in court again. This happened twice, but the police managed to defy the orders and secure further remand.

It was only after the girls were released on the 13<sup>th</sup>, on the insistence of

committee was formed with representatives of all the seven dalit bastis in Patiala. They have demanded the immediate arrest of ASI Dharam Singh, a judicial probe into the incident, the transfer of the local SP, and the withdrawal of false cases against the girls.

On April 21 about 750 people including about 300 women demonstrated outside the Deputy Commissioner's office. This was the first instance of united action by the balmikis and dhehas. On April 29, another district

20 women sat on relay hunger strike as well, but their participation was limited to doing exactly as they were told. By and large, they were ignorant about what went on in the coordination committee meetings. Even the two women who had been victims of police atrocities were ignorant about the movement. It was hardly seen as a women's question – rather, it was made into a question of the “honour of the community”. It is because of this view of things that women tend to have no hand in determining the direction of the struggle where they should be in the forefront.

Dalit women have so far enjoyed somewhat greater quality and autonomy vis-à-vis the men, because right from childhood they begin to contribute to the family income. But vicious middle class norms are obviously fast percolating downwards to these communities.

In fact, there is a growing feeling among harijan men of all communities against letting women work. They want to stop their women from working outside because they feel this exposes them to such attacks. This amounts to saying that a husband's ‘honour’ is safe only if he can afford to maintain a jail for his wife.

- Madhu Kishwar

## **BRITAIN**

### **Black People against State Brutality**

On Sunday June 3, 1979, nearly 2,000 blacks and a few whites assembled at Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park, London to protest against the racist laws of Britain and the anti-black, anti-Asian policies of Ms. Thatcher's government. What was significant about this demonstration was the unity of Indians, West Indians and Pakistanis, who forgot all their differences and came together. The demonstration was organized by AWAZ, the Asian Women's Group. The demonstrators marched through the streets, shouting slogans and carrying banners. Speakers at the rally were mostly women.

The pamphlet brought out to announce the demonstration set out clearly what they were protesting against:

## **The Laws**

SUS 1 : (section 4, 1824 Vagrancy Act) is used mainly to attack the West Indian community. People are picked off the streets whenever a police officer chooses to suspect them to intent to commit a treasonable offence.

SUS 2 : (1971 Immigration Act) is the counterpart for Asians. Under this law, people can be arrested whenever a police officer chooses to suspect them of being illegal immigrants.

As if this was not enough, two special police squads have been brought in for action against black people.

### **The Attack on the Black Family**

A knock on the door... an early morning raid... your home is busted up... your children taken away... this is a familiar experience for black families... all this is *legal* under the 1971 Immigration Act.

### **Two of the Many Lives Lost**

On Sunday December 10, 1978, West Indian Michael Ferreira, age 19, was returning home from a party with five black friends when three white youths from the other side of the road stopped and hurled racist abuse at them. Resisting the provocation to fight, Michael and his friends were walking on when the racists crossed the road and one of them stabbed Michael. Michael lay bleeding at the police station 25 minutes before the ambulance arrived. The police appeared to be more interested in what the youths were doing on the streets than in Michael bleeding to death.

Zahira Galiara was pregnant when she arrived at Heathrow from India in October 1976. She was interrogated for hours at a stretch, given no food or drink and locked up at the detention centre. She started having severe labour pains but was refused medical aids. While she screamed in agony, immigration officers laughed. Her baby was born at the detention centre and died soon after.

### **Sexual Examination**

For the past ten years, black women and men from the Indian sub continent have been subject to humiliating sexual examinations. 16-year-old girls have been examined for VD at Holloway

Prison. The results of such examinations were used to ‘prove’ that these young girls and boys were too old to come to Britain as dependents.

### **What's a British Passport Worth if you're Black ?**

To come into Britain, it is worth nothing. Even once you're inside the land of Hope and Glory, it is the colour of your skin which decides whether you get a job, a home, welfare benefits or even a school education... For a black person, a passport is not for entry into this country, it is like a passbook in South Africa. People who demand to see passports are not only police officers and immigration officers but increasingly, post office clerks, teachers, doctors and employers. All these people are encouraged by the state to think of black people as potential criminals.

### **Future Attacks Planned**

The police are asking for legal sanction for repressive acts they are already committing. What do they want:

- to be able to detain people for 72 hours rather than the present 24.
- to detain, strip, search and fingerprint anybody they choose to.
- to finger-print all persons in particular circumstances under order of a high court judge.
- to have the power to search homes of persons who are arrested.
- to use silence as incriminating evidence.

### **Nationality Laws**

A new nationality and citizenship law is now being planned which will mean ‘induced’ repatriation.

### **Our Demands**

1. Repeal of the 1971 Immigration Act.
2. An independent public inquiry into immigration procedures (not another select committee).
3. Limiting the powers of immigration and police officers.
4. Disbanding the special police squads and repeal of the SUS laws.
5. No restrictions on the entry of fiancés, male or female.
6. Full inquiry into how ‘virginity tests’ came to be carried out.

-Amiya Rao