

For A Common Cause

-Meetings In Rewa and Bangalore

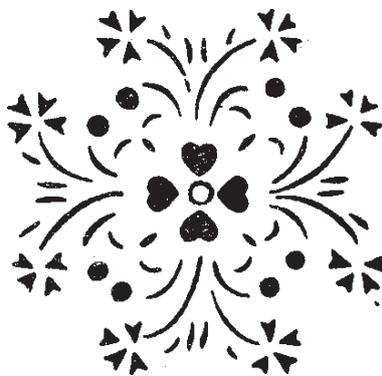
Many readers of **Manushi** are not just readers but also real supporters. This makes us very happy, and encourages us in our work. One example is Brij Kishor and his friends in a village of Madhya Pradesh. Apart from his subscription copy, he gets extra copies of each issue and distributes them in surrounding areas and local book shops. Many readers help in this way with **Manushi** distribution. Brij has also tried to get village women to read **Manushi** so that the few literate women there can develop links with ongoing women's struggles in other parts of the country. In the course of these efforts, Brij met Hamidan Bano of Rewa who had for some time been trying to build a women's organisation. Brij had for some time been writing to **Manushi**, saying that women in his area were influenced by **Manushi** and would like to organise a training camp for which some **Manushi** activists should visit the area.

On November 16, a two day women's camp was arranged at Rewa and two of us inaugurated it. A number of activists from other states were also invited.

About 25 local women and 10 men attended the camp. Many local women who wished to attend were forbidden by their families. The second day was devoted to discussion. Most of the women, even the very active ones, hesitated to come and speak at the mike even though they seemed to have a lot to say. Later, in informal discussions, they spoke very freely. This suggests that the structuring of women's meetings needs to be different from that of male dominated political meetings. It needs to be more informal and less oriented towards speechifying.

The men spoke much more in the meetings. Some of them were fairly well informed on women's issues. However, several others raised the usual questions that we are repeatedly confronted with, such as the question whether ideas of

women's freedom are imported from the west. To this, we could only respond with a counter question; are people in this country incapable of desiring freedom on their own initiative? The local women's organisation has been started by Hamidan Bano in her own house where a meeting is held once a month. Hamidan has not been to school but has studied at home. She has eight children. She has an intense desire to work for change so that the next generation of women does not have to encounter the same situation as exists today. She has gathered a small group of enthusiastic women who are eager to build



a strong organisation. In this, she seems to have the support of her family. This seems an important reason for her being able to devote a substantial amount of time to such activities. All of us who were invited for the conference from outside, stayed in her house.

The most impressive aspect of this women's group is that Muslim women are in a majority in it, and are most active. Yet they want all women to participate equally in the organisation and work for a common cause. They have faced some problems, for instance, some Hindu women of the neighbourhood do not wish to join a group along with Muslim women. Yet the camp was attended by equal numbers of Muslim and Hindu women.

—Kusum, Madhu
(translated from Hindi)

ALL issues are women's issues and need to be approached from a women's perspective. This was the emphasis of the national conference on "Emerging trends in women's movements in India" held at the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore, from November 27 to 30, 1985. A total of 45 women, some of them professional women, others activists working with dalit, tribal, rural or urban poor women, participated.

A key issue discussed was that of land rights for women. Landlessness and insecure property rights are related to women's vulnerability to various forms of violence and social control.

The question of how women's movements can become an anti-communal force was also discussed. The need was emphasised for a strategy of support to women who are victimised by personal laws while keeping such support free of communal overtones.

The conference recommended that women's organisations address themselves to questions of land reform and women's land rights; that they collect data on birth control practices and plan a national campaign against sex determination tests; that they attempt to evolve a leadership from amongst poorer women. It was also recommended that government form women's welfare calls and provide more shortstay hostels for women in distress, both single women and women with children.

"I Am My Home"

*How shall I decorate my cell
To adorn myself?
Where shall I hang
My confinement ?
Will the music of my cry
Cheer the rooms ?
Will strings of tears
Make good curtains ?
Will my dark presence
Light my home ?
Will flowers of doom
Bloom on the walls ?
If I am my home,
My grave I know in life.*

—Prabha Rani