

The Voice of the Working Woman



CITU Congratulates the Peasants of Rajasthan

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) congratulates the farmers of Rajasthan who, through their resolute struggle, have compelled the BJP government in Rajasthan to concede their major demands

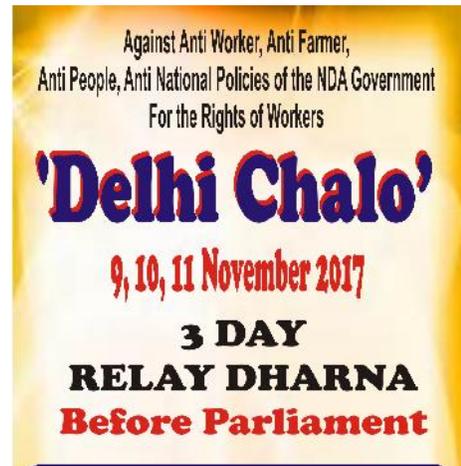
Thousands of farmers participated in the 'Mahapadav' at district headquarters across the state since 1st September. Rasta rokos were held for 3 days bringing life to a standstill in around 20 districts.

All sections of the common people, particularly the workers and their trade unions, extended unstinted support to the struggle of the kisans in the state, conducted under the leadership of All India Kisan Sabha. This forced the adamant government of Vasundhara Raje to call the leadership of the All India Kisan Sabha for talks and concede some of the major demands.

The state government agreed to waive loans up to Rs 50000 which would benefit 8 lakh farmers and to purchase groundnut, green gram and urad dal at minimum support price (MSP) at all district headquarters within 7 days, withdraw the hike in electricity rates for drip irrigation, pay the arrears of SC/ST/OBC scholarships immediately, relax the restrictions on the sale of cattle, take measures to protect crops from stray cattle and wild animals etc. The government has also agreed in principle to increase pension to Rs 2000 per month and write to the government of India seeking implementation of Swaminathan Commission recommendations on MSP.

The struggle and the victory of Rajasthan peasantry is a great inspiration to the working class all over the country.

CITU calls upon the entire working class of the country to follow the example of the Rajasthan farmers and participate in lakhs every day in the three day mahapadav called by the central trade unions near Parliament on 9-11 November 2017 and force the BJP government at the centre to concede the most genuine demands of the workers



The Voice
of the
Working Woman

Monthly Journal of the AICWW(CITU)

Editorial Board

Editor K Hemalata

Working Editor Ranjana Nirula

Members A R Sindhu
Sunanda Bhattacharya, Aruna

Inside

	<i>Page</i>
ASHA March to Parliament	4
Scheme Workers Convention	6
Women on the Move	10
'Babas and Deras'	12
Demonetisation Disaster	14
Jan Adhikar Convention	17
International	20
Triple Talaq	22
Marital Rape	24
India Today	25
Gauri Lankesh	26

Total pages - 28
(including cover pages)

Economic Slowdown

The Voice of the Working Woman congratulates the peasants of Rajasthan who have compelled the BJP government in the state to concede some of their major demands, through their struggles.

It is heartening to note that the farmers who have been silently suffering the impact of the agrarian crisis due to the neoliberal policies of the successive governments at the centre have now decided to fight back.

The victory of the farmers of Rajasthan inspires the entire working class of the country who have also been fighting against the impact of the neoliberal policies on their rights and working conditions since the last over twenty five years.

In the context of the continuing global crisis the ruling classes in our country have also increased their attacks on the working class and other sections of working people, to protect and increase their profits. This is reflected in the various measures being taken by the BJP led government at the centre.

Despite the tall and apparently false claims made by the Prime Minister from the ramparts of the Red Fort in his Independence Day speech about the success of his demonetisation drive, all economic indicators released during this period show that the Indian economy is fast heading for a recession. Volume II of Economic Survey and the data released by the Central Statistical Organisation present a dismal picture.

Despite the huge concessions and exemptions to the private corporates, domestic and foreign, investment is not picking up. Exports have stagnated. The public sector banks are burdened with the so called nonperforming assets (NPAs) – loans not repaid to the tune of Rs 8.26 lakh crores by the end of June 2017. Creation of new jobs is at the lowest level in the last decade. In fact jobs are declining in the organised sector.

All reports indicate that demonetisation has intensified the economic slowdown. The worst to suffer are the workers, particularly in the unorganised sector, the daily wage earners, the small and medium enterprises and the peasants and agricultural workers. Before they could recover came the blow of the GST which again impacted the small traders and business men, the unorganised sector and the workers employed in the unorganised sector.

Totally unconcerned about the hardships being faced by the toiling people, the BJP government under Prime Minister Modi is continuing with its pro corporate anti worker policies. It has introduced the Wage Code Bill in the Lok Sabha. It is going ahead with the draconian Industrial Relations Code Bill which seeks to convert workers into slaves of the employers. Its Draft Code on Social Security makes a mockery of social security. If implemented it will remove whatever

social security benefits even a small section of organised workers are getting today. It hastened the process of privatisation including our defence and railway sectors.

These anti-worker, anti people and anti national policies must be thoroughly exposed and defeated. The campaign for the three day dharna on 9-11 November, called by the joint trade union movement, must be an occasion for this.



(From internet)

ASHA Workers March to Parliament with 50 Lakh Signatures Demand Public Health Services for All

Wave upon wave of ASHA workers and facilitators, in their colourful pink, blue, purple, white and maroon uniforms, collected at the Ram Lila Maidan on 21st August morning. Around 6000 of them had come from 11 states across the country - from Delhi, Haryana, Kashmir, Punjab, UP in the North to Andhra Pradesh, Kerala in the South, from Maharashtra, Gujarat in the West to Odisha in the East, and from Madhya Pradesh in Central India. ASHA workers from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Bihar were unable to come due to the floods and disruption of train services there.

They had come with 50 lakh signatures supporting their demands to the central government . Their slogans and placards read:

*Improve Government Health Services ! No Privatisation of Health care !
Regularise ASHA Workers as Health workers ! Pay Minimum Wages to ASHA workers!
Provide Social Security Benefits and Pension to all ASHA workers!*

Several hundred ASHA workers assembled directly at Jantar Mantar, where a meeting was held after the marchers arrived. Tapan Sen, General Secretary CITU, in his inaugural address spoke about the policies of the BJP and their disastrous impact on the working class, the peasantry and the poor. He stressed on the need for wide working class unity and resistance to force a change in these policies. The meeting was addressed by Ranjana Nirula , Convenor of the All India Coordination Committee of ASHA workers (CITU), who stated that it is only through intense struggles that the ASHA workers have been able to achieve some demands and these struggles are continue. Asha Sharma AIDWA, Suneet Chopra Agricultural Workers Union, Vijoo Krishnan of the All India Kisan Sabha, VP Sanu of SFI, Jai Bhagwan of the Midday Meal Workers Federation of India and A R Sindhu of the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers spoke and expressed their solidarity with the ASHA workers.

The leaders of ASHA workers from the states related their experiences at work and of their continuous struggles - to survive, to support their families and to fight for their rights as workers.

The reality

Over 10 lakh ASHA/USHA workers work under the NHM. The services rendered by these workers have been acknowledged by the High Level Expert Committee of the Planning Commission, apart from other agencies. These workers have played a crucial role in contributing to an improvement in the health indices of the country, including an increase in Institutional Deliveries from 38.7% in 2005-2006 to 78.9% in 2015-16. Correspondingly, the Maternal Mortality Rate has declined by 87 points (34.2%) between 2004-05 and 2011-13, and the Infant Mortality Rate has declined by 21 points (36.2%) between 2005 and 2015.

The fact is that in India the financial allocation for health services is one of the lowest in the world, and over 80% of health expenditure is out of pocket, which leads to lakhs of people being pushed into poverty, every year. There is need to allocate 6% of the GDP for the health sector, as recommended by the WHO. Instead, privatization of the public health services is being done, with Primary Health Centres in some states being handed over to the private sector and various procedures in CHCs and hospitals being outsourced to private entities.

The working conditions and emoluments of the ASHA/USHA workers and facilitators are a matter of serious concern. The ground reality is that ASHA workers are paid a pittance in the form of incentives for the tasks they perform, and even this payment is often delayed for many months. They are not even issued the necessary medicines for their medical kits. This, when the recent CAG audit report has pointed out that there are unutilized NHM funds in 27 states. The ASHA workers face humiliating behaviour by the staff at health centres, and they have to work at all odd hours of the night also, with no security provided, etc.

Several studies have stated that policy level responses of the Government are inadequate and the present incentive system and payment mode is not commensurate with the important contribution made in the health sector by these workers.

The Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women (2009-10) in its Eleventh Report recommended monthly remuneration for these workers, as did the Mission Steering Group of the NRHM .The 45th Indian Labour Conference (2013) recommended their regularization as workers; that they should be paid minimum wages; and they should get all social security benefits, etc. These recommendations were reiterated in the 46th ILC (2015). All these recommendations have yet to be implemented.

It is clear that ASHA, USHA workers should be recognized and treated as health workers in view of the crucial role they are playing in the health sector and their important contribution to the implementation of the NHM programme.

Since May a campaign was conducted by all CITU affiliated ASHA unions in 15 states, to collect 50 lakh signatures from ASHA workers and the beneficiaries as well as the general public, on a memorandum to be submitted to the Central government.

The major demands

- ◆ To make the NHM a permanent programme of the government.
- ◆ No privatisation of the public health system.
- ◆ To improve infrastructure in all public health facilities.
- ◆ To increase the allocation for health to at least 6% of the GDP.
- ◆ To implement the recommendations of the 45th and 46th ILC regarding scheme workers including regularization of ASHA/USHA workers as ' Health Workers'; paying them minimum wages of Rs. 18,000 per month with variable DA; giving them all social security benefits like pension, gratuity, maternity benefits, etc.
- ◆ Pending regularization to pay them a fixed monthly remuneration equivalent to the statutory minimum wage for skilled workers in the respective states, in addition to the specified incentives.

The memorandum, along with the signatures, was submitted to the Health Secretary by the delegation of the All India Coordination Committee of ASHA workers led by Tapan Sen and Ranjana Nirula. The Health Secretary was receptive to their demands and assured that these would be forwarded to the Health Minister for serious consideration. He promised immediate action to stop printing of the ASHA label on condoms and ordered immediate supply of medicines for medical kits.

It was decided in the meeting that ASHA workers will participate in large numbers in the joint trade union Padav in Delhi from 9 to 11 November 2017.

National Convention on “The Right to Food, Health, Education and Care”

A R Sindhu



The total cost for providing universal entitlements for five basic rights to food, employment, free quality healthcare, free quality education, old age pension and benefits to the disabled will be only 8-10 percent of the GDP in India, asserted noted economist Prof. Prabhat Patnaik. He was inaugurating the National Convention on “**The Right to Food, Health, Education and Care, The Government, Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Beyond**” on 17 September 2017 at Parsi Anjuman hall,

New Delhi. The convention was organized by the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers (AIFAWH), Mid Day Meal Workers Federation of India (MDMWF), and All India Coordination Committee of Asha Workers (AICCAW) in the context of the ongoing efforts by the NDA government to dismantle and privatise the basic delivery systems in the social sector. He said that there must be unified struggles to achieve these basic rights as fundamental rights which is legally binding. Governments can easily do this by taxing the rich but they are not ready to act for the majority of the people, and instead are following policies to benefit the top one percent of the population, he said. He emphasised the role of trade unions in leading such struggles.

The convention which started with the welcome by Anju Maini, Treasurer AIFAWH was presided over by A R Sindhu, GS, AIFAWH, Secretary CITU, Monika Dutta Roy, Vice President MDMWF and Ranjana Nirula, Convenor, AICCAW.

The declaration was placed by AR Sindhu. The problems of implementation of these schemes and the working conditions of the workers in their respective schemes were presented by Usharani, President AIFAWH and Secretary CITU, Jai Bhagwan, General Secretary MDMWF and Surekha, AICCAW.

Different expert panelists responded to these presentations, linking up the issues with government policies. Dr. Amit Sengupta, Co Convenor of the Jana Swasthya Abhiyan, explained the health sector policies and said that only the assertion of these women workers at the bottom of the hierarchy can challenge and break the ‘brahmanwad’ in the society and the system. Devika Singh of the Mobile Crèches spoke about the importance to protect the rights of the child for the society and fight of the scheme workers to be linked to the fight for the rights of the children. Dr. Rajni Palriwala explained the caste, gender and social exploitation linked to the exploitation of the scheme workers and how their fight challenges the present social order. She emphasised that the movement must be conscious and alert against the divisive forces within the movement and to fight against all kinds of discrimination at their workplace as well. Dipa Sinha from the Right to Food Campaign explained how various governments, despite the Supreme Court order and the law, try to dismantle the schemes and go ahead with privatization. She emphasised on the importance of coordinating with the community and taking it into confidence for the success of the struggles. Indranil Mukherjee, economic researcher, explained that in India government spending on basic services is very low and every year 5.5 crore people are pushed below the poverty line because of their spending for health care which is largely privatized. He said while the government is ready to spend Rs.111000 crore for the bullet train which will be used by a maximum of a few lakh

people throughout the year, it will cost only Rs.108000 crores to provide minimum wages to 60 lakh scheme workers.

President of AIAWU A Thirunavukkarasu narrated the conditions of the agricultural workers in the country and their struggles and expressed solidarity with the struggles of the scheme workers. Mayookh Biswas, joint secretary SFI, expressed solidarity, explained the privatization of education and continuously decreasing purchasing power of the people and the unemployment in the country. Asha Mishra, coordinator of the BGVS, explained their campaigns and programmes on the people's rights for the basic services and their slogan to 'access, quality and equity'. She explained the AIPSN's call to the scheme worker's organisations to join the people's movement's mobilization in the last week of November in Bhopal. M L Malkotia, Treasurer of CITU, explained the CITU's consistent efforts to organize the scheme workers and the fight for their recognition which resulted in the recommendations of the 45th ILC, which were reiterated in 46th ILC. He called upon them to reach the unreached and expose the policies behind the issues to the people. Maimoona Mollah, joint secretary AIDWA, said that as the beneficiaries of these schemes the women's movement and AIDWA will support and fight for the cause of the scheme workers and for strengthening these schemes. CWDS, Forces and HRLN also expressed solidarity with the cause of the scheme workers. The Convention decided to

- ◆ Involve the beneficiaries and broader sections of people in the struggle to Save the Basic Government Schemes for the People's Right to Food, Health, Nutrition and Care
- ◆ Approach people's representatives and ministers jointly on the demands
- ◆ Mobilise the scheme workers in large numbers in the three days mass dharna before Parliament on 9,10,11 November 2017 called by the Central Trade Unions and independent federations of employees
- ◆ Join the call by the Jan Ekta Jan Adhikar manch , the joint platform of left, democratic and secular class, mass and social organisations and individuals

The convention, which was attended by the national working committee members of AIFAWH and MDMWFI and the leaders of the ASHA Workers' unions from Hindi speaking states, called upon the scheme workers to intensify the campaign and struggles in case the government is not ready to stop privatisation and accept the demands of adequate budget allocations, recognition as workers, minimum wages, pension and social security to the workers. It decided to organize the widest possible campaign among the people for the rights for food, health, education and care and stressed on the need to strengthen the ICDS, MDMS and NHM.

Declaration

This National Convention of anganwadi workers, helpers, mid day meal workers, ASHA workers, representatives of mass organisations of beneficiaries like women, peasants, agricultural workers, workers, students, youth, academics, intellectuals, food right, child right, health, education right activists held on 17 September 2017 at Parsi Anjuman Auditorium, New Delhi, strongly condemns the Modi led NDA government measures to dismantle the delivery systems of the basic rights of food, health, education and care in the country, which were put in place through years of struggles of the toiling people. We reiterate the right of every citizen to food, health, education and care and the responsibility of the government to provide that.

The convention expresses grave concern over the poor human development status of the country where it ranks 131 out of 188 countries. According to Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) by the government of India, 75% of rural households in India have an income of less than Rs.5000 a month. Half of the children in India, 50% of whose population is less than 25 years of age, are stunted, wasted and severely malnourished. 79% of Indian women and children are anemic. According to the ministry of WCD, out of the 2.5 crore births taking place in India every year, only 1.75 crore children survive to reach their first birthday, i.e, 75 lakh children die every year before they reach one year.

At the same time there is shocking disparity between the rich and the poor in the country and the gap is widening day by day. 57 billionaires in India hold more wealth than that of the bottom 70% of Indians. 1% of the Indian population owns 58% of the country's wealth.

The convention reiterates the importance of the largest schemes delivering the basic services of nutrition, health and preprimary education and maternal and child care, the ICDS, NHM and MDMS which covers 8 crore children under six, more than 2 crore mothers and 11 crore children between 6-14 yrs. The ICDS which was started in 1975 on a pilot basis has been proved to be most effective in combating child and maternal nutritional levels, combat maternal and child mortality rates. The MDM Scheme has helped in improving the nutrition levels and school enrolment rates and to reduce school dropout rate. NHM is the most recent scheme which has helped in improving the maternal and child health and improved institutional delivery rates.

The convention condemns the move by the NDA government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi to dismantle the available basic service delivery mechanisms and schemes in India. The NDA government had made drastic cuts in the budgetary allocations for most of the schemes, especially ICDS, NHM and MDMS. This is happening when all the Parliamentary committees, CAG reports, planning commission and NITI Ayog documents all recommend for improved infrastructure and increased budget allocations for these most effective schemes. The government has already changed the funding patterns for these schemes. Citing the lack of funds it is taking various measures to privatise them by involving big corporate houses like 'Vedanta' which is a tax defaulter to pay the tune of Rs.20,000 crores. Against the very basic concepts of the schemes, the government is handing over the food supply in ICDS and MDMS to corporate NGOs like ISKCON and Naandi Foundation, opening centralized kitchens and is trying to involve corporate food giants like Britannia, Nestle, Pepsico, Patanjali etc. and other private players in various ways. The mandatory linking of these schemes with Aadhar is another move to curtail the benefits availed by the poor and has already affected the scheme. Already in many states the conditional cash transfers have been started. The very existence of these crucial schemes which are the delivery system for laws like the 'Right to Food Act' which have been earned through massive prolonged struggles by various sections of the people is under threat.

The convention notes that while the government is claiming lack of funds for welfare programmes and cutting down each subsidy to the poor it is highly subsidizing the corporates and the rich of the country and abroad. It has been reported that between 2006 and 2013 Rs.31 lakh crore was given as subsidy to the rich. While in the budget 2017-18 the total allocation to the ICDS, NHM and MDMS together amounts to around Rs.50000 crores, only the tax concession to the corporates amounts to more than Rs.83,000 crores.

The convention notes that the various governments which were in power refused to recognize the grass root level workers of these crucial schemes who deliver the services to the people as workers or employees, but term them as 'volunteers', thus depriving them of any legal rights and looting from them a minimum amount to the tune of Rs.60000 crores only on account of their wages of a minimum 60 lakh anganwadi, ASHA and mid day meal workers. Hundred percent anganwadi workers, helpers and ASHA workers and 99 percent mid day meal worker are women only belonging to socially deprived section of the society. They are paid "honorarium" or 'incentives' far less than the minimum wages. They do not have any social security benefits. Even the meager remuneration is not paid to them for months together. These schemes also lack proper infrastructure like, buildings, kitchen sheds, drinking water and sanitation facilities, good quality food, availability of medicines, educational equipments etc.

The convention expresses solidarity with the struggles of workers of these schemes for their right as workers, for the better working conditions, better facilities in these services and against the privatisation and curtailment of benefits of these schemes at various levels.

The convention appreciates that during the last few years the scheme workers have, through their struggles, won some benefits from various governments to improve their working conditions and could stop the privatization of the schemes through their struggles. We reiterate that only through struggles of the workers along with other sections of the society could save these crucial schemes from dismantling.

The convention also expresses shock at the increasing incidents of murders and violence against the voices of rationality and justice by the communal divisive forces led by the RSS with the support of the BJP led governments. We condemn the brutal murders of rationalists like Govind Pansare, Narendra Dhabolkar, M M kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh. These forces, which are trying to divide the society on the basis of religion, caste, region etc. are also dictating the food habits of the people. We condemn the decisions of various BJP led state governments to ban eggs in Mid day meals in schools and anganwadis thus denying them the easiest available protein which is crucial to their growth.

The Convention pledges to build unity of toiling people to protect rights for food, health and nutrition

The Convention Demands that the government

- **Make these Basic services schemes of ICDS, NHM and MDMS permanent programmes of the government to cover the entire population. Ensure maternity entitlements to all women. Include the children of 3-6 yrs and 14-18 yrs of age in Right to Education Act. Include MDMS in Right to Education Act. Ensure adequate budget allocations for these programmes**
- **Implement the recommendations of the 45th Indian Labour Conference on Scheme workers – recognize them as workers, pay minimum wages of Rs.18000 per month and provide social security including pension**
- **Convert all the anganwadi centres to anganwadi cum crèches so that the working women can send their children there.**
- **Stop privatisation of the schemes in any form**
- **Improve the infrastructure and quality of the services provided through these programmes and universalise them.**

The Convention Decides to

- **Involve the beneficiaries and broader sections of people in the struggle to Save the Basic Government Schemes for the People's Right to Food, Health, Nutrition and Care**
- **Approach the people's representatives and ministers jointly on the demands**
- **Mobilise the scheme workers in large numbers in the three days mass dharna before Parliament on 9,10, 11 November 2017 called by the Central Trade Unions and independent federations of employees**
- **Join the call by the Jan Ekta Jan Adhikar manch , the joint platform of left, democratic and secular class, mass and social organisations and individuals**

The convention calls upon the scheme workers to intensify the campaign and struggles in case the government is not ready to stop privatisation and accept the demands of adequate budget allocations, recognition as workers, minimum wages, pension and social security to the workers. It calls upon the people of the country to join together to fight for the right of the people, especially the children for Food, Health, Education and Care by strengthening the ICDS, MDMS and NHM.

ALL INDIA FEDERATION OF ANGANWADI WORKERS AND HELPERS (AIFAWH)
MID DAY MEAL WORKERS FEDERATION OF INDIA (MDMWF I)
ALL INDIA COORDINATION COMMITTEE OF ASHA WORKERS (AICCAW)

AIFAWH Workshop

A Workshop on Organization was held on 15-16 September 2017 at BTR Bhawan, New Delhi in which 77 comrades from 17 states participated. The workshop discussed the facilities achieved through struggles, level of implementation and present stage of our struggles at the state level, organization and the 8th conference task to organize the other sectors.

Future Tasks: Organisational workshop for the states that did not attend the workshop- Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Haryana, J&K, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal to be held on 24-25 November 2017

1. State level Workshops to be completed by December 2017 on the tasks taken. Written report to be prepared with the help of the AIFAWH office Bearer who is in charge of the state.
2. This to be followed by District level workshops and where possible at block level
3. Campaign against Government Policies to dismantle the ICDS among the workers and beneficiaries in September – October. Maximum mobilization for 3 day relay dharna before Parliament on 9-11 November 2017. Scheme workers to be mobilized on 11 November 2017.
4. Complete Membership 2017 by December to complete the quota of 6.1 Lakhs. Increase the membership to 7 lakhs by 2018
5. Double the number of functioning district committees and project committees in each state before next state conference. Make a plan for consolidation and expansion. Decide priority districts in each state and priority projects in each district.
6. Prepare the list of cadres. Organise at least one state level trade union class for identified activists in all states before the end of 2017
7. Special emphasis to develop helpers. Have minimum 25% helpers as state committee members.
8. Open bank accounts of all the state and district committees by the end of 2017 and all project committees by the next conference.
9. Plan state level struggles for the next year to achieve the maximum benefits in various states.
10. Ensure implementation of all existing state benefits by taking up local struggles by this year.
11. Take up a joint campaign to 'Save ICDS' with AIKS, AIAWU, AIDWA, DYFI, SFI etc.
12. Plan joint conventions on 'The right to food, health, education and care' with MDM and ASHA workers' unions.
13. Initiative to be taken to take up social issues such as women's issues, dalit issues, communal and casteist violence etc
14. Make concrete plan to organize other sections, particularly the rural working class like ASHA, MDM, MNREGA, construction workers in your state.

Anganwadi Employees Strike in Jharkhand

Since 26th August 2017 anganwadi workers and helpers were on strike under the banner of the Jharkhand Anganwadi Sevika Sahayika Sangh (CITU). After three days of strike, the government was forced to talk to their delegation.

Their main demands were for payment of honorarium and nutrition dues pending from six months and to restart payment of Poshan Sakhi scheme.

On 29th August 2017 district social welfare officer Mamta Saha called a meeting with the union. An 11 member delegation including Sanjay Paswan, CITU State Committee Member, held talks with the officer and placed their demands. The officer assured them that pending payment of honorarium and nutrition and Poshan Sakhi scheme will be sent to them in ten days. She said that their other demands i.e. two days leave in a month for workers and helpers, payment of other pending accounts, etc will also be considered.

The anganwadi workers and helpers union warned that an intensive struggle will be organised if the assurances are not fulfilled in ten days. They decided to hold a joint dharna on 8th September 2017 to demand honorarium increase and regularization.

ASHA Workers Dharna in Andhra Pradesh

There was a flood of ASHA workers in Vijayawada in response to the call given by their union for 'Chalo Vijayawada' to demand Rs 6000 as fixed monthly payment along with ESI, PF facilities etc. Prior to the public meeting ASHA workers participated in a huge rally, carrying CITU flags, banners and placards. Vijayawada vibrated with the slogans raised by ASHA workers throughout the march from Railway station to Dharna Chowk.

The public meeting was addressed by the leader of PDF MLC's forum Sri V Balasubramanyam who demanded that the State Government respond to the justified demands of ASHA workers and assured that he will raise these in ensuing council sessions. Union President PSV Ratnam, Secretary K .Dhanalakshmi along with PDF MLCs and CITU leaders also addressed the meeting, saying that they will block the Secretariat if the government does not respond positively.

ASHA Workers Struggle in Uttarakhand

Hundreds of ASHA workers have been sitting on dharna in Dehra Dun since 25th August 2017, demanding minimum wages / fixed monthly payment like other scheme workers, bonus and implementation of the recommendations of the 45th ILC, social security benefits and compensation of Rs 5 lakhs in case of death on duty. They are also demanding that the payment of Rs. 5000 per year promised by the previous government, which is due for the past four years from 2012-13, should be made forthwith and in one instalment.

When the police tried to arrest the president of the union, Shiva Dubey, all the ASHAs protested and over 700 were arrested, along with her, on 15 September. They were kept in the police lines and released only late in the evening. In ensuing talks with the authorities, officials tried to persuade the union representatives to leave the CITU union and to join the BMS union but the union leaders flatly refused to do this. No solution emerged so the struggle will be intensified and will continue until the demands are met.

Maharashtra Anganwadi Indefinite Strike

Over 2 lakh Anganwadi Workers, Helpers and Mini Anganwadi Workers all over Maharashtra went on indefinite strike from 11th September 2017 under the banner of the Maharashtra Rajya Anganwadi Karmachari Kruti Samiti.

The two main demands for the strike are to an increase in honorarium for the Anganwadi workers and for an increase in the rate of supplementary nutrition food provided to the beneficiaries.

The background of the strike is the formation of the Committee for Honorarium Increase on 20th August 2016. This committee held 6 meetings and finalised the proposal for wage increase which was submitted to the government in March 2017 but the Women and Child Development Minister Smt Pankaja Munde only gave empty assurances in the rallies of anganwadi workers organised in Mumbai and Beed and there was no action on the proposals.

The indefinite strike started with a show of strength of 15,000 women employees who came from all over Maharashtra and collected at Azad Maidan, Mumbai and demonstrations, rallies, rasta rokos all over the state, which forced the Government to take note of the demands.

Finally, the WCD Minister held discussions with the Kruti Samiti on 18th September 2017, but the government adopted an adamant attitude by insisting on withdrawal of the strike first, giving the reason of increase in malnutrition deaths during the strike period. Then, in the discussion on Honorarium Increase the offer of only Rs. 950, Rs 500 and Rs 550 resulted in the failure of the talks.

The government has resorted to victimisation in some districts by serving termination letters to the anganwadi workers and helpers.

The Kruti Samiti will intensify the struggle at all levels of this battle between the haves and have-nots.

(Report from Armaity Irani)

Of ‘Babas’ and ‘Deras’

Jagmati Sangwan

The rising self-respect and assertion in women being evidenced in the social, political and other spheres of life is being manifested in the religious sphere too. The so-called Asaram Bapu and Guru Ram Rahim episodes are its latest examples. The other reality is that while treading on the path of resistance, the women have had to pay heavily. The major reason for this is that there is huge social acceptance for an unholy alliance of religious organizations with the mainstream politics and for sexual violence against women. The baba (Godman) himself stated this to the complainant sadhvi, who had mentioned it in her letter. He said (from the letter) *‘we have a big say in the government; even the ministers of Haryana and Punjab touch our feet; they take our political support and money; they can never go against us; He also said, ‘there were 360 gopis with Lord Srikrishna with whom he used to do ‘prem leela’ every day. Even then the people consider him Paramatma; this is not something new’.* Since May 2002, when a copy of the anonymous letter written to the then Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, reached Jagmati Sangwan who was the president of Janwadi Mahila Samiti, the JMS got involved in this fight for justice.

A JMS delegation met the complainant, a victim of sexual exploitation (whose brother Ranjeet was murdered), and her family at Khampur Koligan; expressed its concern and support and gathered information about the concerned parties. After that the team collected more information and facts from the dera also. A memorandum prepared on the basis of all the facts was sent to the Prime Minister, Chief Justice and Human Rights Commission, demanding immediate and exemplary action. The team had found that this was not a case of sexual exploitation of two sadhvis only but in this case, the ‘dera’ godman was committing a heinous crime of playing with and betraying the religious belief and faith of thousands of people. There was no reply from anywhere. The JMS delegation met DIG Sirsa at Hissar, submitted a memorandum demanding a probe and strict action. The reply was *‘Who will bell that cat?’*.

In the absence of any concrete intervention, protest demonstrations were held in all the districts and also organized against the attack on dedicated journalist Chhatrapati and this issue were raised continuously. In 2007, when charges of sexual exploitation were framed against Ram Rahim, the JMS organized a victory and vigil rally which was addressed by Subhashni Ali.

In the meantime whichever political party – Lok Dal, Congress, Akali Dal, BJP came to power in Haryana, it has been hand in glove with the criminal Baba for votes and money. Even now, it is not too late to have a fair probe to expose the sexual exploitation of Sadhvis by the politicians also. The BJP has gone the farthest in its dealings with the Baba; even its national president bowed down at the feet of the Baba and the CM went to take his blessings along with his Cabinet. Recently on August 15th 2017, the State Education Minister handed over Rs.51 lakhs from the Government exchequer as a birthday gift to the Baba and before that the State Health Minister had given a similar donation.

A day before the case decision was announced, the education minister had said that Section 144 does not apply to the faithful. This is why wrong orders were issued about Section 144 and later blamed on a printing mistake. The DCP of Panchkula was suspended while this game was responsible for the huge assembly of followers at Panchkula and the violence that followed. Here, for politicians, the crime of sexual violence is not a serious crime. Sakshi Maharaj quickly explained in his Maan Ki Baat that when the Baba has crores of followers then a case of rape is

of no consequence. Earlier also, in the case of 14 year old tennis player Ruchika Girotra, all these political parties were in support of DGP Rathore, who was accused of sexual violence, and as a result a promising player had to end her life. In such situations of a powerful unholy nexus of selfish allies, the voice seeking justice generally proves too weak.

However, coming back to the main issue, we can say that given a continuous degeneration of liberal human values in religions organizations and due to the dominance of rich persons over them, people from the weaker sections are getting disillusioned. But as there are no new avenues of expression, they are in search of new gurus. These new gurus have not come up from a religious reform movement either. So they exploit religious faith and mobilize votes for leaders who are cut off from public interest, give shelter to criminals and indulge in sexual exploitation and gratification. The anti-people policies of governments are also responsible for pushing the people towards such babas for fulfillment of their day to day needs. Deras and ashrams help them in the education of their children, getting jobs, marriage of their daughters etc. Besides that, to obtain social acceptance, these deras also undertake campaigns for cleanliness, against drugs etc. It should be remembered that dera sachcha sauda too runs schools and colleges for girls and their teams have won at the national level. That is why poor people start considering them as god. And the babas, in turn, incite these mobs of followers to violence to prevent any action against them.

The majority of their followers are the victims of a corrupt system, casteism and patriarchy. Among them a big section is of women who go there to get rid of their domestic troubles and tension, and to fulfill their need for socialization. For instance, initially, at dera sachha sauda (located at a place where the borders of Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan meet) women used to go for de-addiction of their husbands and sons. Women, who generally remain behind the four walls of their home, find a way through satsang etc. to move out and form a community. They get an opportunity to form women's groups; they also get a chance to get advice on family matters. In many ways deras are useful for them. But the reality is that the sermons given there channelize their consciousness against them and their physical and sexual exploitation is a normal thing. The opinions which are being expressed at various levels in the dera sachaha sauda - sadhvi sexual exploitation episode and the violence after the decision was pronounced need to be looked at in this context. Only by analyzing in detail the various aspects involved, will we be able to take a correct approach towards the different characters involved.

(Jagmati Sangwan is a CEC member of AIDWA)

Read and Subscribe to

The Voice of the Working Woman

**Single Copy: Rs. 10/-, Annual Subscription: Rs. 100/-
Send MO/DD favouring 'Centre of Indian Trade Unions'**

**to The Manager, The Voice of the Working Woman,
13-A, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi 110002, Ph: 011-23221306, email: aiccww@yahoo.com**

**Send money directly through the Bank,
A/c Name – The Voice of the Working Woman,
a/c no. – 0158101019570, Canara Bank, Branch-DDU Marg, New Delhi-02
IFSC Code – CNRB0000158, MICR Code - 110015005
please inform us immediately through call or email.**

The Demonetization Disaster

Surajit Mazumdar

Just over 10 months have passed since Narendra Modi's dramatic announcement withdrawing the legal tender status of the old 500 and 1000 rupee notes having an aggregate value of Rupees 15.44 lakh crores and accounting for 86 per cent of the total currency in circulation at that time. The immediate and direct impact of the demonetization decision was that almost all the cash in the hands of people became unusable in making payments – until it could be converted into new valid currency. It was impossible, however, to produce and make available such a large quantity of currency in a short span of time. The long process of depositing all the invalid currency with banks and an even longer wait for receiving the new currency was the consequence. Indeed, the full replacement of the currency has not happened even till date. According to the most recent figures available, as on 08 September 2017 the total currency in circulation was Rupees 15.81 lakh crores. Since these figures also include the notes and coins of denominations less than 500 in circulation (whose aggregate value at the time of the demonetization announcement was roughly Rupees 2.5 lakh crores), clearly even today the amount of currency available to be used is less than that just before the demonetization announcement. In addition is the problem that too high a proportion of new currency is still of denomination 2000 rupees, whose use is difficult.

The significance of the currency shortage was enhanced by the fact that in an economy such as India's, for many people and many transactions a quick shift to alternative non-cash modes of payment was impossible. Data available from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) can also confirm this. While the value of cash withdrawals from ATMs dropped precipitously from November 2017, the increased use of debit and credit cards at points of sale and of pre-paid instruments (PPIs) like mobile wallets did not compensate for the decline. Till October, in each and every month the combined value of use of cards (at ATMs and Points of Sale) and PPIs was greater in 2016-17 compared to the corresponding month of the previous year. However, in the next three months they fell significantly below 2015-16 levels and barely matched the previous year value in February. If we further recognize that each rupee withdrawn from ATMs would typically be used several times in transactions as it passes from one hand to another, we have incontrovertible evidence that the value of payments in the economy was reduced by demonetization.

The Enduring Economic Squeeze

The immediate economic effects of the demonetization measure were dramatic. As purchases and payments dried up in the cash using segment of the economy, economic activities were subject to a severe squeeze. Producers seeking to purchase inputs with their existing money holdings were prevented from doing so. In informal credit markets which are an important feature of the Indian economy, both repayment of debts and advances of credit were hit. The inability of producers and consumers or debtors and creditors to make use of the currency they held blocked in turn the receipts of money by others and chains of payments were thus broken. Compared to what it would otherwise have been, production and sales suffered and the cutback in these also resulted in employment losses in several sectors. While the sectors using more cash were the ones most severely affected, other sectors too faced a squeeze since economic activities are inter-linked and every sector of production depends on others for its inputs and for its market. The crisis being faced by farmers across many parts of the country today – whose produce came to the market many months after demonetization only to find prices plummeting as a result of continuing demand and cash shortages – is symptomatic of the enduring effects of the economic squeeze.

Official statistics on GDP and on industrial production now available do confirm the contractionary effect of demonetization. While data for the third quarter (which included about 40 days of the pre-demonetization period) did not show it, a significant slowdown in GDP growth by over one percentage point became evident in the fourth quarter (January-March 2017) data. The data on GDP growth for the first quarter of the current financial year (April-June 2017) confirmed further the sharp slowdown. These statistics, however, may still be failing to capture the full magnitude of the adverse situation in the economy. For one, several economists for credible reasons hold the view that the current GDP series has been overestimating Indian growth even before demonetization. Secondly, our data generation methods are such that they are unlikely to have captured fully the extent of adverse impact on the informal sector.

One of the symptoms of the demand squeeze was the sharp contraction witnessed in bank credit growth. At a time when banks saw a surge in deposits due to the compulsions imposed on the public, growth of credit plummeted. On 28 October, the last date before demonetization for which this data is available, the growth of bank deposits and credit compared to the corresponding period of the previous year stood at 9.82 and 9.09 per cent respectively. By the end of November, deposit growth reached a peak level of 16 per cent before tapering off and gradually returning towards the pre-demonetization level (currently 9.6 per cent, on 1 September 2017). Credit growth however showed a consistent trend of decline till mid-March 2017 when it fell below 3 per cent. The subsequent recovery of credit growth has remained muted and has hovered between 4 and 6 per cent, far below the October 2016 level. In other words, the tall claims that credit would boom because demonetization would bring more money into banks simply has not materialized! Instead, with such poor credit growth accompanying a deposit surge and other stresses generated by demonetization, the financial health of the banking system has suffered some damage.



Even an economy in good health would have faced a serious danger of being derailed by a measure like the Government's demonetization exercise from which recovery would be uncertain. The Indian economy was not such a healthy one. Significant parts of it and investment were experiencing very sluggish growth and expansion of employment opportunities was practically non-existent. This was aggravating the already depressed income status of the overwhelming majority of working people, which is both cause and effect of the problem. Demonetization intensified this disease afflicting the Indian economy, made it more long-lasting and the recovery from it less likely.

The Colossal Failure

Those who made tall claims about demonetization breaking the backbone of terrorism or ending the protests in Kashmir may, after the events of the last few months, be unwilling to own up to their earlier statements. The evidence of the failure of demonetization in its ostensible primary objective of fighting black money is, however, no less damning.

It is nothing short of a scandal that the RBI and the Government took so long to declare the value of the invalidated currency that was returned to the RBI through banks. This has only served to strengthen the suspicion that more than being a well thought out economic policy measure, demonetization was primarily intended to be a PR exercise for the current regime. Once it went wrong, a cover up was initiated to minimize the damage. Now we know for certain that almost all the 15.44 lakh crores worth of cash has been returned to the RBI. At the least, this means the assumption that a significant part of the cash would not be returned to banks because it was the form in which hidden incomes were hoarded has fallen flat on its face.

The only way now left to justify the success of Demonetization as an anti-black money measure is to find significant amounts of hidden incomes from the cash deposits made in banks. The prospects of this were never going to be very good given that the amount of cash held by the public was always very small in relation to the size of India's black economy. The doubts about the black economy taking a big hit through this are only reinforced by what we now additionally know – namely the threat of penal action has not deterred any of the holding of cash from being deposited even as the response to the parallel income disclosure scheme which closed on 31 March 2017 – the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna (PMGKY) - was extremely tepid.

So, demonetization was neither a measure inflicting short-term pain for long-term gain nor a well-intentioned policy gone wrong. Far from hitting the black economy in a big way, the demonetization failure may only end up further emboldening tax evaders and others with illegal incomes. The squeeze it imposed on the economy may, on the other hand continue to show its effects for a long time to come in the form of aggravation of the economic crisis.

(Surajit Mazumdar is Professor of Economics at JNU)

Homage to Comrade Subodh Mehta

The CITU Secretariat expresses its profound grief at the demise of veteran trade union leader and freedom fighter Comrade Subodh Mehta. Comrade Subodh Mehta functioned as the general secretary of CITU Gujarat state committee and later as its president. He was a member of the national working committee of CITU for a long period. He was a well recognized and respected leader of the trade union and democratic movements of the state.

Comrade Subodh Mehta also functioned as the secretary of the state committee of CPI (M) and as a member of its central committee.

CITU conveys its heartfelt condolences to his comrades and the bereaved family members.

CITU Condemns Murder of Gauri Lankesh

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) strongly condemns the brutal murder of noted journalist and activist Gauri Lankesh in front of her residence in Bengaluru. She was a critic of the communal forces of RSS.

This murder is the latest in the series of murders of rationalists like Govind Pansare, Narendra Dhabolkar and M.M. Kalburgi by these communal divisive forces to create terror against criticism of the Hindutva communal forces and among minorities.

CITU conveys its condolences to her family and colleagues. CITU demands of the Government of Karnataka to immediately arrest the culprits and unearth the conspiracy to silence the voices of reason.

CITU calls upon its members and the working class of the country to protest against this heinous crime and attack on secularism.

National Convention of Class, Mass and Social Movements



This national convention of class, mass and social movements

Expresses grave concern at the attacks by Modi led BJP government at the centre on the hard won rights of all sections of the toiling people and on the secular fabric of the country. It came to power promising 'Acche Din' (Good Times): freedom from price rise, corruption and violence against women; employment generation and 'sabka saath sabka vikas' (Inclusive development for all). But, during it's more than 3 years rule, the Modi led BJP government has been achieving just the opposite. In addition to betraying its promises, it is attacking the rights achieved by the people through hard struggles and fostering a climate of violence against minorities, oppressed sections, and dissenting voices. The latest victim of this climate of organised hate-mongering and violence is the journalist and activist Gauri Lankesh.

Notes that corruption is being institutionalised, including foreign and domestic corporate funding for political parties, and crony capitalism.

Expresses its dismay at sharp rise of 42% in the number of farmers' suicides during 2014 – 2015, one in every 30 minutes; and the large number of hunger deaths in different parts of the country. Instead of implementing its poll promise of minimum support price as per Swaminathan Committee recommendations, the BJP government meets farmers' demands of MSP and loan waiver with bullets and killings as was witnessed in Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh. At the same time, bad loans of wilful corporate defaulters amounting to more than Rs 1.91 lakh crores were written off during 3 financial year of Modi regime with a record Rs.81, 683 crores in 2016-17 alone. FDI and corporatisation of agriculture through contract farming are being vigorously pursued with insurance companies profiteering in the name of crop insurance. Large scale displacement and dispossession of rural poor is taking place through forcible land acquisition without proper rehabilitation and resettlement. The Forest Rights Act is not being implemented and Adivasis and other forest dwellers are being evicted; the CNT/SPT Acts protecting adivasi right to land are being diluted. Agricultural workers are being pauperised in absence of jobs,

minimum wages and social security; and due to cuts in fund allocation, absence of adequate job and delayed payment in MNREGA.

Notes with alarm the deteriorating employment situation belying the promise of 2 crore jobs every year. In 3 years of Modi led BJP rule it is not just a job-less economy, but in reality a job-loss economy: Government's labour bureau statistics show that employment in 8 major labour intensive sectors plummeted to the lowest in 8 years; only 2.31 lakh new jobs were created in these sectors in the 9 months ending in December 2016. According to the 5th annual employment unemployment survey of the labour bureau, around 77% households in the country had no regular wage / salaried person. The job crisis and resulting distress amongst the common people has been rendered considerably worse by the huge adverse impact of demonetisation and GST, as well as increasing bank charges, and Aadhar linkage for social welfare benefits.

Further Notes that, in the name of 'Make in India' and 'Ease of Doing Business', corporates, both domestic and foreign, are being invited to exploit our country's resources, including oil, gas and other natural resources as well as India's workers. Laws to protect the environment are being diluted or openly violated. Labour laws are being amended brazenly favouring employers, snatching away the hard-earned rights of the workers including the right to organise, to do collective bargaining and claim social security benefits. Workers' lives, their safety, health and livelihood are sought to be left to the mercy of the greedy corporates.

Noted with Concern the massive drive for privatisation of our national wealth through disinvestment, outright sale and strategic sale of the public sector. Despite all talk of nationalism, even strategic and key sectors like defence, railways, banks, insurance, BHEL and others are sought to be handed over to the foreign and domestic corporates. Rapid decline in human development indices are a serious concern. There is a sharp decline and commercialisation of health and education as has been revealed in mass killing of children in Gorakhpur hospital.

Expresses its outrage at the growing attacks on dalits and minorities during the last 3 years; there have been organised attacks on dalits in Una in Gujarat, Saharanpur in UP and in several other places. Lynch mobs of so called 'gau rakshaks' have been attacking and killing Muslims on the pretext of 'beef eating'. Legal cattle traders carrying all necessary documents are also not being spared. The bans and restrictions on cattle trade have hit the livelihoods of lakhs of people, particularly dalits and minorities and other poorer sections in the country.

Condemns the brutal state repression and custodial violence unleashed on adivasis in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Jharkhand and on the people of Kashmir; and the ongoing attempts to impose the Hindi language on the people of Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Assam and other non-Hindi peoples.

Condemns the substantial shift in the country's independent foreign policy to embrace US imperialism and condone Israel's colonial and racist occupation of Palestine.

Condemns the government's apathy in controlling spiralling price rise particularly of essential commodities like vegetables, dal, etc affecting common people with deterioration of public distribution system. Instead of reducing petrol, diesel and cooking gas prices following decline of oil prices in the international market, the government has decided to increase price of LPG every month until the subsidy is totally eliminated and hand in hand with corporate houses plunder the people by hiking the domestic price of petrol and diesel every day. Increasing futures trading and commodity exchange are adversely impacting on the availability and prices of essential commodities.



Condemns the retrograde patriarchal attitudes being promoted by the communal fascist forces patronised by BJP Governments. These forces have unleashed a virtual war on women's autonomy. These regressive attitudes are also reinforced by employers – including Governments as well as Indian and transnational corporations which use them as a tool to exploit and discipline women workers. The ruling party is promoting a political culture which unleashes abuse against outspoken women in public life and which seeks to trivialise violence against women, protect the culprits, and blame the victims.

Condemns all out attacks on the freedom of expression and protest under the BJP regime. Dissent against government policies, opposition to the fundamentalist ideology of the RSS are being equated to being 'anti national'. Student activists, Universities with a progressive outlook, and rational thinkers are being attacked while regressive retrograde and unscientific ideas are being promoted. There is increasing communalisation of educational institutions, slashing of research seats and reduction in budget allocation for education.

Recalls the immense sacrifices made by the people of our country, our forefathers, who fought the British colonialism and achieved independence 70 years ago. They visualised an Independent India with an egalitarian society where all its citizens can lead an equal and dignified life irrespective of their caste, creed or gender. Today, the fundamental rights and freedoms, guaranteed by our Constitution to all our citizens, are being subjected to worst ever attack by the present BJP led government. There is shrinking of democratic spaces and increasing RSS ideology and personnel penetration in different spheres including educational institutions.

Extends support to the rapidly growing countrywide united trade unions and peasants struggles and calls for joint solidarity actions.

In such a situation, this convention calls upon:

- All left, democratic, secular, rational, progressive and broad minded people to come together to reclaim our country and our democracy; and
- Unite to fight back these fascist, authoritarian and autocratic elements and the divisive ideology that guides them; and

Decides to:

- Hold similar conventions with more broader participation in state capitals, district headquarters and at lower levels to propagate the issues and united actions; and
- Organise united people's 'Jan Ekta Mashal' assembly / procession with Mashal / candle light on 30 October, 2017 in districts / lower levels in widest areas across the country.

CITU Delegation visits WFTU Headquarters

Soon after the 15th conference of CITU, World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) extended an invitation to CITU leadership to visit its headquarters in Athens, as per their convenience. Accordingly a delegation comprising Hemalata, president, Tapan Sen, general secretary and Swadesh Dev Roye, national secretary of CITU and in charge of its international department visited Athens on 5-8 September 2017.

The CITU delegation was received at the airport on 5th September by Anda Anastasaki, general coordinator of the WFTU central office and welcomed at the hotel by George Mavrikos, general secretary and Valentino Pacho, senior leader, of WFTU who briefed about the programmes arranged during the visit.

Incidentally a delegation of South African Trade Unions including Zola Zapetha, general secretary of National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU), David Sipunzi, general secretary of National Union of Mines Workers (NUM) and Nkosinathi Theledi, general secretary of Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (POPCRU) along with Michael Makwayiba, president of WFTU were also visiting WFTU headquarters during the same period. The CITU delegation met them also.

The CITU delegation visited the WFTU headquarters on the morning of 6th September, presented mementos to the comrades there and held discussions with George Mavrikos. Welcoming the delegation to the WFTU headquarters, Mavrikos said that the visit would help in strengthening the common understanding that WFTU and CITU have about the global situation and the conditions of the working class across world. It would certainly help the trade union movement across the world and in India as well he said.

The WFTU general secretary said that the situation in all continents and areas in the world today is complex. The WFTU and its regional committees including its Asia Pacific committee are keenly following these. The analysis of the 17th Congress of WFTU held in October 2016 in Durban in South Africa is proving to be correct. The capitalist class is desperately trying to overcome the global crisis by putting more burdens on the workers. While the working class across the world is trying to resist these attacks, the ruling classes are adopting various methods to weaken working class struggles – by dividing them, isolating them etc. The embassies of different countries are also playing an active role by mobilising the migrant workers from their respective countries and isolating them from the mainstream trade union movement.

He explained in detail the efforts being made by the WFTU to develop proletarian internationalism and to help organise workers against the capitalist class. Because of these efforts WFTU is gaining and expanding its influence in different countries and continents. One significant development is expansion of WFTU in Africa and its increasing influence in Latin America. A meeting of the leadership of all the Trade Unions International (TUIs) of the WFTU, which is usually held at WFTU headquarters, will be held this year in Kolkata on 9-10 October. WFTU is expanding in all these areas. It is also making serious efforts to become stronger in Europe despite many difficulties. The militant Greek trade union PAME has been given the responsibility for this.

Mavrikos also enlisted the different international programmes planned by WFTU in the coming period. All preparations are being made for the successful implementation of the Action Day on 3rd October, focussing on the issues of immigration and refugees. The international

pharmaceutical and health conference will be held in Paris on 25-26 October. The conference on young workers will be held in Italy. The WFTU also wants to utilise the centenary of the Great October Revolution to spread its message across world. The preparatory meeting for the working women's Asia Pacific conference will be held in Vietnam on 6-7 December and the Congress of working women will be held in Panama on 8th March 2018.



Mavrikos requested CITU to send its representatives to all these conferences. Hemalata and Tapan Sen thanked the WFTU for the invitation and briefed about the conditions of workers in India, the initiatives and struggles by CITU and the joint trade union movement. They particularly mentioned the efforts for the massive joint trade union mobilisation on 9-11 November near the Parliament.

The meeting at WFTU headquarters was followed by a meeting with the executive secretariat of All Workers' Militant Front (PAME) the militant class oriented trade union of Greece, led by Giorgos Perros, at its head office. Giorgos Perros briefed the CITU delegation about the attacks by the Syriza government on the workers on the pretext of development and growth. It was trying to make legislations to ban the right to strike and obstruct collective actions by the working class. In the past three years, the wages of the workers were reduced by 40%; more than 10 lakh workers are not getting their salaries for durations ranging from 3 months to 1 year. Workers are asked to be patient and wait with the promise that conditions will improve in one year. Unemployment crossed 30%; youth unemployment crossed 55%. Workers in different sectors under the leadership of PAME are launching big struggles against such attacks. On 9th September they have planned huge demonstrations in many cities against the visit of the French President who was coming with a delegation of 40 corporate heads. PAME is preparing for another general strike and to intensify the struggle involving more and more people. He also mentioned the attempts by the ruling classes to rouse anti communist and 'nationalist' feelings among the people to divert their attention from the anti people policies. PAME is preparing the working class to take an internationalist stand in case of imperialist wars. It is also talking to the Turkish trade unions on this issue.

Concluding his presentation Perros said that despite the difficulties in facing the big employers, the government and the unions controlled by the employers and the government, PAME is optimistic that they will succeed, based on solidarity. They are inspired by the belief that the future of the working class cannot be the barbaric capitalist system and they are fighting to end the exploitation of man by man. Capitalism cannot be reformed. It belongs to the past and it has to be relegated to the past.

On 7th September the CITU delegation along with the South African delegation visited and paid floral tributes at the WFTU monument at the municipality of Kaisariani in Athens, erected in memory of the founder leaders of WFTU. They thanked the WFTU headquarters for making excellent arrangements for their stay in Athens and arranging for interactions with the trade union and other leaders of Greece.

Triple Talaq Verdict: a Battle Won, but the War Remains

CP Chandrasekhar and Jayati Ghosh

The SC's welcome verdict should bring public attention to the problems and needs of separated and divorced women across all religious communities in India

The verdict of the Supreme Court in the Triple Talaq case has quite rightly been welcomed and celebrated across India by all those who are concerned with even the most minimal rights of women. It is also a tribute to the prolonged and fearless struggle of groups like the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan in the face of much pressure from within and outside the Muslim community. But it is worth asking why – unlike many other societies in which higher rates of marital dissolution are often seen as expressions of greater choice and emancipation of women – in India, the possibility of divorce is still such a stark and unwelcome outcome for most women, even when their marriages have been unhappy, exploitative and oppressive. This is essentially because of the still low status of women in most of Indian society. This is reflected in their low paid work participation, which prevents them from accessing independent incomes; as well as in extremely regressive and unequal practices with respect to inheritance and asset ownership, which means that women, regardless of religion, are typically denied access to assets.

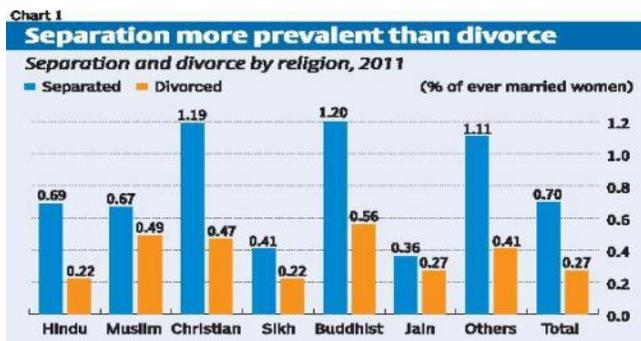
This means that the end of marriage can — and typically does — leave women in dire material straits, having to look after children and themselves without any apparent means of support.

Separation and divorce

The ability of a man to end a marriage through the demeaning and irresponsible route of triple talaq added further insult to this injury of a gender-unequal post-divorce reality, specifically for Muslim women. So it is an important victory that this practice will no longer be legally recognised. However, there is an important concern: most dissolved marriages in India occur through separation, rather than formal divorce. Chart 1 indicates the relative significance of both for women across different religious categories, according to the Census of India 2011. It should cause some concern, because it is evident that separation (typically in the form of abandonment by husbands) is much more widespread for women across all religions, than divorce.

Furthermore, while divorce was more prevalent among Muslim women than Hindu women (but less than among Christian, Buddhist and Other women) separation was actually higher among Hindu women.

Further, Chart 2 shows that Muslim women across all age groups do not have the highest rates of marital dissolution (taking separation and divorce together) and indeed their rates are only slightly higher than those of Hindu women, and significantly lower than for some other groups of women. So while triple talaq was definitely a completely unacceptable practice, it was only one of the ways in which married women could be abandoned, and women across all communities continue to face these problems of abandonment without adequate recourse to either justice or survival incomes.

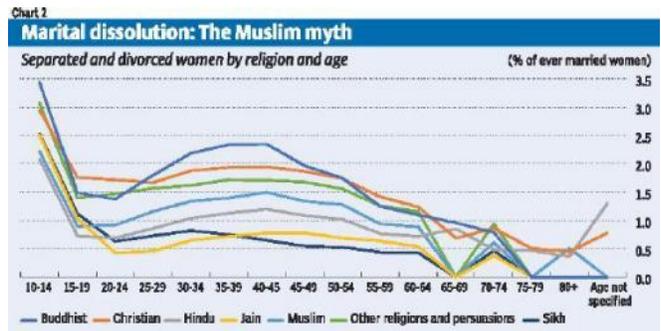


These problems are compounded by the poor handling of alimony or maintenance payments. Even though marriage and its termination in India are covered under various different legal systems and personal laws, in all of them, the dice are loaded against women. No matter what the legal framework, the only legal right that an Indian woman has on separation or divorce is a right to maintenance from her spouse. But maintenance awards are typically much

delayed because of the prolonged legal process, provide very small and inadequate amounts and do not ensure regular payment.

Informal woes

For obvious reasons, the problems are most severe for women whose marriages have not been formally ended. Even for those with formal divorce, the courts (whether family courts or formal courts) tend to be difficult and intimidating places for women seeking justice, especially for women with relatively little education and coming from poor families.



The repeated trips to courts and postponement of cases, dealing with lawyers' charges and with patriarchal attitudes displayed by lawyers and judges, all contribute to their sense of powerlessness, wasted effort, and have even dissuaded women from pursuing cases beyond a point. Women who have taken up employment after dissolution of the marriage, even if the employment is very low-paying, have been found to get less sympathy from courts in terms of alimony and maintenance. This is the context in which the triple talaq judgement should be viewed. Getting some alimony or maintenance is difficult for women across religious categories. But for Muslim women, the matter became even more difficult with the passage of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986 (or MWA), which was widely seen as an essentially patriarchal response to the outcry among the male Muslim community to the Supreme Court judgement in the Shah Bano case (which forced her former husband to pay continued maintenance to her).

The MWA drastically limited the husband's liability to his former wife. It basically stated that, once a woman's *iddat* expenses (covering three months' subsistence) had been paid and she had received her *mehr* (dowry) and any other money or property that had been gifted to her at the time of marriage, the husband had no further financial responsibility towards her.

This law came in for much criticism from women activists and others, as a discriminatory law that singled out Muslim women to deprive them of maintenance rights that would be available to all other divorced women in the country.

It was taken for granted that this would have seriously detrimental consequences for Muslim women, encouraging higher rates of divorce that would allow men to get away without providing maintenance.

Other concerns

But the subsequent reality may be more complex. The MWA requires the husband to provide "reasonable and fair provision" during the three-month *iddat* period, a clause that was further reinforced by a Supreme Court judgement of 2001 that "during the *iddat* period, a Muslim man is liable to make a payment to his ex-wife that will secure her ability to sustain herself in the future. As a result, courts began to require men to give their ex-wives substantial lump-sum amounts or to transfer some material assets such as land, a house, or gold and jewellery.

In at least some cases, the implementation of the law had a (probably unintended) positive effect on divorced Muslim women, by forcing the ex-husbands to give substantial once-off payments and releasing the divorced women from the uncertainty and unreliability of periodic low payments of maintenance. (Indeed, they might even be better off than non-Muslim women in this respect.) But of course, in most other cases, lack of material support for women remains a huge concern. In any case, the point is that the problems faced by women in India whose marriages end are numerous, and result from economic, legal, social and cultural practices that are widespread across all religious groups. This Supreme Court verdict should cause all of us to take note of this and strive for more gender just and sensitive solutions for all such women.

(Courtesy: Business Line)

Marital Rape

Subjugation of Women within Marriage

Mariam Dhawale

Marital rape is described as unwanted sexual intercourse by a man with his wife without her express or implied consent, either forcefully or by threat of physical harm. It is a form of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Marital rape is often a chronic form of violence for the victim which takes place within abusive relations. The reluctance to criminalize and prosecute marital rape is due to traditional views of marriage and to cultural expectations of subordination of a wife to her husband. The act of imposing sexual intercourse against the will of the wife is often not identified as morally wrong, as it is seen as the man's right to sexual and reproductive control of his wife.

Many young women have said that even if they felt discomfort and didn't want to have sex, they accepted their husbands' wishes and submitted, fearing beating or being abandoned. It is believed that a husband is entitled to sex any time he demands it, and that if his wife refuses him, he has the right to use force. Marital rape is seen as an incident provoked by the wife who refuses to perform her duty.

Married women who are subjected to this kind of sexual violence by their husbands have no place to go; they cannot complain about this to their family due to societal pressure and also they cannot go to the police because the law does not recognize marital rape as an offence. Thus, victims of marital rape bear the pain silently with no remedy available to them.

Though society as a whole considers rape as a very serious crime and the law also gives importance to punishing the rapists, rape laws do not give any protection to married women who are subjected by their husbands to forcible sexual intercourse.

Most of the developed world has criminalized marital rape, but India has not yet done so. The absence of legal provisions recognizing marital rape as an offence encourages the man to continue with his offensive behavior leaving his wife in a helpless situation.

According to a 2016 UNICEF Report, India has the highest number of child brides – with 47% of girls being married before they attain the age of 18. Further, India ranks second highest in the rate of child marriages in South Asia, with 75% of the girls married before the age of 18. The National Family Health Survey 2015-16, has recorded that forced sexual encounters by older husbands have long-lasting adverse impacts on the psychological and emotional well-being of the wife and often result in post-traumatic stress disorder with young girls being at a greater risk of suffering marital rape.

A PIL is being heard in the Delhi High Court by an NGO RIT Foundation, challenging Section 375 IPC, on the ground that it does not include forced sexual intercourse of a man with his wife within the definition of rape. The PIL has sought to declare the provision unconstitutional as it discriminates against married women sexually assaulted by their own husbands. The court has allowed the intervention application of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) seeking the striking down of the exception in the IPC which does not consider forced sexual intercourse with a wife, not less than 15 years of age, as rape and hence not a crime.

A marriage is not a license for a husband to forcibly rape his wife with impunity. The feudal and patriarchal system considers sexual relationship to be an important part of a married woman's duty towards her husband and she is not supposed to deny that to him. Her role must be of submission and surrender. This has to be challenged. It is an important part of the struggle for women's equality and emancipation.

(Mariam Dhawale is General Secretary, AIDWA)

39 Manual Scavengers Die in 100 Days



In August as many as 10 sanitation workers died in Delhi while cleaning clogged gutters. Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 has not been a deterrent as manual scavengers continue to be employed due to the lack of proper implementation of the law by the authorities and apathy of the general public.

In clear violation of the ban, municipal corporations in Delhi follow this practice. The workers regularly go inside storm water drains and sewers, without any checking

about whether they are safe and free of poisonous gases, etc. Around 250 sanitation workers across the capital clean them, mostly without any safety gear or protective clothing.

Only 5-10% of manual scavengers who work with the municipalities in Delhi live till their retirement age. Some die on the job due to inhalation of toxic gases, others drown after they misjudge the height of drains. Many others suffer from fatal diseases due to constant exposure to waste. They finish their eight-hour duty only with a bamboo stick tied to a basket. The condition of this basket has become so poor that it cannot hold any sludge. A ladder, which is supposed to be used to descend into drains, lies unused as it is not strong enough to take any weight.

“We cannot wear any footwear because the normal ones get stuck in the sludge in the drains. And every now and then, bones, needles or glass pieces pierce our feet,” says one of them. They carefully step down into an almost 15-feet-deep drain to sieve out a load of sludge - a mix of plastic, kitchen waste and even human excreta - with their bare hands.

Crores of rupees are spent on the Government's 'Swacch Bharat Abhiyan' but the very basic equipment for cleaning gutters is not procured because the protection and well-being of poor people who clean these has never been on the agenda of the government. Is it because almost all of them are either Dalits or Muslims?

Guilty Go Scot Free

The Act is a comprehensive legislation which prohibits employment of manual scavengers, terming it a non-bailable offence and offenders could be imprisoned for up to five years. Despite being a stringent legislation, the utilisation of the Act has not been impressive. Between 2014 and 2016, nearly 1,500 people have died while cleaning septic tanks across India.

Between 1993 and 2013, no convictions were recorded for violation of the Manual Scavenging Act. This shows the apathy of state governments and local authorities towards the practice. Karnataka, which has over 15,000 manual scavengers, recorded 60 deaths related to manual scavenging, between 2008 and 2016. No convictions were recorded in relation to these deaths, showing how lightly the problem is looked at by the state administration. Unfortunately, the situation is no different in many other states.

Silencing Rational Voices Will Make Them Louder

Adeera

“You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring from coming” – Pablo Neruda

On September 6, Gauri Lankesh, a 5ft tall, thin-framed 55-year-old journalist-activist, was riddled with bullets by two men on a motorcycle on the portico of her home in Bangalore, called the Silicon Valley of India. It was 8 p.m and Gauri, who was living alone in the city, was just entering her home from work. She edited *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*, a Kannada weekly tabloid, and wrote vociferously against right wing groups, against growing attacks on minorities in the form of mob lynchings etc, against caste discrimination and superstitious practices. Gauri was also instrumental in getting some Naxals back into the mainstream, with help from the Karnataka government.

Gauri’s brutal murder is strikingly similar to the killings of three rationalists – Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and MM Kalburgi. Like these three, Gauri was known for her rationalist, Left liberal and fearless views, and also had been receiving threats from Hindutva groups. Her name is said to have been on a hit-list of ‘dissenters’

Gauri’s lawyer B T Venkatesh, who was defending her in a defamation case filed by Dharwad BJP MP Prahlad Joshi and BJP leader Umesh Dushi, told the [wire.in](http://www.wire.in) that he was pretty certain that the killing was “ *a sinister and pre-planned act by Hindu terror units.*”

“Let us say it loud and clear. Hindu terror units killed Gauri Lankesh. She opposed the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the BJP and these Hindutva forces and this killing is the silencing of that voice against hate politics. It had nothing to do with all the defamation cases filed against her”, he said.

The firebrand journalist, like Kalburgi, also belonged to the powerful Lingayat community in Karnataka and had written against the community being part of the Hindu fold as she strongly felt that the Basavanna tradition followed by Lingayats was essentially anti-casteist, rational and secular. This had riled Hindutva forces no end, as BJP has a strong support base among the Lingayats and Karnataka is all set for Assembly polls next year.

Gauri was also among the founders of the communal harmony platform – *Komu Souharda Vedike* – and was active in taking out marches and dharnas against right wing forces, the offshoots of RSS, their use of fake news to spread misinformation and divide society. She was a strong proponent of free speech and a plural India.

Committed to the cause of the downtrodden and the socially and politically disenfranchised, Gauri was the daughter of eminent author, poet and playwright P Lankesh, the editor of one of the most influential news magazines in Kannada, *Lankesh Patrike*, who died in 2000.

The cold-blooded murder to silence Gauri’s voice and send a signal to all those who raise their voice against RSS and its ‘shadow armies’, however, has given rise to widespread outrage across major cities. People from all walks of life came out in large numbers in Bangalore,

Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Trivandrum, Kolkata, Lucknow, Pune and many other places in protest against her murder, forcing the Karnataka government to set up a Special Investigation Team.

The killing of Gauri, however, is a grim indicator of intolerance and violence being unleashed by right wing forces across the country. The signs are ominous and a big blot on the world's largest democracy, ruled by right wing forces at the Centre and in several states. The killings of rationalists such as Gauri, Dabholkar, Pansare and Kalburgi, show to what extent these fascist forces can go to silence the voices of free speech and upholders of plurality. These forces should not be allowed to succeed. It is time for progressive, rational voices to come together and become louder.

There's a Method in these Murders

Narendra Dabholkar

August 2013 — Dr Narendra Dabholkar, 67, was shot at point blank range in Pune by two unidentified men when he was on his morning walk. Dabholkar was a rationalist and well-known anti-superstition crusader in Maharashtra, and was receiving threats from Hindutva groups. At the time of his murder, Dabholkar was spearheading a campaign to get the Maharashtra government to pass an anti-superstition and black magic Bill. Two men — Virendra Tawade from Sanatan Santhsa and Hindu Janjagran Samiti – were arrested in the case. The probe was handed over to CBI but his family still awaits justice.



Govind Pansare

February 2015 — CPI leader Govind Pansare, 84, was a lawyer and wrote extensively on subjects ranging from caste and the rights of minorities. A close associate of Pansare, he was also shot at close range by two men on a motorcycle outside his house in Kolhapur. A well-known critic of right-wing forces, Pansare had written many books on the ills in Indian society. In his book 'Who Was Shivaji', he portrayed Shivaji as a secular leader, contrary to the portrayal by right wing outfits. He was receiving threats from Hindutva groups.

The main arrest in the case was of Samir Gaikwad, activist of the Sanathan Sanstha. However, he was granted bail by a local court in Kolhapur. A special investigation team is probing the murder, but the case is yet to be resolved.

M M Kalburgi

August 2015 — MM Kalburgi, 76, an eminent litterateur and former vice-chancellor of Kannada University, was killed at close range outside his residence in Dharwad, Karnataka, by two men who knocked at his door.

A member of the politically dominant Lingayat community (traditional BJP supporters), Kalburgi was also a crusader against superstitious practices, idol worship and was critical of Hindutva groups. He was also receiving threats from these groups. Not a single arrest has been made in the case so far, even though has been handed over to the CID.

Postal regd. No. DL©-01/1199/2015-2017 Delhi, Licenced to post without prepayment under
Licence No. U(C)-07/2015-17, Posted on 26-27 (Advance month) at NDPSO, ND-110001 RNI 37025/81.
(Date of Publication- 24th September 2017)



Anganwadi Strike Maharashtra

Unity and Struggle



ASHA Workers Assam



ASHA Workers Andhra Pradesh



Peasantry Rajasthan

Printed by K. Hemalata and published by K.Hemalata on behalf of the AICCWW(CITU), 13-A, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi 110 002,
Ph: 011-23221306, Fax: 011-23211284, Email: aiccww@yahoo.com, Website: www.citucentre.org and
printed at Progressive Printers, A-21, Jhilmil Industrial Area, G T Road, Shahdara, Delhi-95. Editor: K.Hemalata