

## **AIDWA CEC CALL : UPHOLD WOMEN'S RIGHTS, SAFEGUARD CONSTITUTION**

**Mariam Dhawale**

This period has been a very challenging time for all the progressive, democratic and secular forces in the country. The results of the 17th Lok Sabha elections have been a great setback. The BJP aroused nationalist jingoism, zeroing in on Pulwama and Balakot, and shifted the poll narrative from the burning issues of the people. The consolidation of the Hindutva vote bank through communally charged campaigns and violent attacks strengthened communal polarisation and helped the BJP. The massive money and media power marshalled in favour of the BJP by the corporate lobby and a servile election commission completed the picture.

One more reason for the BJP victory was its propaganda about various central government schemes and its outreach to their beneficiaries. AIDWA has been raising the problems faced by women and organising struggles on the implementation of the various schemes – Ujjwala Gas, Swachh Bharat, housing, health, etc – announced by the government. But there has been a weakness in understanding the impact of these schemes on women.

With this victory, the offensives by the Modi-Shah-led BJP-RSS government are going to increase sharply. Economic assaults, communal attacks on backward sections and minorities, assaults on democratic rights, civil liberties and constitutional institutions have already begun.

It is in this background that the AIDWA central executive committee (CEC) meeting held on June 28-29-30, 2019 in New Delhi took several important decisions to reach out to the mass of women by going to the grass-roots level. CEC members seriously discussed the aftermath of these elections and the need to change our style of functioning. 71 out of 99 CEC members and 4 out of 12 special invitees from 21 states attended this meeting. The central secretariat meeting attended by 28 out of 32 members was held prior to the CEC. President Malini Bhattacharya, along with vice-presidents Sudha Sundarraman and U Vasuki chaired different sessions of the meeting. Patrons Brinda Karat and Banani Biswas also guided the meeting.

### **REPORT AND DISCUSSION ON CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS**

After the condolence resolution, the 23-page report on current international and national developments for the period from February 16 to June 15, 2019 was placed by the general secretary Mariam Dhawale. It was adopted after important suggestions by 18 CEC members who took part in the two hour discussion on this report.

Some of the issues raised during the discussions were: The serious drought situation in the country is having a disastrous impact on the lives of the people, especially women. Large scale distress migration is taking place in many parts of the country. Various struggles on the issues of

safe drinking water, proper health facilities, regular supply of electricity, street lights, underground drainage, ration shops and civic facilities were organised in Tamil Nadu, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Telangana, Maharashtra, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh. Protests for water supply were held in Rajasthan. Adivasi women in Korba, Chhattisgarh are resisting being evicted from their agricultural plots in the forests. A morcha of 1500 tribal women submitted a memorandum to the Korba district collector. Similar struggles are going on in Maharashtra.

The need of the hour is to intensify our struggle for implementation of MNREGA. AIDWA is organizing thousands of MNREGA women workers in 3-4 districts in Karnataka. A successful experiment in water rejuvenation involving MNREGA workers has been carried out in Gulbarga district. Members from the 'water planning and managing body' of the villages participated in the two-day workshop held in Gulbarga. A successful nine month long struggle of crèche workers in Haryana forced the authorities to take them back to work. Delhi leaders intervened in a case of sexual harassment in a factory in NOIDA, took a mass delegation to the Deputy Labour Commissioner resulting in the reinstatement of the complainant women.

Multifarious programmes and environment awareness campaigns were organised in Kerala. A Muslim women's convention was held in Lucknow based on the findings of a survey in 18 areas on the socio-economic conditions of the Muslim community. Campaign against superstitions was organised in Neyyatinkara in Kerala. 500 liquor shops have closed due to AIDWA's interventions in Andhra Pradesh. The medium of street theatre was used for popularizing our slogans in Madhya Pradesh. We also have to systematically use the social media for taking up issues especially among young women. Awareness programmes were held for young mothers on June 1 in Kerala. The Sushila Gopalan Trust is holding programmes jointly with the Child Rights Commission. The Sushila Gopalan Library is run by the AIDWA centre. A women writers' camp was held in coordination with the Writers' Academy. Political and organizational classes have been held in Telangana and Uttar Pradesh.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

There were 3.39 lakh cases of crimes against women in 2016, the last year for which these figures were published. There were 38,947 cases of rape. That means every hour, four cases of rape took place. More than one third of these cases of rape were against children. But the conviction rate in the same year which reported an increase in crime reported a decrease in conviction: just 18.9 per cent of those accused were convicted. The conviction rate for crimes against dalit and adivasi women is even lower.

The law and order situation in Uttar Pradesh has deteriorated. Lynching, incidents of rape and murder of minor girls are on a rise. Thousands of people including poets and artists participated in the human chain organised by the women's joint forum to condemn the Pollachi sexual

abuse in Tamil Nadu. More than 200 young girls and women have been victims of sexual abuse in this case. AIDWA's intervention compelled the government to pay a relief of Rs 4 lakh to the family of a 7 year old girl who was sexually assaulted and murdered in Thudiyalur, Tamil Nadu. AIDWA has regularly intervened in incidents of violence in Haryana and Andhra Pradesh. A discussion was organised with law students of Jindal University on the issue of honour killings in Haryana. A campaign against sex determination tests and abortions of female foetuses was organised in 78 village committees in Kozhikode district. AIDWA intervened in the rape and murder of young girls in Hajipur in Telangana. In Maharashtra, the AIDWA organised joint demonstrations on the issue of the tragic suicide of a young tribal doctor, Dr Payal Tadv.

### **COMMUNAL ONSLAUGHT**

Students in Kendriya Vidyalayas and Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, both funded by the government, are being made to recite shlokas during the morning prayers. During the morning assembly, daily, one student has to recite one shloka and its meaning from the Bhagavad Gita or the Vedas. Isha Foundation and Akshaya Patra Foundation are allowed into schools in the name of yoga instruction and providing mid-day meals. Lessons from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita are being taught in several BJP-ruled states. AsaramBapu's life is taught in the chapter on 'Saints' for class three students in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan. He has been in jail since 2013 in a case of sexual assault of a 16-year-old girl in his ashram.

AIDWA jointly intervened during the attacks on poor Kashmiri vendors in Lucknow. AIDWA fact finding team conducted an inquiry into the caste violence in Ponparappi, Tamil Nadu and submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of the Health Department. Programmes to challenge the anti-women teachings of Manusmriti and taking forward our campaigns on social reform movements were organised in Andhra Pradesh involving college students.

The BJP is flouting all democratic norms to stifle any criticism. Repression is let loose on those who oppose or do not agree with the government dictates. AIDWA CEC condemned the victimisation of Sanjiv Bhatt and passed a resolution supporting Shweta Bhatt's struggle for justice. AIDWA leaders have been trolled in social media by the hate mongers. The statue of Birsa Munda was broken on June 9 in Jharkhand.

### **ATTACKS ON LEFT FORCES**

The situation in Tripura is extremely serious. There is an atmosphere of terror and fear. The BJP state government is undoing the pro-people policies of the erstwhile LF government. Now people have to pay fees for the education of their children whereas it was free under the LF government. In a move towards privatisation, 20 schools have been handed over to ISKCON. Spoilt sugar is being given through ration shops. Load shedding has also increased. AIDWA

activists have bravely faced the intimidation and assaults of the TMC and BJP in West Bengal during and after the Lok Sabha elections.

## **FUTURE TASKS**

The agenda on future tasks was placed by Kananika Ghose Bose. The CEC clearly opined that it is very necessary for all our leaders and activists to reach out to the mass of women, work at the grass roots level and understand the concrete situation at the ground level. We must change our style of functioning and win the hearts and minds of women.

### **Captain Laxmi Sehgal Memorial Day – July 23**

AIDWA shall hold programmes to encourage people to pledge to donate their body and eyes on this day. Blood donation camps shall also be organised wherever possible on July 23. The campaign against superstitions will be taken forward through this Memorial Day programme.

### **Vimal Ranadive Death Anniversary Day – July 24**

Various programmes especially among working women will be held to pay homage to our veteran leader Vimal Ranadive on July 24.

### **Quit India Day to Independence Day – August 9 to 15**

We will be completing 77 years of the Quit India Movement which was launched on August 8, 1942, and 72 years of our Independence on August 15. The CEC has decided to organise multifarious programmes to popularise the ideals of democracy and secularism of our freedom movement from August 9 to 18. These programmes shall be held in all districts involving the mass of women. Commemorating our freedom fighters, lectures to explain the anti-women strictures of the Manusmriti, joint celebrations on Bakri Eid, exhibitions, cultural activities, etc. are the different types of programmes that will be organised at the local level. The focus of these programmes will be on the rights given by our Constitution and to explain the dangers of the Manusmriti ideology obliterating these rights.

### **Bi-Centenary of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar – September 26**

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was born on 26 September 1820. The bi-centenary year starts on September 26, 2019. He was a philosopher, educator, writer, reformer and philanthropist. He was the most prominent campaigner for Hindu widow remarriage and petitioned the Legislative Council on this issue despite severe opposition by the fundamentalists who considered it a breach of Hindu customs. The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act was passed in 1856. A note with details about Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar will be sent to the states to help in popularising the social reform movement.

## **New Education Policy**

A brief summary explaining certain aspects of the Draft New Education Policy (NEP) formulated by the BJP central government was placed by Archana Prasad. CEC members will send their suggestions to the AIDWA centre and a memorandum will be sent to the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

## **Solidarity with Cuba**

The 9<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference of Solidarity with Cuba is being held in Kathmandu, Nepal on July 26 and 27. The CEC decided that Debolina Hembram (West Bengal), Adv Sabida Begum (Kerala) and P Suganthi (Tamil Nadu) will represent AIDWA in this conference.

## **AIDWA STATE CONFERENCES**

The CEC reviewed the holding of unit, local, area, zonal, tehsil and district conferences. It has been decided that all the state committees must pay urgent attention to this important organisational task and complete all their conferences. During the conferences, young activists have to be identified, encouraged and trained to involve them to take up organisational responsibilities.

AIDWA state conferences of Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra and Delhi have already been successfully held. The dates of the remaining state conferences are:-

Madhya Pradesh (Morena)-July 16-17-18; Karnataka (Mandya)-July 30-31-August 1; Chhattisgarh (Korba)-August 4; Rajasthan (Hanumangarh)-August 27-28; Haryana (Bhiwani)-August 31-September 1; Punjab (Jalandhar)-September 2-3; Jharkhand (Ranchi)-September 5-6; Odisha (Rourkela)-September 7-8; Uttar Pradesh (Kanpur)-September 17-18-19; Assam (Kamrup)-September 21-22-23; Uttarakhand (Dehradun)-September 24-25; Himachal Pradesh (Nahan)-September 26-27; Bihar (Madhepura)-October 19-20; Kerala (Kozhikode)-October 25-26-27. The dates for West Bengal, Tripura, Gujarat and Manipur will be fixed soon.

## **12<sup>TH</sup> ALL INDIA CONFERENCE – MUMBAI, DECEMBER 2019**

The AIDWA 12<sup>th</sup> All India Conference will be held from December 27 to 30, 2019 in Mumbai, Maharashtra around the theme ***Safeguard our Constitution, Uphold Women's Rights – All Together, Fight Together, Forward Together***. The conference venue will be named after Ahilya Rangnekar, conference hall after Mangaleshwari Debbarma and public meeting dais after Gauri Lankesh. The meeting for the formation of the Reception Committee is fixed for July 27. AIDWA Maharashtra state committee and Left and progressive forces have started preparations for this conference. State president Naseema Shaikh and state secretary Prachi Hatiwlekar have

so far attended 15 successful AIDWA district conventions to prepare for the All India Conference.

Along with the political-organisational report, eight commission papers for the conference have been decided as follows:- Regressive Ideologies-Reinforcing Patriarchy-Persistent Inequalities; Agrarian Crisis and Women; Urbanisation and Women; Women in Education; LGBTQ groups; Issues of Differently Abled Women; Social Media and its Impact on Women; and Attacks on Women's Rights in the Legal Sphere under Modi Regime.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

The agenda of membership was placed by P Sathi Devi. The CEC congratulated the Kerala state committee and all the activists for completion of their membership target of 52 lakhs for 2019.

It was decided that the next meeting of the CEC, the last before the coming All India Conference, will be held on November 1-2-3, 2019.

## **CONCLUSION**

AIDWA has taken up many issues in various states over the years. But evidently all this has not been enough. Vastly increasing the sweep and intensity of struggles, linking them with convincing and effective political campaigns and greatly strengthening our organisation at all levels is the need of the hour. To achieve this, there must be a radical improvement in the functioning of our organisation and in each one of us.

We have been organising many programmes in defence of secularism but have not been able to gauge the impact of the communal propaganda on the psyche of women. How women are being influenced and co-opted into the Hindutva design is a matter that we will have to address urgently and find ways and means to veer women away from this poisonous propaganda. We have to work with much greater strength and determination at the grass-roots, understand the opinions of women, learn from them and mobilise them for building a strong and united women's movement.

AIDWA is the largest women's organisation in the country having a membership of nearly one crore in 23 states. No other women's organisation has this kind of reach. Yet, the fact is that we have been unable to influence most of our members to staunchly defend and deepen democratic, secular and progressive values. We are heading towards our 12th All India conference in December 2019. We will have to make a serious review of our political, ideological and organisational work and functioning at all levels, analyse our weaknesses and strive to overcome them. We must collectively build our organisation and equip our activists to

face the challenges ahead. We have to build a team that is united in will and action. That was the main direction given by this AIDWA CEC meeting.