

AIDWA



NEWSLETTER-13

March-2022

Editorial Communication

Dear comrades, friends and well-wishers,

Just how do you look at the unprecedented medley of shocking incidents taking place around you every day in this country? Do you regard them as a series of disparate confusing and confused assaults upon your consciousness which merely reduce your known world into chaos? Let me tell you that whatever the range of my individual experience, it tells me that there is a method in this madness. Powerful agencies are creating these nightmares for us which are actually not unconnected with one another and the objective situation particularly in the 'Covid Era' is being used by these political forces to strengthen their hegemonic grasp over us. It is for us to discover these connections if we are to free ourselves from this thralldom.

Take, for example, the weird and violent situation unfolding in Karnataka over the last month or so on the so-called 'Hijab issue'. Perhaps you are looking at it as a problem of that state; maybe in your pride over your own secular credentials, you are thinking such things are bound to happen where BJP is in power and all we have to do is to do our best to reduce its electoral strength wherever we may be. Surely this latter is an important concern of all right-minded people, but is it enough? An electoral battle is going on in Uttar Pradesh and in other states. Mobilising Hindu votes for electoral gain in such states is no doubt a desperate concern for the Modi-Shah-Yogi team. The only way they can think of doing this is through open communal campaign and it has to be instigated all over the country at this moment through whatever issue can be used to spark it off. As it has been aptly put: 'Biryani for UP is being cooked in Karnataka'.

But we should not stop here in understanding the sequence of events. That would make it a temporary concern that would come to an end with the elections.

Even among people with secular credentials, do we not find the lurking saving clause that 'after all, the hijab (a head cover) is an issue for Muslim girl students only! We have to support them against RSS hoolignism of course, but it does not directly concern the entire student community!' There is no doubt that the Muslim community is a special target of attack today, but let us not forget that this particular attack comes at a time when another series of changes are being enforced upon us through laws and policies as well as through direct and indirect violations of our Constitution.

It seems to me that the ugly chain of incidents erupting in Udipi are indirectly but integrally linked also with various other initiatives. It has invisible links for instance with the exclusionist thrust of the New Education Policy of 2020 which has been shown to have vicious surprises in store for previously marginalised groups of students seeking their due place in the arena of education. Dalits, adivasis and the poor, particularly the girls among them, are in the process of being pushed out, the same thing is happening to Muslim girls in Karnataka using the hijab as excuse. Undemocratic educational governance is a cornerstone of NEP 2020. It allows the rule of regressive political forces on the campus and that is just what we find in Karnataka today, it is not just an issue for Muslim girls.

In fact, to my mind, the Udipi issue has underground connections also with all the insidious moves that are being rehearsed at various stages and in various modes in the legal arena to raise the age of marriage, to introduce anti-conversion laws, and yes, to enforce what RSS-BJP understands by 'common civil code'. They are not just targeting the Muslim community, but imposing arbitrarily regressive laws against the independence of the entire younger generation to develop critical intelligence, to choose their life-partners and to live free and dignified lives of their own.

It is not that all this is part of a conscious concerted conspiracy. All that it shows is the desperate groping in the dark of the BJP-RSS to wield their authority to the full. But unless we understand the 'hijab-issue' in relation to the totality of its direct and indirect social-political connections, we cannot extract our victory from their desperation.

Malini Bhattacharya

President, All India Democratic Women's Association

**Call for March 8, 2022 – International Women’s Day
by Mariam Dhawale**

From the Archives of AIDWA:

**Bibha Ghosh Goswami’s Speech While Moving the Working
Women Welfare Bill, 1985 in Lok Sabha**

**A translated extract from ‘Mone Mone’(‘Musings’),
Kanak Mukhopadhyay’s reminiscences in Bengali**

Women’s Struggles across the World

**Sultana Khaya: “Despite persecution, Sahrawi women have not
stopped demanding freedom and independence”
by Capire**

Call for March 8, 2022 – International Women’s Day

"Education and Employment our Right; Fight for Equal Rights; Reclaim Secular India"

-Mariam Dhawale, General Secretary, AIDWA

March 8 - International Women’s Day (IWD) is celebrated all over the world to reiterate the struggle for equality, justice and a violence free life for women since 1910. Clara Zetkin had proposed in the International Socialist Women’s Conference held in Copenhagen in August 1910 that March 8 be celebrated as International Women’s Day. The United Nations began celebrating this day from 1975. The UN theme for International Women’s Day this year is “**Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow**”. This theme recognizes the contribution of women and girls around the world, who are fighting to build a more sustainable future for all.



The All India Democratic Women’s Association has given a call to celebrate March 8 jointly with the CITU, DYFI and SFI. The slogan is "**Education and Employment our Right; Fight for Equal Rights; Reclaim Secular India**".

The pandemic and the highly unjust, blatantly pro-corporate policies of the Modi-led BJP-RSS government have made the lives of women miserable. The India Supplement 2022 Report ‘Inequality Kills’ revealed that when 84 per cent of households in the country suffered a decline in their income in a year marked by tremendous loss of life and livelihoods, the number of Indian billionaires grew from 102 to 142.

The 'World Inequality Report 2022' states that India is among the most unequal countries in the world, with rising poverty and an 'affluent elite.' The report highlights that the top 10 per cent and top 1 per cent in India hold 57 per cent

and 22 per cent of the total national income respectively while the bottom 50 per cent share has gone down to 13 per cent. The bottom 50 per cent of the nation can be seen to own almost nothing. The top 10 per cent owns 65 per cent of the total household wealth and the top 1 per cent own 33 per cent of the total household wealth in India.

This also reflects on the growing gender inequality in India. The share of female labour income in India is equal to 18 per cent which is among the lowest in the world. Cuts in government spending for MNREGA and central schemes are pushing the marginalized sections on the verge of total destitution with absolutely no means of survival. The Global Hunger Report has shown India to be having the largest number of hungry people in the world. This means that crores of women and girl children are being deprived of their right to nutrition and food security.

Privatisation of all essential services has increased the burden of unpaid care work and domestic labour of women. The demand for recognition of scheme workers as government employees is being ignored. Discrimination and sexual harassment at the workplace, violence against women, availability of health facilities, 33 per cent reservation for women in the parliament and state assemblies are constant issues of struggles. The NEP is a devious plot to deprive a large section of children from their right to education.



Equal rights for women and defence of secularism have to be taken up vigorously as there is a significant threat to these ideals by the Manuwadi BJP-

RSS government. It is hell- bent on undoing the Constitutional principles and replacing it with the Manusmruti.

All of us have to redouble our efforts to fight for gender equal world free of bias, stereotypes and discrimination, for a world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive, a world where difference is valued and celebrated. Together we can forge women's equality.

From the Archives of AIDWA:

Bibha Ghosh Goswami's Speech While Moving the Working Women Welfare Bill, 1985 in Lok Sabha



[This has been preserved in our archives from the proceedings of Loksabha, 26 April, 1985 (Item no.17, 16.57 hours). Here we find recently-departed AIDWA leader Bibha Ghosh Goswami, who had been four times elected as CPI(M) member from Nabadwip, West Bengal, moving a private member's bill (Working Women Welfare Bill, 1985) in parliament. The original speech is in Bengali of which the translated version appearing in the Loksabha Archives has been reprinted here. It is an example of the concerns of the women's movement which our MPs sought to highlight in the House.]

SHRIMATI BIBHA GHOSH GOSWAMI (Nabadwip) : Sir, I beg to move :

“That the Bill to provide for the welfare of women employed in various industries and establishments, be taken into consideration.”

Sir, I will be speaking in my mother tongue, Bengali.

[Translation]

*I am very glad that we are getting an opportunity to discuss this Bill today. This happens to be the last year of the women's decade. It would have been better if this Bill was pre-scheduled to be discussed today and all the Hon. Members of this House knew about it. As it happens, many Members especially the lady M.Ps had no idea that this Bill will be discussed today. Had they known about it, they certainly would have been present in the House in much larger numbers and would have participated in this discussion. This bill has come up for discussion today quite

unexpectedly as the two Hon. Members who were to pilot two other earlier Bills are not present in the House by chance. It would have been very good if all the Hon. Lady Members were present and could place their views on this Bill before this august House. However, I hope that on the next occasion many more lady Members will be present and will participate in the discussion.

Sir, we all know that the women of our country are to a great extent deprived of the benefits envisaged for them in our Constitution. Most women are living as Second Class citizens, and they are victims of exploitation in some form or other. The number of women who work i.e. who get any opportunity to work, is very insignificant compared to men.

In the latest census of 1981 it has been stated that out of 66.3 million working women, 45.9 million are 'mainworkers' i.e. who are employed for the major part of a year, and 20.3 million have been identified as 'marginal workers' i.e. who work occasionally in a year. In the Census of 1981 the concept of the term 'worker' has been enlarged vis-a-vis the 1971 Census. In the 1971 census it was stated that 52.5% of the able-bodied men population actually work whereas only 13.8% of the able bodied women were found to be working. This was contained in the 1971 census report.

Then in the 1981 census, the definition of the term 'worker' was enlarged and liberalised. Those were also counted as 'workers' who have worked for some time or other in a year thereby an effort was made to project the impression that the number of women workers have gone up. But in spite of this liberalised definition it was seen that the number of women workers did not rise beyond 21% and the number of women 'mainworkers' is only 45.9 million. We can study the position in another way also. In 1951 the number of men and women workers was in the ratio of 1000: 525, i.e. for every 1000 men workers, the number of women workers was 525.

In 1971 the ratio came down to 210 women workers for every 1000 men workers. In 1981 due to the liberalised definition, the ratio should slightly improve but still the number of women workers remain far less than the men workers.

The welfare facilities which are at present being made available to the working women are wholly inadequate and unsatisfactory. In various factories and establishments, where they work, more attention has been paid to items like cleanliness, ventilation, first aid, canteen etc. But not much attention has been paid towards labour welfare. The existing laws do not provide for proper medical, educational, recreational facilities for the working women and their children.

The enactments mostly entrust the responsibility for providing these facilities on the employers. But the employers mostly deceive the workers and do not provide the required benefits to the working women, the pregnant workers and the children of the women workers. Therefore we feel that some such system must be devised whereby the burden and responsibility for providing reasonable working conditions and other welfare facilities to the women workers and their children must fall on the Government; that is the purpose of introducing this Bill.

Sir, this Working Women Welfare Bill consists of three parts. In the first part a provision has been made for the setting up of a Working Women Welfare Fund. In this Fund, the Government shall contribute an amount equal to 10% of the pay of the women workers. The employer shall contribute another 10% of such pay to the Fund. The women workers will not have to contribute anything to this Fund themselves. This provision regarding constitution of the Fund has been made in this Bill.



In the next part it has been provided how this fund is to be utilised. The very first item for application of the fund is 'to ensure the right to work for the women employees in any industry or establishment.' It has been our experience that at many places the employers appoint men workers even where women can be suitably appointed. The other day there was a discussion in this very house about women's welfare. There Smt. Geeta Mukherjee pointed out how in the Bharat Coking Coal Limited the women workers were being forced to proceed on voluntary retirement and to give in writing that in their place a male member of their family will be appointed. In this way the men are being given employment there in place of the women. The BCCL is also retrenching a large number of women workers. "As a result of the Baveja Committee report it is found that in the BCCL about 50,000 women workers will fall surplus. Even in the open hearth mines, women are not being employed and only men are being appointed. Whenever one woman is coming out of employment, she is being replaced by a man. No woman is being appointed in her place. Therefore, there is need for such an enactment whereby a woman only shall be appointed in place of another woman. No man shall be allowed to be appointed there. There is a function in the coal mines called 'shell picking'. This function performed with the band ensures that no stones mix with the coal that is lifted out of the coal mines. This shell picking job is performed very efficiently by women. But this very function of shell picking is being given up in mines. This Bill seeks to ensure employment to women at all those places where

they can be suitably employed. This Fund shall be utilised for that purpose. Secondly, this fund shall be utilised to ensure to women employees equal wages for equal work. In this connection I have one submission to make. We have seen that in some sectors, where government fixes the wage, women get less than men. For example in the plantations, where the government themselves fix the wages, there too grave injustice is done to the women workers. Women are paid comparatively less wages for the same work as done by men. The Government should rectify this.

Then, it has been provided that this Working Women Welfare Fund shall be utilised "to ensure steady and definite increase of the women employees in the total work force." I have already stated how the number of women workers is declining over the years even in industries and establishments where they used to be employed traditionally. Take for instance the Jute mills. In all the jute mills the women workers have practically been wiped out where once they used to work in large numbers. We have seen that at all places where the women work, the most tedious, the most back-breaking items of work are given to them. They are mostly non-technical and untrained. Therefore, they are given the lowest type of work which carry the least remuneration and require the maximum patience and endurance. The men workers are given the more remunerative works which carry many associated benefits. The women have unfortunately very little opportunity of receiving training and thereby getting better and more remunerative jobs. They are, therefore, employed on the more monotonous, tedious and difficult jobs. In the textile mills of Bombay there were at one time about 25% women workers. In a discussion held in 1983, it was found that the percentage had come down to 5%. Today, in 1985 I doubt that there are even 3% women workers in the Textile mills of Bombay. Then, in the tea plantations, up to 1971 the number of women workers was more than the men workers. In the total work force, the number of women was more than men. But in 1972 it was found that the men workers outnumbered women workers by 25,000. This gap is increasing continuously in favour of men. In Tobacco, in Coir, the same situation prevails. In the mines the number of women is dwindling steadily. In 1951 their number among the mine workers constituted 20%. In 1971 it came down to 12% and even less. In 1973 they numbered, 30,000. In 1982 we found that the number of women workers in the mines has fallen to 12000 only. Their number has been falling steadily. It is a matter of regret that even our public sector undertaking viz. the BCCL is resorting to retrenchment of women workers. In our country the women have equal rights with men. Here we want that the women should come forward in larger numbers for more socially responsible productive work. This is what we want. Otherwise there can never be equal rights for women, unless they can be self-supporting economically. Till then there cannot be equal rights. We all know that. So long as women are economically dependent on others, there cannot be any rise in their social or economic status. Therefore, we must all strive to ensure that the women may join the work force of our country in larger numbers as 'main workers'. Therefore, I want that through this Bill the proposed fund shall be utilised towards that end. Efforts should be made to suitably amend the existing labour laws to provide adequate benefits to the women workers. Keeping their need in view, provision has also been made in the Bill for providing child-care facilities to the women employees. If proper and adequate child care facilities are not available, than many mothers cannot go for work even if they are willing and have need for

work. The children are a nation's wealth. They must be considered as such and the state should take their responsibility upon itself, and provide all facilities for them. This Bill provides for that also.



A special problem of the women employees is proper accommodation or residential facilities. The women workers in our country and all over the world need some extra residential facilities. The women cannot reside at any and every place. They need some extra facilities. They should be provided with safe accommodation near their place of work and with proper transport facilities. They should be enabled to go to their place of work and come back in safety with enough security. That provision has been made in this Bill. It has been provided that this fund may be utilised for improving the working conditions of the women at their place of work.

Now a word about maternity facilities. This will be considered along with childcare. Sir, in this last year of the women's decade, the Government of India should come forward and declare that all the new born babies and their mothers, both are our national responsibility and the Government is accepting them as such. For every child and its mother in any part of our country, the Government of India will provide full maternity facilities such as paid maternity leave. The Government should declare that all the mothers all over the country and the pregnant ones also, be she in the factories or in the fields, shall be provided with full maternity and child-care facilities. In this year it is necessary for the Government to make this declaration.

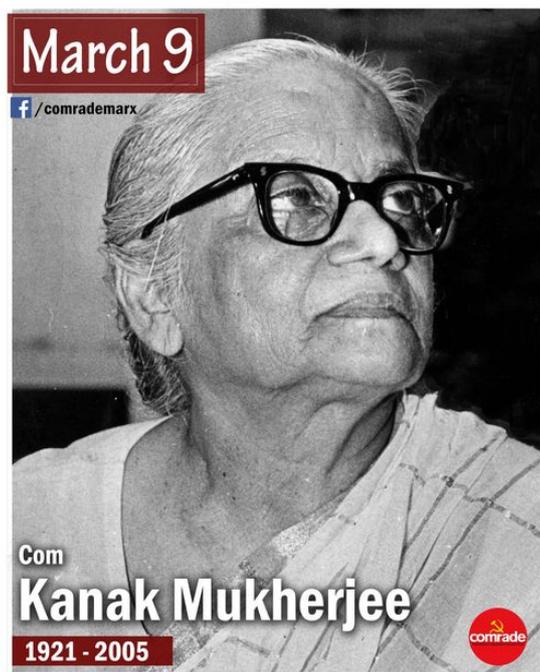
The Bill provides for construction of more hostels for the working women at suitable places near their place of work so that they may live in safety and may be able to join work in larger numbers. Provision has been kept in this Bill for protection of women against health hazards inherent in certain types of work.

Therefore, in this Bill I have provided for the constitution of the Working Women Welfare Fund in the first part and in the second part it has provided as to how this Fund is to be applied or utilised.

Towards the end of the Bill, it has been provided how this legislation should be implemented. To enforce or implement this law, I have provided that in every area or in every industry or establishment an Advisory committee should be set up which should have three types of representation. First there should be Government representatives; second, there should be the representatives of the employer and third, there should be representatives of the trade union. But here too, I have said that preference should be given to women while selecting these representatives. Because if there are female representatives, then they would be able to realise the problems of the women workers more intimately and will be able to consider them more sympathetically. This Law is to be implemented through these advisory committees. This Bill also provides for constitution of a Central Advisory Committee by the Central Government. This Central Advisory Committee should monitor and coordinate the work of the other Area Advisory committees all over the country and the state level committees. The Central Government shall have to appoint many officers to ensure the enforcement and implementation of this legislation all over the country.

Now, for implementing this Law effectively, it is very necessary to know correctly and accurately how many women are actually working in a particular establishment. For that it has been provided in this Bill that a register is to be maintained in each district where every employer shall enter the number and details of the women workers in his establishment. The district level advisory Committee shall have the right and responsibility of collecting these details from the employers. At the end of each financial year, the District Advisory Committees should submit a report. From this report it will be known what difficulties were faced by the women who are already in employment, what facilities were provided to them during the year etc. The State Government as well as the Central Government shall have the powers to collect all the information regarding the employment of women in various organisations, facilities that have been provided to them and what problems were faced by them etc. All sorts of statistics and other information shall have to be provided to the Government in any form they ask for it. The Government shall also have the power to enquire whether this law is being properly implemented or not in any establishment. In the end it has been provided that this enactment will be enforced, even if there are at any point agreements or condition entered upon by any employer with any women employee. There may be any unfavourable agreement entered into for getting employment by a poor women. In our society we know that women do accept jobs under humiliating circumstances for economic reasons. They even sign bonds. This law shall have precedence over all such agreements. If at any place women are in receipt of some additional facilities or benefits not included in this Bill, they will continue to enjoy them in addition to the benefits of this Bill. It has been stated as usual how the Government of India shall issue notification etc. for implementation of this Bill.

A translated extract from 'Mone Mone' ('Musings'), Kanak Mukhopadhyay's reminiscences in Bengali



[These reminiscences of Kanak Mukhopadhyay, one of AIDWA's founder-leaders, whose birth centenary we celebrated last year, were recorded towards the end of her long and active life at the request of her younger colleagues in 'Eksathe', the journal of our organisation in West Bengal, of which also she had been one of the founders. It was serially published in 'Eksathe' and brought out as a book by her comrades after her death. Since her eyesight was very bad at that time, Bibha Ghosh Goswami, a very close friend who came from the same part of undivided Bengal, acted as her amanuensis. This is one of her earliest memories as related by her of the reverberations of the Freedom Movement in her life in her native village where in the late 1920s she was a student of the local pathsala. We have tried to preserve the flavour of her colloquial style and her sense of humour about herself. I was helped in this translation by a group of young people from SFI.

Malini Bhattacharya]

I do not remember the exact sequence of events, but at that time I must have been studying in the second or third standard of our village pathsala. The Congress had organised a big meeting with much fanfare in Kalia. Subhash Chandra Bose came to that meeting. On the occasion of this meeting a volunteer force was formed with the boys of Kalay-Benda School. They performed a parade in white shorts and green half-shirts. My two elder brothers who were High School students were among them. We girls pleaded in tears to be allowed to join, but were left out. None of us were taken to the meeting. I was so eager to go to the meeting that Anu and myself persuaded a woman from the village to take us to Kalia, close to the meeting place, where my paternal aunt

resided. However by the time my 'Pishima', was able to reach the meeting place with us, the meeting was over. Subhash Chandra had left and people were also leaving the huge marquee which had been put up...

After this meeting, the children of the village started spinning cotton on charkhas and planting cotton trees in every house. I remember I bought a spinning wheel and a spindle from the village fair for two and a half rupees. I planted cotton saplings in the backyard of our house. Anu and my elder brothers were with me and we started spinning thread first on the spindle and then on the wheel. My brothers took the thread and gave it somewhere. At that time Gandhiji's name carried divine inspiration. I started making rhymes and the very first one was about Gandhiji. I remember two lines from it which dreamt of the sons and daughters of the country spinning yarn in every home.

Someone reported that a Congress leader had died on hunger strike in the jail and a call was given for everyone to observe fast in protest on that day. Only much later I came to know that it was the martyrdom day of Jatin Das who had died in Lahore jail after observing hunger strike for 63 days (1929). I too insisted on going without food all day. My granny and aunts tried to persuade me that I was still too small for such things, but I refused to listen to them. Maybe my granny succeeded finally in making me break my fast in the evening.

Then we heard that imported salt was being boycotted, so we must make salt in our homes. Our elder brothers took to burning coconut leaves at home and extracting salt from the ashes. To Anu, Feli and myself fell the happy duty of gathering dried coconut leaves from our compound. My brothers even started making soap at home using coconut oil and other ingredients. All this created a great deal of excitement in the village.

My elder brothers used to run a club which many boys from our village had joined. Its venue was an empty old house of one of our relatives. They organised sports, a library and reading sessions. Once they made a clay image of the Lord Hanuman and worshipped it. The boys used to say, the gods are of no use, Hanuman alone is the symbol of power. We made a lot of fun over it. But the same boys would come forward to help the people of the village when there was some trouble. The foremost of this group was Thakurchand-da. Son of Brahmananda Thakur, a well-established person in the village, he had a healthy body, well-developed through exercise. Living at one end of the village, the family was of a priestly caste. They themselves used to organise Durga Puja and Kali Puja in their house. It was the people of the priestly caste living in different parts of the village who used to officiate in the various religious festivals that took place in the village.....

Thakurchand-da was the eldest son of the family, and he was married. He travelled frequently outside the village although no one knew exactly for what purpose. Not only was he a leader of sorts to my brothers, but he taught them the art of wielding lathis and knives. A branch was opened to make girls too proficient in the same martial arts. Some of us used to attend its sessions. Then only we discovered that he belonged to an armed revolutionary group, whether Jugantar or Anushilan we had no idea.

My own elder brother Kshitish and and my first cousin Naresh (Mejda) were involved in the secret activities of this group. Thakurchand-da used to come and talk with them in our outer room. One day Mejda introduced me to him. He said 'Puntu ['the small one': Kanak's nickname] has a lot of courage. She can be trusted'. From then on, I too became involved in their secret work. Thakurchand-da called me to his house one afternoon and made me acquainted with his wife. Then I understood that his wife was also involved in their work. Thakurchand-da took me by the hand and taught me to write a letter in the reverse which could be read only through its reflection in the mirror. He said, in this way secret letters in a female hand must be written. He showed me a revolver and said: 'Grow up, I will teach you how to use a revolver'. One day he said, 'Today your courage will be tested. You must come outside at dead of night when I send you a signal and follow me. I shall not tell you now where we shall be going'. I let Anu into my secret and told her: 'I shall be going out at night. You must lock the door and stay awake until I come back and let me in'. Late at night I got up in due time and followed Thakurchand-da. Anu fearfully waited for me. Thakurchand-da led me with a lighted torch through a back lane to their house and told me to wait in a corner of the yard and said, 'You must stand guard while I go and bury this revolver in our front garden'. I stood in front of their porch holding on to a wooden pole. After a while, Thakurchand-da came back from the garden and reached me home. Anu was sitting by the window holding her breath. Seeing me, she quickly opened the door. The two of us went back to bed clutching each other. Luckily, we were never discovered. I still shudder when I think of that romantic night.

From then on, I used to pester Thakurchand-da continually, reminding him of his promise to teach me how to fire a revolver. On another occasion, he again called me at night to our desolate outer yard and talked about some organisation or other of which I remember nothing and told me that he was testing my courage and would soon take me and a few others to the open fields near the river to teach revolver shooting. My elder brother, Mejda and Anu were the only ones aware of this contact of mine with a secret revolutionary group.

At this time I was in the third or fourth grade at the pathsala. The episode ended

however when eventually the police raided Thakurchand-da's house and took him away. I have no idea what happened to the group. I do not even know how my brothers were involved with it. Small as I then was, I do not know if people will call my activities purely adventurous or stupid.

Women's Struggles across the World

Sultana Khaya: “Despite persecution, Sahrawi women have not stopped demanding freedom and independence”

-Capire

To this day, the lives of women and men living in Western Sahara are crossed by colonialism. From 1884 to 1975, the territory was considered a colony of the Spanish State. In 1975, after the withdrawal of Spain, Western Sahara was occupied by Morocco, and today it is the last colony on the African continent. For decades, the Sahrawi people have claimed their self-determination and sovereignty over their territory, culture, production and ways of life.

The Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara has severe and daily results: human rights violations, political persecution, violence, military territorial control. Faced with this reality, women play a fundamental role in resistance within communities. In 1991, a ceasefire agreement was established between the Moroccan state and the POLISARIO Front (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio Oro), and in November 2020 it was broken by the Moroccan army, which invaded the Sahrawi territory to repress protesters.

Since then, the breach of the ceasefire agreement has generated even more conflicts and increased the feeling of unsafety for the Sahrawi people, who resist despite multiple aspects of colonial violence. Activist Sultana Khaya is one of the targets of political persecution. Sultana was brutally raped more than once by the Moroccan authorities, who set up a permanent siege on her home and impede her and her family's free movement.



On this February 18, the International Day of Solidarity with Sahrawi Women, we publish a special interview with Sultana Khaya for **Capire**. The activist tells her story of resistance, denounces the violence she has suffered and calls for international feminist solidarity for the freedom of her people. We want this interview

to be another tool to strengthen the campaign for Sahrawi self-determination and for the freedom and safety of Sultana Khaya and all women in Western Sahara.

At Capire, we are paying attention and following your situation with solidarity, through the information sent by our Saharawi companions of the World March of Women. Could we please start the interview by presenting your trajectory of life and struggle?

First of all, I want to thank Capire and the World March of Women for this opportunity. Through you, I thank all the living awareness around the world.

I started to fight like any Sahrawi person living under occupation, in a climate dominated by repression and crimes against humanity. I got involved in the Sahrawi peaceful resistance when I was a child and still in school.

During my struggle, I was a target of persecution, intimidation and torture. I remember 2007, when the Moroccan occupation forces caused me to lose my right eye during my participation in a peaceful student demonstration at the University of Marrakech. It was a terrible thing.

Now, since November 19, 2020, me, my mother and my sister have been living under siege, under house arrest, which comes with violence, torture and rape, with my sister and my mother. All this under a terrible silence from the UN [United Nations].

Since that moment in 2020, have the Moroccan authorities' attacks and violence against you increased? How has this violence impacted your life and the lives of those around you? And what does this systematic violation of human rights represent for the Sahrawi people?

In November 2020, I was a victim of violence by the Moroccan occupation forces shortly after my return from Spain. The attacks have continued since then and have increased and my family members and all the people who have tried to visit me or express solidarity with me have not been spared.

In January 2021, I almost lost my left eye, hit with a stone thrown by a Moroccan delegate. After that, my family's house has been attacked several times. The walls were smeared with fetid products, a part of our belongings was stolen, and the rest was destroyed. These attacks took place very late at night, with violence and torture. My mother, who was 84 years old, was not spared. Me and my sister were raped several times.

These shameful practices of the Moroccan state continue to this day and are a systematic policy against the Sahrawi people in the occupied territories of Western Sahara, and in the presence of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). This clearly represents the ongoing violations of the rights of the Sahrawi people, with the complicity of the international community.

What is the relationship between colonialism and patriarchy in Western Sahara? How does this materialize in the persecution that is going on against you?

The relationship between occupation and patriarchy is manifested in the ongoing military operations and violations of freedom, especially against Sahrawi women. Personally, my mother, my sister and I experience this daily persecution by the men who represent the repressive machine of the Moroccan state.

And what is the role of women in the resistance against this relationship between colonialism and patriarchy and in the construction of self-determination of the people?

Despite this persecution and the shameful practices of the Moroccan state, represented in the suppression of freedom, in violence, torture and rape, as well as kidnappings and arbitrary arrests, Sahrawi women continue to peacefully resist in the occupied territories, demanding the Sahrawi people's right to freedom and independence. We do this by organizing peaceful demonstrations, educating the younger generations, preserving national identity and rejecting the occupation.

All over the world, grassroots movements and women's movements have shown solidarity with the Sahrawi resistance, especially on February 18, International Day of Solidarity with Sahrawi Women. What actions do you recommend that international movements take in solidarity with this struggle?

The Sahrawi people have won the sympathy of people who are aware and progressive and democratic forces around the world through our just cause and our legitimate struggle for the right to freedom and independence. February 18, the International Day of Solidarity with Sahrawi Women, continues to be an opportunity for women's movements and grassroots movements around the world to express their solidarity with the struggle of Sahrawi women for freedom and independence. Personally, I wish that all women in the world would expose the failures of the UN and its mechanisms and the International Red Cross, for not fulfilling their role in protecting Sahrawi civilians – especially women and children in the occupied areas of Western Sahara – from the crimes committed by the Moroccan state, which are crimes against humanity.

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*First published in **Capire**.*

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