

# AIDWA



**NEWSLETTER-15**

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## **Editorial Communication**

Dear comrades, friends and well-wishers,

Information has recently come to us from West Bengal of a horrendous incident of domestic crime. Renu Khatun, who has a diploma in nursing and had been working earlier in private institutions, applied and got a place as nurse in the West Bengal Health Service. But even before she was appointed, her husband, also an IT trained person without any regular employment who thought she might leave him if she had a government job, hired a couple of goons and made a murderous attack on her chopping off her right hand in the process. However, the plucky girl managed to escape, was admitted to hospital by her family and lodged an FIR against her assailants. The media picked up the story and there was such an upsurge of public outrage that the administration was forced to act more speedily than usual, the culprits were arrested and cases filed against them and what is more, through the intervention of the Chief Minister, Renu got a job in the CMOH's office in her district, East Burdwan soon after her recovery in spite of the physical damage inflicted on her.

Why, you may ask, if Renu's story had a 'happy ending' as they call it, are we narrating it to you once more? For several reasons. Firstly, for Renu herself, it is not an 'ending' but the beginning of another episode in which she will still have to establish herself as a worker having security and dignity at her workplace. Secondly, what seems to be a 'happy ending' for an individual should not make us close our eyes to the thousands of other Renu, other working women in West Bengal and in other states, who are subjected at home to domination, torture and even murder without the media, the administration or the public batting an eyelid. Nor should it make us oblivious to those thousands of other women workers who face humiliation at the workplace as well as sexual and other forms of assault sometimes even leading to loss of life. Thirdly, we cannot overlook that the public

concern over the case has a dark undercurrent. There is a murmur underground that such an atrocity against a woman can only take place within the Muslim community feeding the dangerous myth that the community itself is prone to bigotry and violence. This is not just evidence of how the politics of hatred has infected the public mind even in a state like West Bengal, but also serves to condone and cover up the spread and the growing intensity of violence against women across communities in the state. We must read Renu's story from this multiple perspective.

Conservatism about women and the ideology of maintaining control over them to preserve social hierarchies has deep roots in any society based on inequality. When a fascist force like BJP-RSS gets hold of the mechanisms at the disposal of the state to intensify from top the culture of violence and divisiveness that it has been injecting into the social roots for a long time, such basic conservatism is bound to turn into aggressive violence against women too. The obsession for control which leads our fascist rulers to seek forcibly to dominate the legislature, the police and armed forces and even the judiciary to stamp out all opposition (as in the Zakia Jaffri-Teesta Shetalbad case) gives legitimacy to smaller tyrants within a community or within the family wielding the stick to prevent women and others of an 'inferior' status from the path of 'disobedience'. We have to strike unafraid at the traditional roots of conservatism within society itself to stop its being nurtured under state patronage into the poison tree of violence.

But this violence has other dimensions too. The ruling dispensation, at the behest of its corporate cronies is pursuing a policy whereby the devaluation of labour has reached its nadir and the worker appears to be the most easily expendable item in the economy of development. Labour ensures no livelihood, no rights, no dignity for men or for women. Women, in particular, who have been mostly part of the informal workforce anyway, are working outside home under unimaginable slavish conditions of drudgery and danger to keep body and soul together. Their labour remains therefore largely invisible in the national map of work participation rate. They face violence not because they go out to work, but because they work under such general conditions.

If men and women had been able to complete education and have positive job prospects in the normal course of things, conservatism about women working would have remained muted through social control. But failing that a woman with a job becomes an intolerable exception; she provokes open misogyny in two ways. Within the family and the social circle she rouses male envy and fear of loss of control; at the workplace her life is haunted by male predators because the work given her is considered as a favour for which she must pay. Right to work for men and women must be guaranteed if this culture of violence has to be stemmed.

For us in AIDWA, there can be no compromise in this struggle and our relentless campaign for the 'Renu's of India, for working women from all sections and communities has to be waged at the same time at the economic, political and social levels.

**Malini Bhattacharya**

**President, All India Democratic Women's Association**

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## **Need to Defend India from the Assault by Fascistic Forces**

-Mariam Dhawale, General Secretary, AIDWA

It is no coincidence that Teesta Setalvad was arrested on June 25 this year. A human rights activist sent behind bars for her 'audacity' to continue to fight for justice for the victims of the 2002 Gujarat communal carnage. She and others are being penalized for not succumbing to repression and for upholding the banner of justice. Forty-seven years ago, on June 25 1975, the then Congress government had declared Emergency. This country had experienced a brutal clamping down of democracy with thousands being arrested and jailed.



Now we are experiencing an 'undeclared Emergency' in our country. Many activists are languishing in jails without any relief. Bail is continuously being denied to them. Leaders of the BJP-RSS and the Sangh Parivar who have been openly giving threats, calling for attacks and murder of minorities, exhorting the majority community to indulge in violence are roaming around freely.

Those who question and oppose the pro-corporate policies of the Modi government are ridiculed and labeled as 'anti-nationals'. Citizens supporting a secular India are condemned and isolated for being against Indian culture. All constitutional institutions, including Parliament and the rights given to us by our Constitution are being consciously subverted.

Poor people are reeling under massive price hikes, unemployment and hunger. Violence is making the lives of women extremely insecure. Attacks on Dalits and

Muslims are carried out with impunity. Use of religion and caste for political mobilization has led to polarization of the people. It has encouraged the rampant and blatant use of politics of hatred for electoral dividends.

These are very dangerous times. The fascistic forces in power want to change the character of India from a democratic, secular nation into a theocratic, authoritarian, manuwadi state. It is time that all citizens of the country come together to resist and combat these regressive forces. As we are nearing the completion of 75 years of our Independence, we must resolve not to let the sacrifices of our martyrs during the struggle for Independence go waste. In Rabindranath Tagore's words –

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action –

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake!

## ***AIPSN Conference in Bhopal***

### **Democracy means equal opportunity for all, a better life and a civilized society: K. K. Shailaja**

-Sandhya Shaili, CEC, AIDWA

#### ***Asha Mishra has been elected as the new General Secretary of AIPSN.***

At Bhopal, the four day long 17th conference of All India People's Science Network was held in a grand event from 6th to 9th June. Around 800 delegates from all over the nation participated. The inaugural session of the dialogue, discussion and resolution ceremony laid the foundation for several sessions of the conference that would continue for the next four days.

Among the keynote speakers at the inaugural session were former Kerala Health Minister K K Shailaja, who set an example across the world by fighting and winning the battle against Corona, P. Sainath, a senior journalist and founder of People's Archives of Rural India (PARI) who has received many international honours and D. Indumati, renowned scientist and professor of the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai.

The programme was inaugurated from the dais with presentation of the prologue of the Constitution of India and flag-waving by the participants. These colourful flags were reflecting the diversity and plurality of India.

The chief guest of the inaugural session was former Kerala Health Minister K. K. Shailaja, who said that there is no democracy in the true sense without equality, opportunity to all and livelihood. Today is the time of capitalist-cum- feudal order. We have to work hard to get rid of it and achieve real freedom. She referred to the progressive ideas which were adopted while framing the Constitution and talked about integrity, equality, and socialism. We cannot achieve them today without a scientific approach. She pointed out that Kerala had faced a severe crisis with a scientific approach in the time of Covid. K K Shailaja also shared her experiences of Covid times.

D. Indumati, Professor of the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai said that instead of 6% in higher education, 0.6% of the budget is being spent, due to which the opportunities for research in science have been reduced. P Sainath spoke about compromised media. Senior poet Rajesh Joshi, senior litterateur Ram Prakash Tripathi and Dr. Sabyasachi Chatterjee, Chairman, All India People's Science Network also spoke in this opening session.

More than 800 scientists, intellectuals, artists and social activists from about 20 states of the country participated in this People's Science Congress. Seminars,

workshops and cultural programmes were organized on a range of topics including 'Idea of India: Scientific Temper, Self-Reliance and Development'.

On the second day The Vice Chancellor of Sidho Kanhu University Prof Sonajharia Minj, Dr O P. Bharucha, Social activist from Shimla and Professor N. Raghuram, Chair of the International Nitrogen Initiative spoke on subjects of education, environment and agriculture.

On the third day, AIPSN organized a seminar on health, education, privatization and scientific outlook. Along with this, workshops on science and social development-related topics were organized in small groups. Anita Rampal, Professor of Delhi University said there are many loopholes in the New Education Policy, which can deprive a large section of people of access to education. Science Documentary Creator and Scientist Gauhar Raza said that it is necessary that the scientific approach should also reach those whom science reaches. Samir Garg, senior health activist said that a scheme like Ayushman Card is benefiting private healthcare providers and weakening the public health infrastructure. Senior Scientist Dr. Satyajit Rath said that even in the epidemic or in normal times, it is necessary to reach people with medicines as well as right information on it. On this day other speakers were Prof Surajit Majumdar, Purva Bharadwaj, Prof R. Ramanujan, Prof Vinita Govada, Prof D. Indumati, Mayank Wahia, Gauhar Raza, Kishore Chandra, Vivek Monteiro, Prof. Satyajit Rath, Sameer Garg, Indira Chakravarty, Vandana Prasad, T. Sundararaman, Dinesh Abrol, Ashok Dhawale and several senior scientists, academicians and social activists of the country.

In other small workshops, ground workers from different states shared their experiences. Every evening, participants from different states gave cultural performances. Stalls displaying books and products from various states were set up at the venue. A painting exhibition of senior painter Manoj Kulkarni was organized with statements from various great men and scientists on the idea of India.

In the valedictory session of AIPSN, there was an interesting discussion on the development of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Speaking at it, the chairman of the session, former Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh, Sharad Chandra Behar, said Marx had once described religion as opium – on the same lines, "development" is the new opium today. In this session, Rajendar Kothari, industry expert and Badal Saroj, Joint Secretary, All India Kisan Sabha, also spoke among other participants.

### **Women in AIPSN Bhopal**

The presence of women at the conference of AIPSN was very effective. AIDWA CEC member and Delhi State President Maimoona Abbas Mollah addressed the delegates and said that the present government is backing its political supporters who are actually related to Sangh Parivar by just using the minorities as a vote

bank and instead of promoting scientific education and consciousness they are pushing the people towards fanaticism, radicalism and superstition.

She spoke about the three roles of women in society and problems faced by them in each and every role.



In the seminar on health, AIDWA Madhya Pradesh state joint secretary Reena Shakya spoke. She said that women often face serious problems like cancer due to lack of knowledge of sanitation during menstruation, many girls also have to drop out of school due to the difficulties during periods. In the seminar on education she spoke about the pathshala or learning centre in the name of Savitribai Phule. On the third day of the conference Preeti Singh, State Joint Secretary, AIDWA on gender and social justice, also spoke. She spoke about the counseling centers run by AIDWA units.

Faizan Mustafa, who was the chief guest at the valedictory function, said that law means justice, but today the situation is that it has become difficult to tell what the justice for the people is. But the problem is that we are also blind to injustice. Why are we not prompted to action by the injustice being done to someone? If this is not happening, then there is a question mark on humanity. He said that freedom of expression is a right given in our Constitution. This clearly means that whatever is in the person's heart let him speak. The society that prevents it from speaking cannot move forward. If there is a government with the consent of the people, then the participation of the people can only be ensured by speaking on the policies of the government. It can consist of as much praise as criticism. He said that the country cannot be made better without scientific consciousness in the country. There is a need to make stringent laws against hate speech in the country. Today there is a nexus between religion, political power and corporate money in the country; if we understand it, then it is possible to do something better. Prof. R. Ramanujam and Professor Sonajharia Minj, Vice-Chancellor of Siddhu Kanhu

University also spoke about the need to conduct the campaign in a planned manner to develop scientific temper. Former Chief Minister Digvijay Singh said that the fanaticism that has spread in the country today can be eliminated through scientific consciousness only.

Concluding the four day conference the new leadership of AIPSN was elected. Professor Satyajit Rath, AISER has been elected as President, Asha Mishra of Madhya Pradesh BGVS as General Secretary and S R Azad from Madhya Pradesh Vigan Sabha as Treasurer along with 9 office bearers and 22 executive members. AIPSN also elected 10 invitees from different academic fields.

## "Ret Samadhi' (Tomb of Sand) - A tale that transcends borders

-Manjeet Rathee, CEC, AIDWA

*Ret Samadhi*, translated into English as *Tomb of Sand* by an American translator Daisy Rockwell, (Penguin Random House, 2022), is Geetanjali Shree's fifth novel, originally written in Hindi in the year 2018. It received the International Booker Prize in 2022 and became the first book in any Indian language to win this prestigious prize. Born in 1957 in the city of Mainpuri in Uttar Pradesh, and presently based in New Delhi, Geetanjali Shree is a widely acclaimed author in Hindi, who has written five novels and many collections of short stories. Apart from fiction, she has also written critical works on Munshi Premchand. Her first novel, *Mai*, written in 2000 was shortlisted for the Crossword Book award in 2001 and has been translated into several languages, including English, Urdu, Serbian, Korean, French and German.



As Daisy Rockwell, the translator, remarked it is a huge book not only in its length (696 pages and consisting of three parts), but also in its scope and complex treatment of issues. It can broadly be described as dealing with complexities involved in families, mother- daughter relationships, and about the partition of India and Pakistan. But above all, it is about borders and walls, and about the beauty and intricacies of language, about Hindi language in particular. In the words of the writer, "I think all languages have within them the possibility of crossing borders and reinventing words, borrowing words, and doing word play and being adventurous. English as much as Hindi surely...and just as we say about Hindi, there is no single one Hindi; there are so many Hindis. I think one says the same about English." (In her speech of acceptance of the Booker award) The novel is not just about the

writer or the individual. It attempts to represent the larger picture of “the entire world of Hindi literature and Indian literature as a whole.”

Set in northern India, the book opens with an eighty year- old Indian woman (“Ma”) steeped in depression and in a mental vacuum after the death of her husband. She has entered into a *samadhi* kind of living and does not respond to the outside world. Each family member tries to break her trance-like meditative state but to no avail. We are introduced to her son Bade, who is more concerned about getting cheque books signed; Bade’s wife, Bahu, who wears Reeboks and feels that no one respects her sacrifices, and two grandsons: Son and Sid. (Part 1). However, Ma, in Part II, becomes determined to regain control of her life. This new-found zeal confuses her daughter, who is unaccustomed to this version of her mother (Ma), and does not quite understand it. To make matters even more intriguing, Ma, in part III insists on going to Pakistan, in order to confront the trauma that she had to go through as a teenager caught in the horrifying tumult of Partition.

The writer, however, instead of dwelling on the grief of the central character, Ma, manages to keep the narrative tone light, as she tries to address important questions around difficult issues like unresolved trauma, feminism and motherhood, especially navigating the terrains of what does it mean to be a woman, in a way which can never be considered as complete or final. In creating a character like Ma, the writer not only crosses a boundary, she builds a world of possibilities where nothing is an exception but weirdly normal. The intricacies of her narrative tone, as also the multiplicity of interpretations and meanings of any tale, is clear from the extract of the book given below:

“A tale tells itself. It can be complete, but also, incomplete, the way all tales are. This particular tale has a border, and women who come and go as they please. Once you have got a woman and a woman and a border, story can write itself. Even women on their own are enough. Women are stories in themselves; full of stirrings and whisperings that float on the wind, that bend with each blade of grass. The setting sun gathers fragments of tales and fashions them into glowing lanterns that hang suspended from clouds. These too will join our story. The story’s path unfurls not knowing where it will stop, taking to the right and the left, twisting, turning, allowing everything to join the narration...” (Tomb of Sand)

In more ways than one, Tomb of Sand is an ode to the rich history of storytelling in South Asia, and defies any kind of categorization. The many narrators of this novel utter myriad things that might seem like digressions from the original story, but there is a method to this madness. Apart from the central character of Ma, there are two ‘other’ women: (1) Beti — the runaway daughter who brought shame to the family who is a freelancer, feminist, and women’s rights activist, and (2) Rosie — a Hijra, othered in every way, who stands and performs at the border of gender. Rosie’s arrival in this story indicates shifting of borders, for soon Ma expresses her desire to

visit Pakistan and, given her age, Ma's family is bound to fulfill her desire. At the same time, they wonder whether it is worth crossing the border risking everyone's life.

The writer believes: "Anything worth doing transcends borders." And so, Ma did cross the border, along with her daughter. She entered [Pakistan] without a visa 'because she also came [to India] that way. Didn't she? And who can tell her where she belongs: here or there? Does she need anyone's permission to cross the border just because two governments decided to draw a line?' (Tomb of Sand) Whenever Ma is questioned about her identity by inspectors and officials in Pakistan, she keeps offering humorous and sarcastic responses. She even delivers a monologue on borders. Part humorous, part dark, part wholesome, and part unbearable, the book allows its readers a glimpse of its many worlds through wordplay. The novel is an attempt to make people look inwards: to re-examine this "age of excess", to be tolerant to the 'other', to be respectful of one's choices, and, above all, to have faith in literature, in stories — even the most traumatic ones like Partition — which exist some place where the borders of consciousness get blurred, where the magic happens and one can approach reality anew.

In an old interview, the writer shares what really inspired her into writing this novel: "I have just a single image... it's a very common sight to see old people in families just lying in a corner, and looking bored with life, looking like they have no reason anymore to live, and looking like they are just waiting for the call to come. So that's a very common image and we see it all the time...of a woman who is nearing eighty, who has lost her husband, and she is bed-ridden and she doesn't seem to have any interest left in life or living and she is, as if, just waiting to die.....so that story...starting with somebody who is looking distressed, roused in me the curiosity: 'Is it really disinterest or some new interest?' From there, the seed of the novel, I think, began."

Hence, the rejuvenation of Ma in the second part of the story and her revisit to Pakistan to confront the still-ripening meaning of 1947 in the final part. The writer gives a rousing analysis of relationships among women, mothers and daughters in the new world of the 21st century. She also sheds light on the internalization of the pain of women, and how it affects them. Geetanjali Shree dedicates the book to Krishna Sobti: "For my guru, my inspiration, my dear Krishna Sobti." There is no straightforward linearity of narration nor a careful delineation of family position, powers or events. Rather, there is just the flux of family relationships as they tangle or rupture or multiply amorously. The plot moves at its own pace through the subjectivities of different family members — especially the women. The writer manages to capture the history and trauma related to Partition with both distance and intimacy.

*From the Archives of AIDWA*

**Resolution on Rising Prices from the First National Conference of AIDWA (Chennai, 1981)**

*[The following resolution on rising prices has been extracted from the proceedings of the First Conference of AIDWA held in Chennai in 1981]*

The first conference of the All India Women's Democratic Association held in Madras on March 10-12, 1981, views with serious alarm that about 31 crores of our people below the poverty line namely, workers, peasants, middle class people, rural poor, etc., have been groaning under the crushing dead weight of ever-rising prices of every essential of life, rice or wheat, dal or millets, sugar or edible oil, kerosene, or diesel, cloth or soap, cement, - a never ending list indeed. Women from these sections of our society are naturally the most hard pressed in making both ends meet, more and more often having to deny their dear ones even the barest necessities of life.

And still the Indira Government at the Centre continues to fool the people about her achievements in this one year of her rule. In her speech in the Lok Sabha (Feb, 26) she claims to have procured 44 per cent more rice, about 10 per cent more wheat, and even opened 40,000 more fair-price shops. But she has no answer to why the prices continue to soar, why scarcity continues to deepen, embracing ever new items in its sweep. With price control as her main election promise, her Finance Minister had repeated during the 1980 budget session that "the prime objective of our policy will be to achieve price stability".

The India Government fools the people when it asks them to believe its figures of the whole-sale price-index. But an on the spot survey of retail shops, which is what matters to the common people, shows the price rise of daily necessities to nearly 50 per cent, and some items like Gram and gram-dal, sugar and coconut oil have registered rises of prices between 22 to 128 per cent in just 1980. Yet 1980 was the year with a food grains stock of 16 million tons, and still food grains prices rose, and sugar shot up to Rs.15 a kilo and in some places, over Rs. 20 when sugar stocks were at least 63 lakh tons. In the last five years, demand was never more than 60 lakh tons.

How systematically the Government tries to fool their own people through its so-called concessions, forced under popular pressure, is to be seen in the last year's reduction of Rs.15 crores in some life-saving drugs, controlled cloth, cheap toilet soap, baby foods, etc. But, actually prices of soap, washing powder, baby powder, edible oil, etc. went up.

This year's budget shows apparently very little increase in excise duties. But this has been done to fool the people, this budget comes after prices of oil, coal, steel, cement, as also rail fares and freights have been steeply hiked, netting a neat Rs.2,200 crores! This does not include the State Government's raising steeply the rates of State transport, milk, books and exercise books, etc.

This conference is of the considered view that the problem of ever-rising prices of all essentials over the last many years is the direct result of Congress (I) Government's policy over the last 30 years. Securing all the resources for development in the interests of the capitalists and big landlords, by fleecing the people through deficit financing and inflation by over-rising doses of indirect taxation and excise duties on life essentials, and externally by relying more and more on foreign imperialist aid through the World Bank and the multinational corporations, giving them, ever more concessions.

Such has been the callousness of this policy that the Indira Government misses no opportunity to shed crocodile tears on the plight of the poor kisan, it studiously refuses to offer him a remunerative price for his produce in the market, despite rising prices everywhere, even for his inputs. This compels the poor peasant to sell 75 per cent of his food grains in 'distress sale' at throwaway prices. The big traders and sharks corner all this, thanks to the indifference or failure of the Government's procurement machinery, and sell it at unconscionable profit, robbing both the kisan and the common man.

But when the peasants as in Tamil Nadu, Andhra, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab and elsewhere swing into massive action demanding remunerative prices for their produce and a fair and minimum wage for the agricultural labourers, Mrs. Gandhi and her entire machinery not only denounce him as anti-national they shamelessly slander him by misleading the people that fair price to the peasant would mean higher issue price to them all, concealing in this the big trader, hoarder and [black] marketeer. All men of goodwill must expose this crude truth.

Amidst this signal failure of the Central Government, this Conference notes with particular pride the outstanding achievements of the Left and Democratic Governments of West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala. Despite all the restrictions and limitations placed on their powers, they have strained all their resources and with people's cooperation seen to it that the common man was not left to the mercies of the black market. The opening of thousands of fair-price shops, securing adequate supplies of some essentials in festive seasons and people's cooperation, these were their ways of helping the people.

It is for these achievements that the Centre has been blocking supply of food grains to these states, stooping to the cheapest tactics to discredit them. But the people know the facts better.

Against these ever rising prices, the conference would like to particularly highlight the magnificent pioneering and sustained united struggles waged by women in many States like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and elsewhere, [forcing] the authorities to make concessions, provide rations, Kerosene in regular instalments at the controlled prices. It is these united struggles that have brought about women's joint action committees in struggles for democratic rights, which have brought women to also participate in the struggle for democratic rights.

This conference believes that a really effective strategy against price rise can be possible only through a united struggle against the anti-people policies of the Congress Government. To this end it appeals to all class and mass organizations, all Left and Democratic parties, all men of goodwill who wish to lead a decent life to come together for a common minimum programme such as,

1. End to the present policies of indirect taxes, deficit financing, loans from imperialist nations, World Bank for capitalist development; instead nationalise, without compensation, foreign monopolies and Indian monopolies, abolish Zamindari and give land to the tillers, directly tax the rich, and agricultural income, etc. for raising funds.
2. Government take-over of all stock of marketable food grains and an effective public distribution system for equal quantity to all.
3. Confiscation of all black money, demonetization of high denomination notes, etc., to take over the ill-gotten wealth of big traders, big business, hoarders, speculators, etc.
4. Takeover of all export -import trade.
5. Remunerative prices for agricultural produce and supply of inputs at reasonable prices.
6. Vigilance committees with representation to women with statutory powers for check-up, proper distribution etc.

While striving for these alternatives of policy, this conference calls upon all its constituent units to unitedly fight for the following immediate demands in unity with other women's organizations:

- a. Bring down prices of all essentials of life, scale down the excise duties to this end; public rationing in cities and villages.
- b. Takeover of wholesale trade in essential commodities including food grains and strengthen the public distribution system.

c. Take over sugar stocks, to be distributed through rationing apparatus, end the present dual pricing.

d. Minimum fair wage for agricultural worker, to be linked with rising prices.

e. All inputs for poor and middle peasants, including seeds, diesel, electricity, disinfectants, minerals, etc. to be offered on a priority basis and at concessional rates.

f. Fix a remunerative price for agricultural produce on the basis of actual costs of production, transport, etc. and ensure that the small holder gets the same.

This conference calls upon all its constituents to work for these demands.

## *Women's Struggles across the World*

### ***AIDWA Statement condemning the Withdrawal of Women's Abortion Rights in the USA through an Order of the Supreme Court , June 2022***



AIDWA strongly condemns the recent order of the Supreme Court of the USA which reverses the right of abortion available to American women for the last five decades through the judgment in the Roe versus Wade case. This judgment which had allowed women to opt for an abortion in the first trimester, and under certain circumstances even in the second trimester of pregnancy has now been overturned by a majority decision of the Supreme Court allowing the states to impose their own restrictions depriving women of their right in the matter.

It is feared that strong anti-abortionist lobbies will prevail in many of the American states and push through harsh laws making all abortions beyond 15 weeks illegal and punishable and imposing severe restrictions even on that. The moot point in the matter is that the power to decide in the matter is being transferred from the woman concerned to the state authorities.

AIDWA sees this as a dangerous turn towards anti-woman anti-poor right-wing reaction within American society which will particularly hurt women from the more vulnerable sections in the US and young adults among them who are anyway denied health and reproductive rights and rights to safe contraception; now they will be deprived of the right to safe abortion as well and may be pushed into taking recourse to illegal clinics jeopardizing their health and even their lives.

AIDWA expresses solidarity with activists within American society opposing this reactionary judgment and asserting the right of women over their bodies.

## *Women's Struggles across the World*

### **How abortion rights were first won in the US and how they will have to be fought for again**

-Surangya, AIDWA, Delhi

*Abortion is a human right! Fight, fight, fight!"*

*"My body, my choice!"*

*"Hey hey, ho ho, the patriarchy has got to go!"*

*"In this country that claims to be so free and democratic..."*

*How democratic is it for 9 people to tell you what you can and can't do with your body?"*

*"What do we do, stand up fight back!"*



*Protests against the Supreme Court decision to ban abortions are ongoing throughout the country.*

On June 24, the Supreme Court of the United States overturned the historic *Roe v. Wade* ruling of 1973, snatching away the right to abortion from people across the country. This is not just an attack on women's rights, but an attack on the rights of all people of different genders who can become pregnant.

This decision has triggered a wave of nationwide protests, with thousands filling the streets to express their rage and indignation. For feminists who were involved in the original struggle, as well as for those who are continuing the fight for reproductive rights today, it is as if the clock has turned back 50 years.

Roe v. Wade was a historic ruling that for the first time in US history, gave federal protection to the right to abortion. Until then, and now that the judgement has been overturned, individual states had the power to decide the legality of abortion. Abortion was illegal in most states at the time.

The 1973 victory was a result of decades of feminist organizing by groups such as the Redstockings in New York City, and the Jane Collective, an underground network of activists in Chicago, Illinois that worked to provide abortion to thousands of people.

Joyce Chediak, an activist who was working with the Redstockings in the 1960s and 70s, and who continues to participate in the struggle for reproductive rights recalled in an interview with Peoples Dispatch, "...People gave testimonies, they disrupted events, they grabbed microphones, they went into meetings, held demonstrations, and they demanded abortion rights. And that's how abortion rights were won. No Supreme Court handed it down out of goodwill. Abortion rights were taken."

Over the decades, the ruling has faced many challenges. One such challenge in 1992 led by a Democrat lawmaker Robert Casey led to the Planned Parenthood v. Casey ruling of the Supreme Court which weakened some of the abortion protections in Roe. However, the right to abortion was still guaranteed.

Now, with the overturning of Roe, people in a dozen states have immediately lost the right to an abortion. This is due to "trigger laws" that 13 of the 50 states in the country have passed since the Roe decision. Trigger laws are legislations which are not immediately enforceable but can be enacted given the right change in circumstances. With the overturning of Roe, these 13 states can now enact the abortion bans they had passed earlier.

The Guttmacher Institute analyzed that these trigger laws, along with existing abortion bans that were stalled by Roe, will result in 26 states to likely soon or immediately ban abortions, depriving 36 million women of reproductive age of this right. Many of these states grant an exception only in the case of threat to life. Some don't even allow for an exception in the case of rape or incest.

This conservative victory has further emboldened right-wing groups in the country who are now proposing extreme legislation that aims to criminalize even discussing abortions.

"This law will mean that every woman who dares to be sexually active, and what's wrong with that, is going to be living in fear of what's going to be happen if she has to get an abortion," Chediak said.

## **An undemocratic decision**

According to a national poll conducted by the Marquette University Law School, 72% of people in the US opposed the overturning of Roe v. Wade. But the

Supreme Court is an unelected body, with all nine justices serving lifetime terms. It does not have to consider public opinion. The current Supreme Court is composed of a conservative majority, three of whom were appointed by previous president Donald Trump.

The court's opinion rejected the argument made in the Roe and Casey rulings that the constitutional right to liberty included an individual's right to privacy in choosing to have an abortion.

Abortion rights activists have further opposed the June 24 decision citing another important argument in the Casey ruling which stated that reproductive rights allow women to "participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation."

"How can women be equal in societies if they don't control their own bodies?" Chediac asked.

### **What does this decision mean for people in the US seeking an abortion?**

Past experience clearly shows, in other countries and in the US, that banning abortions does not mean people stop getting them. Those who have the resources are still able to access abortion services, by either travelling to places where it is allowed or through other means. However, they constitute a very small proportion of the masses.

Most people, particularly from poor and marginalized communities, are pushed towards unsafe abortions. These procedures can result in infections and excessive bleeding among other adverse outcomes and can even cause death. Meanwhile, those who are forced to carry a pregnancy to full term are more likely to face pregnancy-related deaths.

Apart from the health consequences, denying the right to abortion also results in lifelong economic, psychological, and personal safety consequences, as the Turnaway Study shows.

Guttmacher Institute has found that the average woman who gets an abortion is a woman of color who is already a mother and who lives at or below the federal poverty level. At its core, the fight for reproductive rights is a working class issue.

Chediac explained, "Abortion is not a single issue. This is something it took us a while to learn back in the 60s and 70s. It's an issue of all reproductive rights. We have to fight on every level together, for abortion, for housing, for nutrition, for the right to all kinds of medical treatments."

### **Growing resistance**

50 years ago, the right to abortion was won through struggles and collective action. It was not handed down by the Democratic Party or the Supreme Court. It is clear to the people that that is the way forward this time as well.

Apart from mass demonstrations, people are organizing reproductive health funds and networks to provide abortion information and services to those in need. Health and civil organizations, particularly Planned Parenthood and ACLU, have filed lawsuits in multiple states against the abortion bans. In two of the 13 trigger states, Louisiana and Utah, judges have temporarily blocked the trigger bans and allowed abortions to resume.

International solidarity has also poured in with the people of the US against the ban on abortions. UN Women issued a statement saying, “To be able to exercise their human rights and make essential decisions, women need to be able to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to information, education, and services.”

For Joyce Chediac, the path ahead is clear, “There were a lot of struggles in the 60s and 70s and a lot was won — abortion rights and many other decisions on gender equality. ... We thought that we won and that things are going to get better. We knew we were up against the patriarchy. But we didn’t understand the kind of patriarchy we were up against. We didn’t understand that we are against capitalism which is a predatory system which puts profits first and will just wait in the wings till it can get everything back again.

“So here we are fighting for abortion rights, against mass incarceration, we’re fighting for the right to tell the history of slavery in the schools. We’re fighting for LGBTQ+ rights again and we’re fighting endless war. We’re going to fight all these things definitely. But how do we secure them, for our children and for our children’s children? We need to know that we need to fight the battles, but we also have to win the war. We have to fight capitalism and sweep it in the dustbins of history and replace it with socialism, a system for the people.”

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