

Mrs. Hansa Mehta (Bombay : General): Sir, I consider it a proud privilege to speak in support of this historic Resolution so ably moved by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru. I do not wish to refer to the issue raised by Dr. Jayakar or speak on the speeches made six thousand miles away by people who either mean mischief or are totally ignorant of the real situation. I wish to offer a few remarks on that of this Resolution,—the fundamental rights which affect a section of the people, namely, women.

It will warm the heart of many a woman to know that free India will mean not only equality of status but equality of opportunity. It is true that a few women in the past and even today enjoy high status and have received the highest honour that any man can receive, like our friend, Mrs. Sarojini Nadu. But these women are few and far between. One swallow does not make a summer. These women do not give us a real picture of the position of Indian women in this country.

The average woman in this country has suffered now for centuries from inequalities heaped upon her by laws, customs and practices of people who have fallen from the heights of that civilisation of which we are all so proud, and in praise of which Dr. Sir S. Radhakrishnan has always spoken. There are thousands of women today who are denied the ordinary human rights. They are put behind the purdah, secluded within the four walls of their homes, unable to move freely. The Indian woman has been reduced to such a state of helplessness that she has become an easy prey of those who wish to exploit the situation. In degrading women, man has degraded himself. In raising her man will not only raise himself but rise the whole nation. Mahatma Gandhi's name has, been invoked on the floor of this House. It would be ingratitude on my part if I do not acknowledge the great debt of gratitude that Indian women owe to Mahatma Gandhi for all that he has done for them. In spite of all these, we have never asked for privileges. The women's organisation to which I have the honour to belong has never asked for reserved seats, for quotas, or for separate electorates. What we have asked for is social justice, economic justice, and political justice. We have asked for that equality which can alone be the basis of mutual respect and understanding and without which real co-operation is not possible between man and woman. Women form one half of the population of this country and, therefore, men cannot go very far without the co-operation of women. This ancient land cannot attain its rightful place, its honoured place in this world without the co-operation of women. I therefore welcome this Resolution for the great promise which it holds, and I hope that the objectives embodied in the Resolution will not remain on paper but will be translated into reality. (Cheers).