

A Historic March

The month of March is historical as this month has witnessed many defining marches of democracy that had shaped the world. So, in our March issue of this magazine, we highlight three such events.



150 years ago

, in the month of March, the workers of the city of Paris, along with other revolutionaries, had formed the Paris Commune. Karl Marx was prophetic when he had written, "Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society." Though it was violently crushed and existed for a short duration, it stimulated the International Working Class movement and was an inspiration behind the Russian Revolution in 1917.

Salt Satyagraha, an act of civil disobedience launched by the nationalists and led by Mahatma Gandhi, aimed to stop the anti-people Salt Tax imposed by the colonial rulers. Salt, an item of daily use, resonated more with all classes of citizens than an abstract demand for greater political rights. As Nehru had later commented, "Of course these movements exercised tremendous pressure on the British Government and shook the government machinery. But the real importance, to my mind, lay in the effect they had on our own people, and especially the village masses ...". This movement initiated a series of movements by people from all strata of society, leading to India's removal of British power.



In March 2021, the farmers' protest against the anti-farmer Farm Laws in the outskirts of Delhi has crossed more than 100 days. Braving cold weather, police atrocities and an indifferent government, lakhs of farmers, with the support pouring in from the workers, students, democratic rights activists, are trying to restore true spirit of democracy. International Women's Day is celebrated by the farmers on 8th March, with the women leading the protest.

Like Paris Commune or Dandi March, will this lead to a great change in Indian polity? It depends on you and me, how we carry out the struggle in the coming days!

PEOPLE'S RIGHT

January - March 2021 Quarterly Issue - 04 Contribution : Rs. 30/-



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COMMITTEE FOR PROTECTION OF DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS - TN

Working Women's Day - 2021

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[Editorial Note: Like every year, this year also, social media sites were abuzz with wishes on International Women's Day and different online shopping offers were showered with a call for celebration. Notwithstanding the hardships due to Corona and economic slowdown, these calls promoting women's products try to obviate the problems women face today and the great historical background of this Day. At a time in history when abusing communism is the norm of the ruling elite, this article traces the historical context of the origin of Women's Day and outlines the present problems and a solution]

In 1907, World Socialist Women's Conference, under the Second International aegis, passed a resolution to fight for universal suffrage. In 1910, the World Socialist Women's Conference was conducted under the leadership of Clara Zetkin. Along with other resolutions on women's right, it was decided in this conference that Women's Day shall be celebrated. In the years to follow, similar valiant attempts were made in Russia, Austria, Germany, England and other parts of Europe. However, the most decisive step was achieved on 8th March 1917, when the working women from the textile industry at Petrograd (currently, St. Petersburg) in Russia organised a women's day. This movement snowballed into a massive movement leading to the overthrowing of the oppressive Czar through the February revolution. Following this, in the Second Communist Women Internationale, it was decided to celebrate 8th March, the day women in Russia rose against Czar, be declared the International Working Women's Day.

However, even after a century of that event, we are still in the process of raising demands for gender equality and equal rights. Women are treated as second-grade citizens without recognition for the labour discharged within the family and for rearing the child, do not receive equal pay for equal work, and are often subjected to sexual exploitation and sexual assault. As per the UN report, only 24% of the parliamentary seats are filled by women. At the global level, 60% of women are involved in the informal economy. Every third woman is subjected to sexual atrocities. As per the National Criminal Record Bureau report, in the year 2019 alone, 4,05,861 criminal cases were filed on atrocities against women. In the year 2018-2019, those convicted for rape cases were 4460. However, 1431 were released without any criminal investigation, and 10630 were released after the court's criminal proceedings. Those convicted for crimes against women in 2018-19 were 31,007. Those acquitted were 99,920. Such is the trend in courts on crimes against women.

The ugly face of patriarchy prevalent in all strata of society is not unseen in official parlance. As recent as 1st March 2021, an a comment by Supreme Court Chief Justice Bobde in a case related to an anticipatory bail in a child rape case caused a great flutter. As per newspaper reports, he had asked the accused, who was already married, if he was willing to marry the rape victim. This evoked great condemnation from the feminists all over India, and they had issued a press note condemning it. On the next day, the same bench issued a stay for a case pertaining to the abortion of the 26-week foetus of a 14-year-old girl, a rape victim, awaiting advisory from the medical board. According to the Medical Abortion amendment act 2021, a foetus beyond 24 weeks pregnancy shall not be aborted. As per the present data, 15.4 % of rape victims are below 18 years of age. Should a child of 12, 13, 14 years, in a rape survivor's case, knock on the doors of court every time to abort? Is it not the bounden duty of the state to provide justice to them? Could not this power be delegated directly to the Medical board without waiting for a final nod from the court after the advisory from the board, thus saving the avoidable delay that further enhances the suffering, anxiety and health of the rape survivor?

In another case, Indira Banerjee, who headed the Chennai High Court earlier, declared in a case related to wages of the nurses that if the nurses are not satisfied with the wages, they were free to quit. Similarly, there was another case of harassment of a Dalit woman sanitary worker in a university. She was forced to wash the clothes, including the inner garments of the husband of the VC, at the VC's house. When she had come to the court complaining against this

treatment, the Chennai High Court bench, headed by single judge Justice Raja, had quipped how she could differentiate when washing clothes, if it was inner garment and external wear? He had imposed a penalty of Rs. 25,000 on the Dalit women worker when it is well-known that a sanitary worker's daily wagers was just Rs.121. These judgements of the judiciary , when it comes to harassment of women is most disappointing. These are just a few sample cases.

During the Corona period, the frontline health workers, who were paid meagre wages and faced many hurdles, had to experience many additional troubles. Due to Corona, even the public toilets were closed. Women scavengers suffered enormously without public toilets. They were not given personal protective equipment. Due to the pandemic situation, women belonging to various sections like the nurses, fishing women, landless labourers, domestic workers and even workers in the organised sector faced a severe crisis. The domestic working hours and the atrocities on women increased. Legally approved, incidences of marital violence on women by their husbands increased much more during this time.

Thus, in a country where the atrocities against women were on the rise, regressive celebrations like Kolam contest, Cooking competition, Beauty contest and Dance competition were conducted on 8th March, the great day of blood-shed struggle by women. Socialists women are continuously raising their voice against this backward culture. Let us continue to rise in revolt to safeguard women's rights. Let us vow to raise our voice for gender equality.