Beginnings

Dramatic changes have taken place in the legal, political, educational and social status of women since independence. This was not unexpected since the question of the improvement of the position of women had been at the heart of the social reform movement from the first quarter of the nineteenth century when Ram Mohan Roy started his questioning of social orthodoxy. Besides, the freedom struggle since the 1920s and especially since the 1930s had partaken amply of the creative energies of Indian women. Gandhiji's statement in the mid-1930s to Mridula Sarabhai, a valiant fighter for his causes of women and freedom, 'I have brought the Indian women out of the kitchen, it is up to you (the women activists) to see that they don't go back,'[1] was no empty boast and no thoughtless exhortation. The national movement by treating women as political beings capable of nationalist feelings and as, if not more, capable of struggle and sacrifice as men resolved many doctrinal debates about the desirability of women's role in the public sphere. If women could march in processions, defy the laws, go to jail—all unescorted by male family members— then they could also aspire to take up jobs, have the right to vote, and maybe even inherit parental property. Political participation by women in the massive popular struggles from the 1920s onwards opened up new vistas of possibilities that a century of social reform could not. The image of the woman changed from a recipient of justice in the nineteenth century, to an ardent supporter of nationalist men in the early twentieth, to a comrade by the 1930s and 1940s. Women had participated in all streams of the national movement—from Gandhian to Socialist to Communist to revolutionary terrorist. They had been in peasant movements and in trade union struggles. They had founded separate women's organizations as well as the All India Women's Conference, founded in 1926, being the most important of these.

After independence, when the time came to consolidate the gains of the hard-fought struggle, the attention naturally turned to securing legal and constitutional rights. The constitution promised complete equality to women. It fulfilled the promise made many years ago by the national movement: women got the vote, along with men, without any qualification of education or property or income. A right for which women suffragettes fought long and hard in many Western countries was won at one stroke by Indian women!

In the early 1950s, Nehru initiated the process of the enactment of the Hindu Code Bill, a measure demanded by women since the 1930s. A committee under the chairmanship of B.N. Rau, the constitutional expert who prepared the first draft of the Constitution of India, had already gone into the matter and submitted a draft code in 1944. Another committee, chaired by B.R. Ambedkar, the law minister after independence, submitted a bill which raised the age of consent and marriage, upheld monogamy, gave women the rights to divorce, maintenance and inheritance, and treated dowry as stridhan, or women's property. Strong opposition from conservative sections of society, and hesitation on the part of some senior Congress leaders,

including President Rajendra Prasad, led to the bill being postponed, despite strong support from a majority of Congressmen and from women activists and social reformers. Ultimately, sections of the bill were passed as four separate acts: the Hindu Marriage Act, the Hindu Succession Act, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act.

The extension of legal rights to Hindu women was not sufficient but it was a big step forward. This is seen from the stiff opposition encountered by the government in its attempts to extend legal rights in the case of other religious communities. The Shah Bano case is a good example. In 1985, about forty years after Hindu law was reformed, the Supreme Court granted a pittance as maintenance to Shah Bano, a divorced Muslim woman. There was a furore among the conservative Muslim sections and sufficient pressure was put on the Rajiv Gandhi government for it to wilt and introduce a bill to negate the Supreme Court judgement. It is no doubt easy and even necessary to castigate the government for its cowardice but it should be remembered that while the Opposition brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets, the supporters of Shah Bano could muster only hundreds. While criticizing Nehru for not pushing through a more radical civil code for Hindus and for not passing a uniform civil code applicable to all citizens, it should be remembered that while Nehru did face opposition, he could also muster considerable support because among Hindus the process of social reform had gone much further than among Muslims, as evidenced by the Shah Bano case thirty years later.

While some legal rights have been exercised, others have remained on paper. The right to vote has been taken very seriously and women are keen voters, acutely conscious of the power of the vote. This is particularly true of rural women. But in other respects, especially with regard to right to inheritance of parental property, legal rights are by and large not claimed. It is still common in most parts of the country for women, both rural and urban, to forgo their rights in parental property. The custom of partilocal residence (residence in husband's home) is very largely responsible for this. This is also one reason women have refused to give up dowry because it is their only chance of getting a share of their parental property. The legal right to divorce has been increasingly used in urban areas, though the stigma attached to divorce is still prevalent, and the difficulties of setting up as a single woman immense.

Women's Movements: Post-1947

A positive development is that women's issues have been taken up by women's organizations as well as by mainstream political parties and grassroots movements. As expected, attention has been focussed on the more visible forms of gender injustice such as dowry deaths, rape, and alchohol-related domestic violence. From the 1970s onwards, through the 1990s, various movements were launched, sometimes localized, sometimes with a bigger spatial reach, on these issues, and public awareness of these has therefore heightened.[2]

After independence, with different political forces in the national movement going their own ways, the women's movement too diversified. Many women leaders became involved in government-initiated and other institutional activities for women's welfare, including rehabilitation and recovery of women lost or abandoned as a result of the mass migration and riots

accompanying Partition, setting up working women's hostels in cities, and women's vocational centres. In 1954, Communist women left the All India Women's Conference to form the National Federation of Indian Women, which became a party forum and not a broad united platform for women. Perhaps inevitably, there was not much evidence of women's 'struggles' in the 1950s and 1960s, which led to a view that there was no women's movement after independence till the new initiative in the 1970s. But such a perception fails to comprehend the inevitable phases of consolidation and quiet constructive work that follow phases of intense struggles as being integral parts of the movement. The Indian women's movement went through precisely such a phase after independence.

Women have also played an important role in peasant, tribal, farmers', trade union and environment movements and this has also enabled them to raise women's issues within them. In the Tebhaga peasant movement in Bengal in 1946–47, women had organized themselves on a separate platform of the Nari Bahini and they ran shelters and maintained lines of communication. Communist women activists also mobilized rural women on specifically women's issues such as rights to finance and property, and village-level Mahila Atma Raksha Samitis (women's self-defence committees) were formed which also took up the issue of domestic violence or wife-beating. In another major Communist peasant struggle of that time in the Telangana area of Hyderabad state from 1946 to 1950, women's participation was also quite significant, and the leadership did pay attention to women's issues such as wife-beating. But there is no evidence of women's organizations emerging. It is also said that women were discouraged from joining the guerrilla force and, when they did succeed in joining, felt they were not totally accepted. Communist women in other areas also complained later that they were strongly encouraged to marry men comrades and edged into working on the 'women's front', rather than integrated into the leadership as members in their own right.[3]

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a new political ferment in the country which gave rise to a host of new political trends and movements, such as the Naxalite movement, the JP Movement, the Chipko movement, and the anti-price rise movement. In the anti-price rise movement of 1973–75, which was organized by Communist and Socialist women in the urban areas of Maharashtra, thousands of housewives joined in public rallies and those who could not leave their houses joined by beating thalis (metal plates) with lathas (rolling pins). The movement spread to Gujarat where it meshed into the Nav Nirman movement influenced by Jayaprakash Narayan's 'Total Revolution'. Though neither of these directly addressed what are called women's issues, the very fact of mass participation of women had a liberating effect and enabled women to gain the self-confidence needed for moving on to more complex issues of patriarchy and women's oppression. Meanwhile, in Gujarat, a very important new development was the founding of a women's wing of the Textile Labour Association (TLA), an old Gandhian organization, called SEWA or Self-Employed Women's Association, which eventually became independent of the TLA. It was unique in that it took up women in the unorganized sector who worked as vendors and hawkers and at home in the putting-out system and organized them into a union which along with collective bargaining provided training, credit and technical help. SEWA spread to Indore, Bhopal, Delhi and Lucknow and even today under the able leadership of Ela

Bhatt is among the top success stories of Indian women.

A very different kind of movement emerged in the Shahada tribal area of Dhulia district in Maharashtra in 1972. Led initially by Gandhian Sarvodaya workers and later also by Maoist activists, the movement for drought relief and land in which the Bhil tribal women were very prominent culminated in a militant anti-liquor campaign in which women, who saw liquor as the main cause of wife-beating, broke liquor pots in drinking dens and marched to punish in public, men who beat their wives. In Uttarakhand, in the hill areas of Uttar Pradesh in the early 1960s, a similar movement had taken place under the influence of Gandhians such as Vinoba Bhave, Gandhiji's followers Sarla behn and Mira behn, who had set up ashrams in Kumaon after independence, and the local Gandhian leader Sunderlal Bahuguna, who became famous in the Chipko agitation. Women had come out in large numbers to picket liquor vendors and demand prohibition of sale of liquor. Anti-liquor movements have continued to erupt from time to time in different parts, the most recent being in Andhra Pradesh in the mid-1990s, when a powerful wave of anti-liquor protest by poor rural women led to a policy of prohibition and later restriction of liquor sales. Clearly, Gandhiji had understood a very important aspect of women's consciousness when he made liquor boycott an integral part of the nationalist programme and entrusted its implementation to women.

From 1974, women in Uttarakhand were again very active in the Chipko movement which got its name from the actions of women who hugged trees in order to prevent them from being cut down by timber contractors. It became famous as the first major movement for saving the environment and gave rise to the understanding that women had a special nurturing role towards nature, and that environment issues were very often women's issues because they suffered most from its deterioration, as when forests disappeared and they had to walk for miles to collect fuelwood, fodder and water.[4]

In Chhattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh, women were very militant in the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh which was set up in 1977 in the tribal belt to protest against the Bhilai steel plant's policy of mechanization, which was seen as being specially detrimental to women's employment; the Mahila Mukti Morcha developed as a new platform. In 1979, the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, an organization influenced by the ideas of Jayaprakash Narayan, which was leading a struggle of agricultural labourers against temple priests in Bodh Gaya in Bihar, and in which women activists and ordinary women were playing a major role, raised the demand that land should be registered in the names of women as well. This idea caught on in later years and in some states pattas, or title deeds for land distributed by government, and even tree pattas were given only in the name of women.

The Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan played the leading role in the effort to secure justice for the victims of the chemical gas leak in the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal in 1984. In the mid-1980s, the Samagra Mahila Aghadi emerged as the women's wing of the Shetkari Sangathana, which was spearheading the farmers' movement in Maharashtra from 1980. Over 100,000 women attended its session in November 1986 and took a stand against brutalization of politics which affects women more than other sections of society and also decided to put up all-women panels for the panchayat and zilla parishad elections.

Another stream of the women's movement took the form of what have been called 'autonomous' women's groups. These mushroomed in the urban centres from around the mid-1970s. Many of these consisted of women who had been active in or influenced by the Maoist or Naxalite movement, and its decline in the early 1970s triggered a process of debate and rethinking in which the issues of gender relations and the place of women in political organizations were prominent. Among the earliest of these was the Progressive Women's Organization in Osmania University in Hyderabad in 1974, and the Purogami Stree Sangathana in Pune and the Stree Mukti Sangathana in Bombay in 1975. The declaration by the UN of 1975 as the International Women's Year probably contributed to a flurry of activity in Maharashtra in 1975 with party-based and autonomous organizations celebrating 8 March as International Women's Day for the first time and a women's conference being attended in October in Pune by women from all over the state belonging to Maoist groups, the Socialist and Republican parties, CPM and Lal Nishan Party.

After the Emergency in 1977, another spurt of activity began. A women's group in Delhi began what turned out to be one of the most enduring institutions of the women's movement. *Manushi,* a journal which has documented and analysed the women's movement, told its history, presented literature by women, and much else, has continued till today under the able leadership of Madhu Kishwar, undoubtedly among the most original, self-reflective and fearless voices in the women's movement.

The women in the Janata Party, mostly Socialists, formed the Mahila Dakshata Samiti and played a major role in initiating the campaign against dowry in which the Delhi-based Stri Sangharsh was also very active.[5] The issue of dowry harassment and dowry deaths was taken up from 1979 in a big way through street rallies and plays, demonstrations outside houses of dowry victims, and demands for legal reform. The Janwadi Mahila Samiti, a wing of the CPM women's wing, the All India Democratic Women's Association set up in 1981, conducted a door-to-door campaign on the issue. A bill to amend the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961) was sent to a Joint Select Committee of parliament and throughout 1981 and 1982, women's organizations and other activists presented evidence before the committee as it toured the country. The amendments strengthening the law against perpetrators of dowry-related crimes were passed in 1984; a few minor ones followed later. The movement declined after this, leaving behind a feeling that the victories have not meant much, given the persistence of dowry and difficulty in securing convictions of offenders.

The other major campaign issue that emerged was rape, especially police rape. A number of cases, the Rameeza Bi case in 1978 in Hyderabad, the Mathura case in Maharashtra and the Maya Tyagi case in western Uttar Pradesh in 1980, brought the whole issue to public attention. Women's groups and organizations, along with mainstream political parties, took up the issue in a big way and a bill was introduced in 1980 itself to amend the existing law on rape. Passed in 1983, the main change that it brought about was that custodial rape was treated as a more heinous crime than other forms of rape and the burden of proof was shifted from the victim to the accused and this made a sea-change in the possibility of bringing about convictions of offenders. The campaign had subsided in the meantime, having shown up in its course the sharp divisions in the

women's movement, which were caused as much by struggles over turf as by differences of ideology and strategy. The prompt response of the government also left many activists feeling that their agenda had been hijacked or 'appropriated' by the government. The inherent weakness in a strategy that does not have room for absorbing reformist gains was revealed starkly.

The anti-dowry and anti-rape agitations seemed to have dissipated the energies of the movement for some time, and while there were protests around the Shah Bano case in 1985–86, there was not the same enthusiasm or unity. The issue was also less clear, being complicated by the overall communal atmosphere in which issues of Muslim identity got entangled with the simpler issue of women's rights, and the Hindu communalists' enthusiasm for Muslim women's rights often left women's rights activists confused and helpless.

The agitation against what was called the sati but looked like the murder of Roop Kanwar, a young woman in Deorala in Rajasthan, was also on the same lines, with the issues being muddled by Hindu communal groups portraying it as an attack on Indian tradition and putting women on to the streets to defend their right to sati. Interestingly, some of the more effective opposition to sati came from Arya Samajists like Swami Agnivesh, who toured the rural areas of Rajasthan and Haryana mobilizing opinion against sati, and also challenged the head priests of the Puri and Benares temples to a debate on their claim for a scriptural sanction for sati. In Orissa, Gandhians organized a rally of 10,000 women to gherao the head priest of the Puri temple, challenging him to prove his claim, which he could not. Opposition also came from the anti-caste movement in Maharashtra and rural women in Rajasthan.

Among the 'autonomous' women's groups, by the 1980s there was a clear shift away from mass campaigns to less dramatic work such as setting up of women's centres for legal aid, counselling, documentation, research, publication and the like, at least partly because it was felt that the mass campaigns with their focus on legal reform had not really succeeded in solving the problems they had set out to address. Many women's groups such as Saheli in Delhi felt it was important not only to focus on women's problems but also on their joys, and encouraged women to express themselves through music, dance and art. Others brought out magazines, acted as media watchdogs scanning advertisements and films derogatory to women, raised issues related to women's health, or campaigned against foeticide, for the rights of the girl child, or for water and housing for women in the slums. Many groups that worked with communities and not exclusively with women also brought a greater focus on women's issues into their work.

In Hyderabad, Anveshi was set up as a platform for theoretical studies of women's issues and in Delhi the Centre for Women's Development Studies promoted research and documentation, including in later years the launching of the *Journal for Gender Studies*. Many more university-based centres also came up in the 1990s, and enough research and writing was available for courses on Women's Studies to begin to appear in university curricula.

Clearly, the movement had entered another phase of institutionalization and consolidation as it had in the early 1950s, and what appeared to some activists as a watering down of the movement was more likely diffusion of its ideas into the wider society which was bound to be accompanied by some dilution of its sharp ideological content. It is also true that the movement suffered from a lack of unity about goals, strategies and methods, from sectarianism which was probably the

contribution of the left, and a tendency for reacting to immediate crises rather than building a consensus on an agenda for action. It has also been alleged that some sections were swayed by the money received from foreign organizations into taking up issues that concerned the donors but had little relevance to the movement in India, and at least some of the more convoluted debates on theoretical issues that absorbed the energies of some feminists suggest that the charge is not without substance. The gap between urban educated women's groups and rural or poor urban women's concerns also remained, though it narrowed in some instances. The sense of achievement that was so palpable in the 1930s and 1940s, when the leaps in empowerment and consciousness were huge, was missing as one looked at the women's movement since the 1970s.

This is not to say that the efforts were in vain. Government policy was certainly affected, and it came up with a National Perspective Plan for Women in 1988, which detailed plans for women's health, education and political participation. In 1989, the Panchayati Raj bill was introduced (though it was passed only in 1993) which instituted one-third of the seats in the panchayats to be reserved for women. The scheme for Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA) was introduced which sponsored mahila mandals or sanghams in rural areas and it enabled many poor women who had no other access to organize and express themselves, often helped by local-level voluntary groups and political activists. Another innovative scheme called the Mahila Kosh was also started which extended credit to mahila mandals to enable their members to improve their skills and standards of living. The effectiveness of these depended on the capacity of their utilization at the local level, and this varied with the level of politicization and awareness of women's issues. But large numbers of groups were able to use the legitimacy or protective cover of a government scheme as a stepping stone to reach poor rural women who they would otherwise find difficult to touch.

Attempts to increase women's role in local and national politics are still being made. Since one-third of the seats in the panchayats are now reserved for women, women panchayat members and village pradhans are now being given special training to perform their new roles. A serious move to reserve one-third of the seats in parliament for women has been going on for some time and has received considerable support from women politicians and women's groups and some political parties, and generated a great deal of debate.

Health and Education: A Record

The flip side of the coin is that female literacy in Barmer, the worst district in the most backward state (Rajasthan), is 8 per cent, lower than Burkina Faso, the worst country in sub-Saharan Africa, where it is 10 per cent. The infant mortality rate in Ganjam, the worst district of India in this respect, is 164 per 1,000 live births, which is worse than Mali, the worst country in sub-Saharan Africa, where it is 161. The fertility rate in Uttar Pradesh is 5.1, which is higher than the average for all low-income countries and much higher than even Myanmar and Bangladesh. The female–male ratio, that is, number of women per 1,000 males, in Haryana is 865, a level lower than that of any country in the world. Among elderly widows, the mortality figures are generally 86 per cent higher than for married women of the same age.[6]

The population of rural females in the 12–14 age group who have never been enrolled in any school is one-half in India as a whole, above two-thirds in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, and as high as 82 per cent in Rajasthan. Only 42 per cent of rural females in the 10–14 age group, and 40 per cent in the 5–9 age group are reported to be attending school. The dropout rate is also very high. Average number of years of schooling for persons aged 25 and above is 2.4 in India as a whole, while it is only 1.2 for females and 3.5 for males. In India, half of all females in the 15–19 age group are illiterate, in China less than 10 per cent.

The all-India averages and the focus on dark areas, however, hides the bright spots that hold out a candle of hope. The state of Kerala has a record that would be the envy of any developing country and in some respects is even equal to that of the developed countries. The adult literacy rate for women in 1990–91 was 86 per cent (and 94 per cent for men). This was far higher than China's which was 68 per cent for women and 86 per cent for men. It was even higher than any individual Chinese province. By 1987–88, Kerala had a female rural literacy rate of 98 per cent in the 10–14 age group. By 1992–93, 60 per cent of females aged 6 and above had completed primary education, the all-India average being only 28.1. The total fertility rate in 1992 was 1.8, which is below the replacement level of 2.1, which is the rate in the US and Sweden. The all-India average for fertility rate is 3.7. The infant mortality rate, which is closely tied, as is well known, to the position of women, was only 17 per 1,000 live births in Kerala in 1992, compared with 31 in China and 79 in India as a whole. The female–male ratio improved from 1,004 to 1,036 between 1901 and 1991, whereas at the all-India level it declined from 972 to 927 over the same period.

Fortunately, Kerala is not the only glowing example. Else it would appear that it is unique because of the historical advantage of having a very early start in the field of education, and because of the matrilineal customs of a significant part of its population. While both these advantages are a fact—the erstwhile princely states of Travancore and Cochin which constitute the bulk of modern Kerala, did give a very strong emphasis to education from the first quarter of the nineteenth century and the matrilineal system, which includes matrilocal residence, inheritance through females, etc. is a strong positive factor—other factors such as an activist and participatory political culture, itself helped by high literacy levels, positive public policies in the areas of health, public distribution system, and primary education, have been extremely important. And these are replicable, as shown by other success stories, notably Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

As recently as 1961, the crude literacy rates in Himachal were 9 per cent for females (and 21 per cent for males), which were below the all-India averages. By 1987–88, literacy rates in the 10– 14 age group were as high as 81 for females in rural areas and even higher at 97 per cent in the urban areas (the corresponding figures for males being 95 and 96 per cent). Thus, in urban areas women had outstripped men. Himachal Pradesh in this respect was second only to Kerala. In terms of number of girls in urban areas attending school, Himachal did even better than Kerala: 95 per cent versus 94 per cent. In rural areas, Kerala had the lead with 91 per cent versus Himachal's 73 per cent, but Himachal's figures were still higher than those of any other state. Other indicators followed suit. The female–male ratio in Himachal increased from 884 to 976 between 1901 and 1991, the biggest increase (plus 92) in the whole of India. Kerala had increased

only from 1,004 to 1,036, though in absolute numbers it was way ahead. The ratio of female death rate to male death rate in the 0–4 age group was only 88.2 per cent in 1991, even lower than Kerala's figure of 91.1 per cent and way below the all-India average of 107.4 per cent. However, the infant mortality rate was still quite high at 70 per 1,000 live births in 1990–92, as was the fertility rate at 3.1 in 1991, though both were below the all-India average.

In Tamil Nadu as well, there have been dramatic improvements in various gender-related indicators. It stands second only to Kerala in its fertility rate, which was 2.2 in 1991. The infant mortality rate was 58 per 1,000 live births in 1990–92, which was the third lowest in the country, only Kerala and Punjab having lower rates. The female literacy rate in the 10–14 age group in 1987–88 was 85.6 per cent in urban and 70.8 per cent in rural areas. The ratio of female death rate to male death rate in 0–4 age group was 90.5 per cent in 1991, the all-India average being 107.4. About 97 per cent of children between the ages of 12 and 23 months had received some vaccination by 1992–93, 'the highest percentage in the country.

The extreme diversity that we have encountered enables us to analyse the factors that facilitate and inhibit positive trends in gender justice. While history and tradition are important and the south of the country, historically, has a better record than the north, a strong commitment in public policy can bring about rapid change, as shown by Himachal Pradesh. The diversity also shows that economic prosperity or growth does not automatically lead to greater gender justice; Punjab, and even more Haryana, two prosperous states, perform pretty poorly on the gender front. The factors which facilitate improvement in women's position also emerge quite clearly. Female literacy and education are unambiguous winners, with the links with improvement in all other indicators coming out very sharply. Conversely, low literacy and education levels lead to negative trends in other indicators.

Women, therefore, have been the main victims of India's failures on the elementary education and literacy fronts. When primary schools in villages do not function, boys are sent to neighbouring villages or towns or even to private schools, but girls are usually just kept at home. Social conservatism, combined with the notion that investing money in a girl's education is like watering a plant in another man's house, since the benefits will accrue to the girl's in-laws' family, lead to this decision. But if schools are available, and teachers are regular, and classes are held, a large proportion of girls do get sent to school in most parts of the country. The consciousness of the value of education has spread to this extent even among the poorest sections. In fact, the poor are more aware that education is their one route to upward social mobility. But in a situation when single-teacher schools accounted for one-third of all schools (in 1986) and where, as recent surveys have shown, two-thirds of teachers were found to be absent during inspections, where there are fifty-eight children for each teacher at the 6–10 age group level, where India ranks 82nd in terms of the proportion of public expenditure on education to GNP among 116 countries for which data is available, it is small wonder that the rate of female literacy is as low as 39 per cent (1990–91).

Another factor that is very important in improving gender justice is the provision of free primary health facilities at the grassroots level. As in the case of education, if health facilities are not easily accessible or are expensive, the loss is unequally that of women and female children.

In fact, unequal access to improved facilities as well as to improved living standards is the major cause of the sharp decline in the female–male ratio in India from 972 to 927 between 1901 and 1991. It is not that the survival chances of women have decreased in absolute terms—on the contrary. But relative to men, women have gained less from the improved access to health facilities and better living standards and therefore their proportion has declined. To correct this imbalance, health facilities have to be brought within the reach of women. Where this has been done, as in Kerala, where over 90 per cent of women deliver their babies in medical institutions, the results are dramatic.

Thus, if the legal and political rights granted to women in the constitution, which are theirs by virtue of their own efforts as well as by all norms of social justice, are to be realized and democratized, millions of women have to become capable of understanding and exercising them. Kerala, and Himachal, at two poles of the country, have shown the way: the heartland has to follow. The women's movement also needs to incorporate education and health as priorities into its strategy for women's empowerment.