

# AIDWA



## NEWSLETTER-14

May-2022

### Editorial Communication

Dear comrades, friends and well-wishers,

It seems that today, not the book of the Constitution but the bulldozer has become the symbol of the state. It has become the symbol not only of the overt agenda of terror practised against the Muslim community by the powers heading the state, but of their deep hatred of labouring people and their determination to wrest whatever rights such toilers may have gained in the past through bitter struggles. Women become some of the worst targets of this both on account of the religious faith they hold and on account of their struggle for bare economic survival at a time when Covid has enforced a severe cut in their family income. Jahangirpuri in Delhi is but an instance of this.

The families living here are of so little consequence that the odd jobs and the small roadside trade they are forced to survive on have to be carried out on their own doorsteps. The state provides them no other space. The state provides them no alternative means of subsistence. Some of these people, all Indian citizens, may have been occupying this space after their eviction from another part of the national capital some years ago presumably in the name of development. Because they are so inconsequential, this meagre space where they live and work, their household belongings and savings are now to be demolished because they are said to be illegal encroachers; in addition they are to be wrongfully marked out as 'dangerous' 'anti-national' elements at the behest of local BJP chieftains.

Who would go against development? Who would protect possible nests of 'terrorism' right in the heart of the national capital? Is it any wonder that the people bereft of their homes and their means of livelihood find no other political force except the Communists to stand by them immediately! Is it any wonder that the Supreme Court itself has to be invoked to point out the illegality of the demolition to stall the march of 'development' for the time being! While we applaud the Delhi committee of CPI(M) and feel justly proud of our own patron Brinda Karat for their timely

intervention on behalf of the working people of Jahangirpuri, we cannot forget that for the latter this is but a lull in the storm and a mere prelude to a long battle they must fight to establish their rights as citizens and as workers. The Communists have shown the way, it is for the other secular democratic political forces to decide which side they would be on in this battle.

Ours is a mass organisation working among women from different sectors of society, of different religious persuasions and coming from different classes. But if there is a lesson to be drawn by us from the Communist intervention in Jahangirpuri, it is that there has to be a class-perspective in whatever work we do for the emancipation of women. Whether it is the problem of dowry, of domestic and social violence against women, of harassment and humiliation at workplace or of the burden of housework, without this class-perspective we may bring temporary relief or individual legal redress to specific sections of women, but without understanding that the inequality which dehumanises gender relationships is inextricably connected with the dehumanising inequality constantly imposed upon the labouring people we cannot strike at the root of the poison-tree. How can women be free if Jahangirpuris across the country come under the bulldozer to benefit the possessing classes?

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

**May Day – Rise to Defend the Unity of Our Nation and Our People!**  
**by Mariam Dhawale**

**Communal Conflagration in Jahangirpuri**  
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**Comrade Mallu Swarajyam, a Fallen Flower in the Orchard of Red Blossoms**  
**by S Punyawati**

*From the Archives of AIDWA:*

**Suggestions for Amendments to the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 – Submitted**  
**by Janvadi Mahila Samity Delhi and Working Women’s Co-ordination**  
**Committee, Delhi, 7 April, 1981**

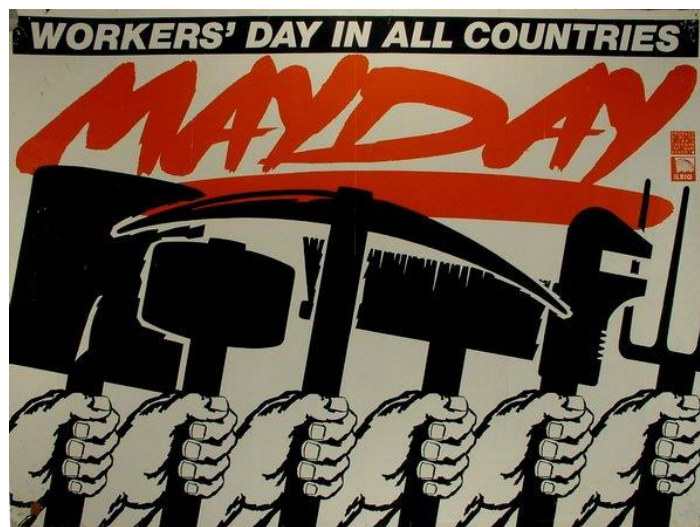
*Struggles across the World:*

**“Every 11<sup>th</sup> has its 13<sup>th</sup>”: How Venezuelans defeated a coup 20 years ago and**  
**continue to defend their country’s socialist processes today**  
**by Surangya**

**May Day – Rise to Defend the Unity of Our Nation and Our People!**

-Mariam Dhawale, General Secretary, AIDWA

May 1 – International Workers Day! Men and women from all toiling sections will come together to reassert their right to the wealth that they create, the wealth that is usurped by the exploiters in a capitalist system. During the pandemic, 80 per cent of the population has been at the receiving end. Having already lost out on their earnings, combined with the death of family members, they are trying hard to bring their lives back on track. But the RSS-BJP regime continues to disrupt their efforts by playing the vicious game of mayhem and murder. The politics of hatred is bringing out the worst in human nature.



In the beginning of April, especially on Ram Navami on April 10 and Hanuman Jayanti on April 16, Muslims, their places of worship, homes, shops and businesses were targeted and attacked. Mobs of the RSS-BJP-VHP-Bajrang Dal, armed with swords, guns and rods, took out processions through Muslim areas, giving shrill anti-Muslim slogans, and attacking them. Most of these incidents were reported in New Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Goa, Uttarakhand, Bihar and West Bengal. Exhortations to people to avenge the so-called 'wrong' done to them are cynically used by the RSS-BJP to foment violence thereby diverting the attention of the poor from the ruin caused in their lives by double-digit inflation and mass unemployment.

The Manusmriti which further propagates this hatred is in operation. Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, women, dissenters and the opposition are all in the line of fire. The month of April saw the brutal display of the arrogance of the communal forces with the shameful connivance of the police administration. Permissions for Ram Navami rallies with brazen display of arms, shouting of provocative slogans to incite riots without fear of

action clearly shows what the RSS-BJP intends to do in favour of the theocratic state that they want to construct. Houses of the minority community are razed to the ground with bulldozers. This is at a time when Muslims are fasting during Ramzan. This demolition continued despite the Supreme Court stay order. It was due to the bold resistance by comrades from Delhi led by AIDWA patron Brinda Karat that the demolition at Jahangirpuri was stopped.

"Hindu Rashtra" is a project to dismantle a diverse, secular and democratic India. The RSS-BJP want to rule by whipping up paranoia, hatred and violence. Muslims are the most convenient target. Anyone who objects to their politics of hatred is labelled anti-national. Hate and prejudice are becoming the norm as it is condoned by the ruling regime. The deafening silence of the prime minister further encourages this mayhem. The menacing spectacle of murderous goons parading in 'religious' processions is a raw assertion of power and violence to intimidate and humiliate the minorities.

The RSS has always idolized Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. After achieving power, Hitler smashed the nation's democratic institutions and imprisoned or murdered millions of innocent people, who included Communists, Socialists, Democrats and of course Jews, deemed inferior or undesirable. Hitler was actively supported by the German ruling class of big capitalists. Sky-rocketing inflation, unemployment, bank failures etc were forgotten by the German people during those murderous days. Democracy and individual rights were abolished. The aim of the Nazi Party was to seize power through the parliamentary system, install Hitler as dictator and create a community of racially pure Germans. Hitler blamed Jews, minorities and communists for the woes of Germany. Using the incident of the fire that broke out in the Reichstag (Parliament Building) in Berlin, for which Communists were blamed, Hitler convinced the President to declare emergency and suspended civil liberties throughout Germany. Freedom of press and expression and the right to hold public assemblies were suspended. Police were authorized to detain citizens without reason.

PM Modi's favouritism towards his corporate cronies, giving them concessions, writing off their loans and selling PSUs for a pittance, is well known. Hitler provided similar financial support to corporates. Both used the politics of hatred to rise to power. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) follows an extreme right-wing fascistic ideology similar to the Nazis. RSS had formally rejected the Indian Constitution, proclaiming '*Manusmriti*' as the Hindu law, and burned effigies of Ambedkar after the Hindu Code Bill was introduced.

The idea of India is being systematically demolished. This should alert all sensitive and patriotic citizens believing in democracy, justice and equality. The fascistic propaganda of the 'other' as enemy and the policy of divide and rule seem to have numbed a section of Indians. It is painful to see that a large part of our population is not angered by this targeting, killing, lynching, destruction of homes and families.

Only the Left and progressive forces are on the streets in defence of the minorities and the people. It is crucial that we awaken from our slumber and rise to defend the rights under the Constitution of all Indian citizens. On this International Workers Day let us resolve to stop the regressive RSS-BJP from destroying our secular, democratic nation! Broad unity and massive mobilisation of the people is the only answer to these divisive forces!

## Communal Conflagration in Jahangirpuri

-Maimoona Mollah, President, AIDWA Delhi Committee

“Work” under the Hindutva project of converting India into a Hindu Rashtra is in full swing. Towards that end, the communal agenda of RSS is very much on the table – or rather on the streets. And now for the last eight years since a government is installed under their leadership, they have been brazenly pursuing the agenda. This is being implemented mainly in the form of minority baiting – legal and physical attacks. The forms of implementation keep changing – lynching-to-save-the-cow, triple-talaq, love-jihad, 370+35A, CAA-NPR-NRC, Sulli Bulli, hijab, azaan-on-loud speakers.... Festival processions are the latest instrument of polarisation in this long and growing list.

Since the pattern in interventions by forces of Hindutva is similar in all events, one is bound to infer that surely a common method and political objective is being followed. Their actions on religious festivals are not isolated incidents, but are often coordinated plans which are not confined to one locality only. The occasions may also coincide with festivals of communities, and this provides a further incentive for creating trouble. The *modus operandi* is almost the same in each case. For example, on the day of the religious festival, say Ramanavami or Hanuman Jayanti, activists from the hindutva brigade organise a procession with flags, sticks, and often weapons such as swords and pistols. The participants of the procession shout aggressive and provocative slogans, stop outside a mosque at the prayer time and try to enter and vandalise it in order to incite trouble. Objection from the other side results in an altercation, stone pelting (from either or both sides) which escalates into a conflagration. The Muslims are then blamed as conspirators who hurt Hindu sentiments. And then further horror – they are punished, bulldozer politics comes into play. A coordinated nexus of politics-police-administration is indeed, on full display. Recently, this happened in Khargone. Nearer home and more recently this was repeated in Jahangirpuri.

Jahangirpuri is a resettlement colony. Back then - when it came into being during the Emergency - it was on the outskirts of Delhi. It is predominantly a working-class locality. The C block of Jahangirpuri, where this avoidable communal violence took place on 16 April 2022, comprises mainly of Bengali Muslims. They are mainly self-employed, involved in street vending, petty trade, selling of fish, waste collection, etc. It is shocking that the BJP should term these bona fide citizens of Delhi as “illegal” or describe them as Rohingya refugees or Bangladeshis. This is the context of the ‘communal’ violence of 16 April 2022.

## What a Fact-Finding Mission to Jahangirpuri Reveals:

A fact-finding team of the Left parties visited the affected area on 17 April 2022, including 3 representatives of AIDWA, Delhi – Asha Sharma (General Secretary), Maimoona Mollah (President) and Savita (Secretariat member). The team met many victims and tried to ascertain, the truth behind the violence.

### *April, the Sixteenth – What Happened?*

Since the early afternoon, three processions commemorating Hanuman Jayanti went by the locality. The first was rather nondescript or so the residents thought. But from what transpired later it now seems more like a recce. The second one did go up to the mosque, there was a little altercation but people from both sides helped avert the crisis. And then came the third – the full-fledged one – 150-200 people mostly outsiders (the residents said we could hardly identify a few locals in the *juloos*), waving their flags, brandishing their weapons – pistols, swords, bats – shouting Jai Shri Ram, and provocative slogans like “mulle kaate jayenge”, “hindustan mei rehna hai to Jai Shri Ram kehna hoga”. They were also playing loud music led by DJs and shouting these slogans, at a time when prayers were going on at the mosque. According to the residents the *juloos* was organised by the Bajrang Dal. There were two police jeeps one ahead of the procession and the other following it, but these vehicles did not have more than a couple of cops in each of the jeeps. They reached the mosque just when people were congregating for the “roza aftar” and evening prayers. The altercation started when someone from the procession tried to enter the mosque with a flag – the people inside the mosque must have thought that the intention was to hoist the saffron flag in the mosque or to perhaps vandalise the mosque. This was when the stone-pelting happened from both sides, as the residents told us. In all of this the residents told us that police remained mere mute spectators.

The residents were in shock – they said ever since this locality came into being, all the communities have been living in harmony. There has never been even a single communal incident, in this area. But what happened as a sequel to the violence was equally horrifying. Ordeal for the women didn't end there. The police conducted raids in the area in the dead of night and indiscriminately arrested 14 boys, all Muslims, on various charges. In one house, the women told us that, when they asked the police with folded hands why their homes were being raided, the male police punched them on their chests and stomach. We saw another 6-8 persons in the PS waiting for the ordeal to begin. Later, it is learnt, a number of persons from other communities have also been arrested.

We visited the Police station only to find the local BJP MP and the Delhi BJP leader addressing the Press occupying the entrance to the PS! The police justified it – after all he's the local MP, the Additional DCP said. Their nexus was clear because the Sanghis and the police have called the 16 April incident a conspiracy. Our account shows that the incident was indeed a conspiracy - a conspiracy to implicate the



victims, and protect the actual disrupters of communal harmony and amity that has prevailed in the area for many years.

### *Our questions:*

a) Did the police give permission for the procession; b) If not, why then was the procession allowed to continue that too carrying weapons? c) Why was the procession allowed to stop outside the mosque? d) Why did the police remain mute spectators while provocative slogans continued outside the mosque?

### *Role of the Police*

The role of the police has been reprehensible. First, the police gave an armed procession licence to stop outside the mosque shouting slogans right at the time of roza aftar and evening prayer. Second, they branded the people inside the mosque as “conspirators”. Third, they arrested (initially) only boys from the minority community, even though video evidence was available of the aggressive and provocative behaviour of the processionists. It is not surprising that the BJP has praised the police for their “commendable” role in this case.

The Jahangirpuri incident is not a one-off case. The South Delhi Municipal Corporation Mayor from the BJP announced a ban on the sale of non-vegetarian food, ABVP tried to enforce vegetarian food in JNU and brutally attacked those who protested. Rajaram a caretaker of a farmhouse in Chawla village was killed by cow vigilante’s alleging slaughter.

### *Aftermath and Demolitions*

Next came the demolitions, a la Khargone, whatever the pretext. There are encroachments galore all over the town – not only in resettlement colonies but in posh colonies too. But the police or the administration would not dare to touch the rich. The axe fell on the poor – this time to punish the victims as it were – the ultimate travesty of justice. On 20 April, even after the Supreme Court’s “status quo” order, the bulldozers continued to raze the livelihoods of the residents for one more hour. As members of AIDWA we proudly declare that it is our comrade, Brinda Karat, whose timely intervention (along with many more from the CPI(M) party) that helped avert a major catastrophe.

The RSS action plan is unconstitutional, against the secular democracy that India is. They spread fear and hatred. The need of the hour is to not to let the plans of the RSS-BJP succeed. They have failed in governance, in delivering to people their just rights. In order to expose this, we are demanding that a time bound judicial inquiry should be ordered to unravel the diabolical conspiracy of the RSS and its cohorts. We also feel that the Home Ministry should immediately intervene to fix the accountability

of the police and book the guilty police personnel not only for dereliction of duty but for open connivance with the perpetrators of violence. The Lieutenant Governor of Delhi should immediately intervene, breaking his silence.



### *JMS's Ongoing Intervention*

Our women have been going to Jahangirpuri regularly. We do have a number of units as also our district office in the area. We have started making an assessment of the losses people have suffered in terms of the items destroyed in demolition (until it stopped), and in terms of the disruption in livelihood that the operation has caused. Loss of livelihood is also because of the arrest of earning members in the family. We are further making an assessment of their immediate as well as long-term rehabilitation requirements. We are also going to be conducting a formal survey towards this end. We are working towards uniting and organising the people to agitate for right to life, livelihood and dignity and to reclaim a secular democratic India.

*Comrade Mallu Swarajyam, a fallen flower in the orchard of red blossoms*

-S Punyawati, Treasurer, AIDWA



There fell another flower in the orchard of red blossoms. Comrade Mallu Swarajyam's life was an open book with precious lessons for every woman. She was an institution in herself for women in public life. Com Mallu Swarajyam, a flower in the orchard of the red blossoms, which fell on 19 March 2022.

Comrade Swarajyam was a veteran communist and torchbearer of the historic Telangana peasants' armed struggle. With a rich experience in public life spanning over eight decades, she lived a complete life and died at the age of 92 years. Her influence over four generations of Telugu people, especially the Telugu women, is unmatched. Even though many women have participated in and led the Indian Independence movement, the Telangana armed struggle and the women's liberation movements, we very rarely find a woman who continued to walk the path of revolution. Com Swarajyam is one such exceptional woman who continued to live a public life and supported people's movements till her last breath.

She was a multi-faceted woman: an artist, a revolutionary, a public representative, a women's rights activist and a mother. Nobody ever saw the brave heart shed a tear as she struggled and withstood the many problems in her life, both on political and personal fronts. In her long revolutionary life, she could only be found in low spirits on a few occasions, such as when she remembered the martyrs of the movement, or when people's leader Gaade Srinivas Reddy was murdered and her husband, Com Mallu Venkata Narasimha Reddy, died.

Com Swarajyam began her journey as a people's leader at the early age of 11 by instilling a fighting spirit among the most oppressed people of the times, the women agricultural labourers. She wrote and sang songs to inspire the women agricultural labourers to break the chains of bonded labour and revolt against the landlords. It was

a time when the atrocities of the landlords knew no boundaries and even lactating mothers were forced to labour on the fields. It was a common practice among the landlords to demand the new mothers show their full breasts to be allowed a break to breastfeed their children. It was at this time that Com Swarajyam sang to appeal to the men on the fields to revolt through her famous Uyyala songs.

She would sing

*“Dear men, Uyyala  
Ploughing the fields, Uyyala  
Devoid of pus and blood are you?, Uyyala  
Why don't you revolt, Uyyala”*

Under the cover of the Uyyala (the cradle) songs which women sang while working on the fields, she would call upon all the workers to unite and fight against the landlords. Her powerful words moved men and women to plunge into action and as a true revolutionary she succeeded in igniting the fighting spirit among the toiling workers.

Comrade Swarajyam rebelled against the atrocities of the Telangana landlords in her youth; she joined the Telangana Armed Struggle that began in 1946. She began building the movement in Nalgonda, Warangal, Peddapalli and Bhupalpally districts at the age of 16 and for seven years, she continued to work among the people of Telangana away from home. She worked among the tribals of the region and commanded a squad of revolutionaries till she was 23. She married a member of the squad, Com Narsimha Reddy, after the movement ended.

Comrade Swarajyam did not try to build the movement sitting in air-conditioned rooms and travelling in air-conditioned cars. The beginning days of her family life reminds us of the iconic movie 'Mother India'. She took up family responsibilities when her husband dedicated his life to building the communist movement in the state. She raised her children by farming her land. However, she never abandoned her responsibilities as a revolutionary and continued to keep abreast of the political developments of the country. She went everywhere she was needed and continued to inspire people to join the people's movement and continued to lead her personal life with the same fighting spirit she built the movement with.

Com Swarajyam continued to fight for women's rights all through her life. She used every opportunity to highlight the direct link between the feudal system and the oppression of women. She lived her life by the values she preached, of independence and liberty. She told stories about how she would rally groups of children to stop child brides from being forcefully sent to their in-laws' houses. An ardent advocate of women's rights, she insisted that women members of the Telangana armed struggle be given firearm training. She identified leadership qualities in a tribal woman Nagamma in her squad and encouraged her to lead. She stressed the importance of women's consent in marriage and also fought for the right to divorce. She also fought for women's property rights. Anyone who raised issues of women, marital problems

or sexual problems has always been criticised in our society, but it is only such champions of women's rights who make history.

As an MLA, Com Swarajyam did not fear raising issues that were uncomfortable to hear for the elite men in the Assembly. However, she did not shy away from raising basic essential issues of women like sanitation problems, drinking water problems and the lack of maternity care services in the state. She turned a deaf ear to those who criticised her and called her "toilets Swarajyam" for raising those issues.

Com Swarajyam's stance and action in the case of Ramija Bee is one classic example of highest level of consciousness and awareness. Ramija Bee, a Hyderabad woman was raped by the police and in an attempt to escape punishment, the police attempted to malign her character. The false propaganda was so strong that it swayed the opinion of many. However, Com Swarajyam, who was an MLA at that time, extended her full support to Ramija Bee and fought to bring justice to her with the same fervour that she had fought the armed struggle. Her speeches in colloquial language of Telangana touched peoples' hearts. She would always share her experiences of the armed struggle to teach the party cadre about building peoples' movements. Quick and decisive, Com Swarajyam never dilly-dallied with any issues.

I looked towards Comrade Swarajyam to understand the issues related to Women's Liberation and organize women. My journey with her started 35 years ago when AIDWA struggled to organise women farmers in the villages near Anakapalli Town in Visakhapatnam district. In theory, we have read that it is possible to attain gender equality only when women, along with the men, participate in commodity production. But, when organizing women farmers it is difficult to translate this theory into practice. Despite being at the centre of the production process, some of these women have been victims of dowry harassment and dowry deaths. These women wake up at the first light and, with a *neem* twig in their mouths, carry pots of water or heaps of grass on their heads to the fields to begin the farm work and have been an integral part of the agriculture labour. "Where aren't these women present in the production activity? Isn't their role crucial in agricultural production? Yet, why are they getting killed for dowry? Why are they subjected to domestic violence? Why should there be oppression of women in such a system?" These questions have haunted me over time.

At AIDWA district-level classes, I sat with Com Swarajyam to discuss these questions. I was skipping through the book 'The origin of the family, private property and the State' as Com Swarajyam shared her experiences. As we discussed questions like how to identify women activists and why they were not keen on joining the AIDWA despite being interested in politics, Com Swarajyam gave her analysis. "A wife means home. A wife means the beast, the sheep, the goat, the land and the work. She means all these," she explained. It was an analysis she gave out of her experience.

Here, we need to note the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Marx said that modern marriage essentially contains servitude along with slavery and that it has come to be to carry out agricultural works. His conclusion is most relevant to India, where most families rely on the labour of their own family members. Oppression is veiled under

familial relationships and affections. This leads to women grinning and bearing domestic abuse in silence.

Com Swarajyam stressed these issues a great deal during our discussions and in her speeches. "We are all talking about women's rights. But, do you men have any rights? You and we should unitedly fight this system of exploitation," she appealed to the men in her speeches.

She would mostly touch upon unpaid labour and parenting responsibilities of the commonly discussed topics. "Is parenting the responsibility solely of women? Should women remain backward for the sake of the children? If that is so, then we will not bear children anymore. Will society survive if women stop bearing children?" she questioned the audience at a public meeting held during the district conference. She explained that the development of any society is impossible without children and they are our society's wealth. She said that since society reaps the benefits of the child's energy and talent, the responsibility of the child and the mother is also of the society.

Her wise advice to women, during the same meeting, was practical and helpful. She said to them, "The husband recognises your worth only when the public recognises it. Rights are not something you can beg for. You should build your own life". I have never seen a despondent Com Swarajyam. She would always stand tall and walk straight. Her life was a challenge not just to the oppression of the landlords but also to the patriarchal society.

We see a rise in suicides these days which pains me very much. The question of "Why?" continues to haunt everyone. Back during the days of Nizam rule, the people survived the atrocities of the landlords. They bore the torture but never resorted to suicide. They have chosen the path of agitation. Why are today's children turning despondent?

During the resistance movement, the people stood by one another and toughened themselves. They bore torture for their fellow comrades and sacrificed their lives for the movement but never became despondent. That is the fundamental difference between a struggle and one for the collective good and the one done for individual aspirations. This spirit was also displayed when Com Swarajyam inaugurated a girl's training camp in Hyderabad during the all-India conference of CPIM in 2002. She was in her 70s at the time when she tied her saree in "Kaasa" style (the pant style) and got into the fray. She taught the girls self-defence techniques and exercises. We should emulate and imbibe her spirit.

Com Swarajyam is one among the many great women who stood by their own decisions and braved the consequences. It was during her time as an MLA that a farmer's oxen and bullock cart were seized by the bank for failing to pay his loan and were kept in a police station. He sought Com Swarajyam's help and in a bid to help the poor farmer, she openly challenged the police and forcibly took over his oxen and bullock cart and gave them to the farmer. Her actions were rapid and she was a guerrilla in the jungle of people. She also played a remarkable role in acting as a bridge between the two Telugu regions of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. At a time

when Telangana was under the Nizam's rule, Andhra Pradesh was ruled by the British. The people of the two regions had different cultures, spoke in different slang but were however united by the spirit of revolution. Many leaders of the Telangana armed struggle took cover in Andhra Pradesh. Com Swarajyam toured Andhra Pradesh to collect funds for the Telangana armed struggle and it is said that she was presented with a garland of rupees during one such fund campaign. Her astounding public speech in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh demanding to ban liquor in the then united Andhra Pradesh has drawn huge crowds. She led the procession with thousands of women to thwart a liquor store auction in the Subbareddy Stadium and warned the government to pay heed to their demands.



*Sunil Janah, Mallu Swarajyam and other members of an armed squad during the Telangana armed struggle, 1946-1951.*

As an advocate of women's right to property, she worked with the committee appointed by the then Chief Minister of the united Andhra Pradesh, NT Rama Rao. As part of the study conducted by the committee, she toured across the state. Along with comrades Suryawati and Udayam, Com Swarajyam supported the demand that women should have a right to a share in ancestral property and to a share in their husband's property as well. They held a public meeting with thousands of women on this issue where they held a signature campaign. Later, the signatures were handed over to the CM. Com Swarajyam also played a key role in formulating demands for toilets for women, maternity services, women's poly technique colleges and Karate coaching for women in colleges in the state.

Even though Communists do not attach high value to positions and accolades, it is important for the current generation to know the responsibilities Com Swarajyam took

up in her life as a revolutionary. She worked to rebuild the women's movement and toured across.

s the united Andhra Pradesh along with comrades Manikonda Suryawati and Moturu Udayam. She played an active role in organising political training classes for women in 1967 in the Guntur district and the AIDWA state conference in 1974. She was elected as the Andhra Pradesh state president of AIDWA in the conference held in Suryapet in 1980 when Com Udayam was elected as the secretary. She continued to work as the state president of AIDWA for 21 years, until 2001. She played a key role in organising AIDWA state conference in 1984 in Miryalaguda wherein the great Telangana warrior Com Iamma was felicitated.

It is remarkable that even though Com Swarajyam was born into a family of rich landlords, she was loved by agricultural labourers and farmers across all castes. She was regarded as a representative of the movement they built for land and wages. She was seen as a representative of the anti-bonded labour movement and an anti-caste oppression activist. She has never been viewed as a representative of her caste and was loved by people of all castes. She was appreciated by leaders of all women's associations, including those from the upper caste because her voice echoed the voices of lakhs of ordinary women. Despite having little education and never having set her foot in a school, the experts have always considered her to be one among them owing to her vast experience in the Telangana armed struggle and the great knowledge she gained from those experiences.

One cannot help but wonder if for her experiences as an armed revolutionary, a farmer, a mother and a communist who witnessed society change its face from before the Independence to today, life itself has conferred a PhD to her.

I worked with her for ten years. We worked together as secretary and president of AIDWA, as CPIM Central Committee members. We have shared our thought with each other. We have shared love and affection with each other. We also had our share of disagreements and a void filled our hearts when she left us. It was at that time that Com Swarajyam called upon everyone not to dwell in grief and share their memories of Com Suryawati with everyone. It was this call that resulted in a memoir book "Mahila Udhya Manipusa Manikonda Suryawati".

Today, the same void fills our heart after the death of Com Swarajyam on 19 March 2022. Our duty, however, lies not in shedding tears for her as she never liked to cry. What she preferred was to groom women into duty-bound activists. She always said that we should create history with our actions. Having lived 80 years of her life as a revolutionary, she did create history. With her passing, a chapter in history has ended and a new one has begun.



*From the Archives of AIDWA:*

**(This document is a testimony to AIDWA women's struggles even as the all-India organization was in the formative stage for better laws against the heinous system of dowry)**

**SUGGESTIONS FOR AMENDMENTS TO THE DOWRY PROHIBITION ACT, 1961 –  
SUBMITTED BY JANVADI MAHILA SAMITY DELHI AND WORKING WOMENS' CO-  
ORDINATION COMMITTEE, DELHI, 7 April, 1981.**

1. The subject of the Act, viz. 'dowry' is one that cannot and should not be dealt with alone but should be seen and treated along with other corrected subjects like women's rights in the societal set-up, procedures regarding investigation, prosecution, etc., in the criminal law, legal aid, physical protection, marriage laws, etc. The Act has proved a failure mainly because it does not comprehend the above. Also, without proper enforcement machinery, independence of the police, the Act cannot be effective. Further, people have to be educated properly about the evil of dowry by introducing such education even at primary school level.
2. In section 2 of the Act, the words "as consideration for the marriage" should be deleted. Ostentatious celebration of marriages and display of gifts should be prohibited. Public Authorities should not give any permission for electricity connections, blocking of roads, etc., for such celebrations. Marriage expenses, Gifts and presents, which are disproportionate to the income of the bride, if she is employed, or her parents in as much as they exceed 10% of such income shall be deemed to be dowry given "as consideration for the marriage". Any person wanting to prove to the contrary should be required to prove conclusively that the gift or present was not dowry. The Act should cover any gift or expenses incurred right from the engagement stage and any time during the subsistence of marriage.
3. The person who gives dowry should be excluded from the ambit of Section 3. The existing provision of punishment to the "giver" actually prevents the offence being brought to light even by the oppressed people. Punishment of imprisonment should be a mandatory minimum of six months, extendable at the discretion of the Court to 5 years. 'Punishment should be both imprisonment and fine, which shall be paid to the woman or her children.' When children are minor, the parents of the woman shall hold it in trust for the children until their majority. When there are no children, the fine should be paid to women's parents. Fine must also be proportionate to the value of the dowry, i.e., Rs. 5000/= or 10% of the value of the dowry, whichever is higher. Harassment by the husband or the in-laws should be made punishable and it should also be made a ground for divorce.

4. In Section 4, the word “bridegroom” should be deleted. Punishment should be a minimum of six months extendable to one year and with fine which may extend to Rs.5,000/-. The proviso to the section should be deleted.
5. In Section 5, it should be expressly stated that any dowry given in pursuance of such an agreement shall be returned by the person who received it within six months of the receipt, otherwise penalty of imprisonment and fine with prosecution for recovery should follow.
6. In Section 6 (3), the surviving husband should be excluded from the expression “heirs of the woman”.
7. The whole of Section 7 should be deleted.
8. All offences under the Act should be cognizable, non-bailable and compoundable. No permission of the Court for compounding the offence sentence should be required. Any police officer, magistrate or Dowry Prohibition Officer functioning in the concerned area should be required to the cognizance of an offence under the Act at the earliest information that comes to him about the commission of such offence.’ Failure to do so should be treated as a punishable offence.
9. Dowry Prohibition Officers should be appointed as mentioned in Question No:17. They should work on the advice of a non-official advisory body consisting of  $\frac{3}{4}$  the women members representing social welfare organizations or social workers etc. The advisory body and the Dowry Prohibition Officer should have powers concurrent with the Police in the matter of investigation arrest and conducting prosecution, etc. Investigation and prosecution must be completed within 3 months of the start of such proceedings.
10. Legal aid and protection should be given to the aggrieved party whenever it is sought for. Such matter should be left to the discretion of the advisory body, which would be in the know of the needs of the individual case.
11. Other major amendments required are:
  - a. All marriages whether under the customary law or under the Special Marriage Act, shall be compulsorily registered. The Registrar, at the time of registration, shall explain to the bride, the bridegroom and their parents, the provisions of the Dowry Act. The Bridegroom and his parents shall be required to make a declaration on oath that they have understood the Act and they have not violated any provision of the Act. Any person found later to have made a false declaration shall be punished for perjury as well as for violation of the Act.

- b. Mitakshara law of coparcenary should be abolished and women should be given equal rights of inheritance of all properties under all laws.
- c. The commission of any offence under the Act should be made a ground for divorce or voidable marriage under all marriage Acts. When divorce is granted, the property of the husband should be shared equally between the wife and husband.
- d. A provision should be made in the Government servants Conduct and Discipline Rules, that all Government servants should make a declaration every year that they are not guilty of any offence under the Dowry Prohibition Act. Any false declaration should be visited with dismissal.
- e. Dowry deaths should be treated as a special kind of murder. No mitigating circumstances should be allowed to be proved on the question of sentence. Heavy fine should be imposed on the guilty, which shall be given to the heirs of the victim in the manner suggested earlier.
- f. The dying declaration made by the victim shall be taken to prove conclusively the guilt of the accused, without any corroboration.
- g. Social Welfare Organizations, independent social workers or neighbours should be given the right to initiate prosecution under the Act.

The Evidence Act should be suitably amended to provide that in proceedings relating to offence under the Dowry Prohibition Act involving death or other harassments, that once the complainant states that dowry was accepted or demanded and gives a fairly cogent narration of the incident and the nature of articles demanded, circumstantial evidence to the above effect should be deemed sufficient and on that basis a presumption should be raised against the accused. Such presumption would be rebuttable only if the accused show by conclusive proof to the contrary.

*Struggles across the World:*

**“Every 11<sup>th</sup> has its 13<sup>th</sup>”: How Venezuelans defeated a coup 20 years ago and continue to defend their country’s socialist processes today**

-Surangya, AIDWA, Delhi

On April 11, 2002, the democratically elected government of Venezuela led by socialist president Hugo Chavez, was ousted in a coup staged by the country’s far-right and backed by the US. Just two days later, however, on April 13, this coup was reversed. Millions of people descended from the working-class *barrios* (neighbourhoods) in the hills surrounding capital city Caracas in defence of their leader. At the same time, people across the country were staging protests. In only 47 hours, this mass uprising succeeded in restoring democracy to the country. What explains this revolutionary sentiment and where does Venezuela’s socialist project stand today?



### **The Bolivarian Revolution and the events of 2002**

Hugo Chavez was elected president of Venezuela in 1998 after decades of mass discontent with the conservative ruling order. Chavez was a key leader of the 1992 Caracazo movement in the country against the then government of president Carlos Andres Perez. Perez had enacted various neoliberal reforms after striking a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1989 which resulted in steep inflation. The Caracazo was an anti-oligarchic, anti-imperialist and popular movement in which masses across the country participated. It created the grounds for the Bolivarian Revolution which began with Chavez’s term as president.

On February 2, 1999, Chavez was sworn in as the president. He vowed to reform the 1961 constitution through a democratic process. The day he was sworn in, he began the process of rewriting the constitution by calling for a referendum for the creation of

a National Constituent Assembly, which would work on creating the new draft. The new constitution, based on the principles of socialism, nationalization, and state-led economy, was approved with 71 percent of the votes in December 1999. It established a new social and people-centric model of the state and renamed the country to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Chavez soon began enacting reforms which antagonized the traditional elite of the country. He passed decrees implementing land reforms, oil wealth distribution, and creating cooperatives. These posed a direct challenge to the interests of the capitalist classes.

Fedecamaras, Venezuela's largest and powerful business federation, was among the fiercest opponents of the socialist government. In April 2002, when Venezuela's right-wing launched the coup and forcefully removed Chavez from office, the opposition anointed Fedecamaras president Pedro Carmona as the new president of the country.

Carmona immediately dissolved all branches of the government, including the Supreme Court and the National Assembly. He suspended constitutional rights, unleashed harsh repression, and declared the newly adopted constitution of 1999, which embodied the hopes of decades of revolutionary movements, as null and void.

The plotters of the coup went forward with their plans after taking control of a section of the military and with the support of private media. The media played an important role for the opposition; it disseminated their narrative far and wide, thereby mobilizing support for their agenda. A false narrative was created within the country and internationally, showing that the Chavez government was the instigator of the violence that took place outside the presidential residence, the Miraflores palace, when the coup was underway. The media blacked out not only the voice of the Chavez government, but also the scenes of his supporters taking to the streets in his defence in the hours following his arrest.

The opposition assumed that this would be enough to guarantee them success, as in pretty much every other coup attempt, this strategy has worked.

This assumption could not have been more wrong. As Samuel Moncada, former Minister of Higher Education and Professor of history at the Central University says, "...the people from the barrios, recognized that they had woken up without rights on that Saturday [April 12]. The Venezuelan people understood that we were being enslaved."

The uprising that took place in those days is often described as spontaneous. It was assumed that most people would have come out on the streets without any organisation and instigation because of the media blackout. Yet, as George Cicccareillo-Maher writes in his book *We Created Chavez*, "...mass spontaneity, while fundamental in its importance, is often the result of serious organizing that, in the case of Venezuela, spans decades."



People were able to achieve the reversal of the coup with the support of those in the military who remained loyal to Chavez. As millions gathered in the streets demanding the president's return, loyal military members took action. They secured the Miraflores palace and were able to bring Chavez back safely on the night of April 13. The coup was defeated, giving rise to the popular saying, "Every 11<sup>th</sup> has its 13<sup>th</sup>." This civic-military alliance continues to be crucial to defending the Bolivarian process in Venezuela today.

### **People continue to defend and strengthen the Bolivarian Revolution**

Venezuela continues to face attacks and interventions from imperialist powers, particularly the US and its allies. The country is under a wide range of unilateral sanctions which have had devastating impacts on its economy. There have been multiple attempts to destabilize the country and overthrow the democratically elected government of Nicolas Maduro by US-backed right-wing forces in the past couple of years.

However, each time the organized masses have stood strong and defeated these attempts. This has only been possible because the processes of organizing – of building collectives and communes – are thriving.

In 2011, Hugo Chavez had launched the Great Housing Mission of Venezuela in order to address the country's housing crisis and build affordable housing for the people. Earlier this month, on April 7, president Maduro celebrated the delivery of a record 4 million homes for the people, as part of this project.

This success was not only due to the government, but also the organized people of Venezuela. Various grassroots housing movements have struggled to win land rights. These movements then organise people to build homes themselves, under the government's housing project on the principles of democratic self-management.

“...it should be noted that when we talk about self-management, we are not just talking about housing construction. Self-management generates a new societal model: when people live side by side and take decisions collectively in assembly, that is when a new society begins to emerge,” said Rigel Sergent from the Movimiento de Pobladoras y Pobladores, a movement that occupies unused urban land.



‘Without organization there is no revolution,’ painted on a wall at the Altos de Lidice Commune in Caracas

Similar collective principles are visible in the communes which organize hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans. These communes have given rise to local assemblies and neighbourhood councils where the people can discuss community needs and provide a platform to take these to the government. These *colectivos* are considered the backbone of the Bolivarian revolutionary process because they give a direct voice to the people.

Just as in 2002 when millions of Venezuelans took to the streets, today the people are fighting against an international order that is intent on creating hunger and unrest. But they are not defending any particular leader or party. The people are resolute in this fight because they are defending the processes of the Bolivarian revolution, the same processes which guarantee them their collective power and voice.

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