

the case was transferred to another court.

The legitimate struggle of the girls was vindicated at yet another point when the women were acquitted in a majority of the false criminal charges filed against them. What made the victory sweeter was that along with the judgement order of acquittal, strictures were also passed against the concerned police officials investigating the matter.

In a spirit of unholy vengeance on January 2, 1984 although a 'status quo' had been granted to the inmates, the management taking the law into their own hands, completely cut off the supply of water and electricity. By this time the harassment had reached intolerable limits and of the original number of 140, only 35 women had stayed back.

The management made determined attempts through petty forms of harassment to coerce the women into leaving the hostel. Among the very definite strategies they used towards this end, were sending telegrams to the parents of the women asking them to come and take their daughter away since she had been arrested, and exerting pressure on the hostelites through their employers asking them to apologise to the management if they did not wish to lose their jobs.

Getting the domestic staff to help them in their efforts to break the morale of the residents, they even descended

the residents (all this in a house of God where 'contemplation' is the order of the day), who were instilled with extreme fear for their own safety. So much so that the last ten women who managed to stay together and bear up against the vicious attacks of the management, were also forced to go out of the hostel. However, as they have made it clear to the court, they have moved out of the hostel only for reasons of security and since they have left a major part of their belongings inside, they intend to go back to the hostel as soon as some solution - legal or otherwise, is in sight.

The Brigittine Hostel issue cannot remain an isolated localised struggle confined to either 140 or 10 women. It is a microcosmic situation representative of the sheer hypocrisy of certain propounded pretensions and values and the attempt to expose and break the legitimising forces which attempt to give victimisation and exploitation an aura of righteous respectability.

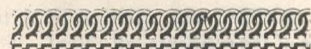
Here certain specificities emerge as related to religious institutions which attempt integration into the mainstream of society, by setting up 'social' organisations like hostels for working women.

(a) On account of being a religious organisation run by 'missionaries', the hostel management could take effective refuge behind its minority status which granted it immunity from governmental interference. Moreover, even within the hierarchy of the church, the archbishop made no move to

working as secretaries in private firms, earning an average salary of Rs.350/-. Supposedly, 'social service' organisations meant for providing shelter to such women, in the ultimate analysis are reduced to mere 'self service' organisations.

What has to be done to counter the prejudiced and avicious attitudes of managements incapable of running hostels for independent working women in need of security and shelter? Even if long term plans can foresee the setting up of independent community housing structures managed by residents, the more immediate need is for progressive legislation which brings within its ambit, all such hostels regardless of their social or religious standing.

Vimochana



## The Fractured Image

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in Cinema' bringing up several points that are well worth greater discussion and debate.

Often, he said, the theme of a film is mistaken for its content, citing the example of 'Insaf Ka Tarazu' the much criticised film which, while ostensibly decrying the fact of rape, actually invites a sexual relationship with the protagonist.... Zeenat Aman.

He spoke of the natural impa-

Minister. For a month they even went on a hunger strike in front of the Labour Commissioner's office.

Since at this point a few politicians also got involved and went on a hunger strike in support of the employees, the government intervened and forced the management to

tience of activists towards change, but he warned of the dangers in expecting art to change immediately with the social condition of women. If cultural activity is to change, it has to fall back on questionable methods, often succeeding in reinforcing prejudice, instead of displacing images to get new meanings. While facile and easily understood images are needed, the only way to radicalise cinema content is to take recourse to traditional vehicles of expression and try to work against them, maybe by raising new slogans.

Perhaps this is what Shahani has tried to do himself in 'Tarang', where Janaki (Smita Patil) although alluding to several mythological archetypes, is meant to break the sexist sociological pattern on which these archetypal images are built.

Here he also cautioned against a sexualisation of politics and then of all reality, and later reminded women that they should recognise that the subjectivity of men is as much in

and suppress the struggle of the women employees - a struggle aimed at the right to live with dignity. So 80 desperate women today are being exploited by women of a higher class, under the deceptive if hypocritical guise of social service. For instance, the management threw the girls out of the

bondage as is the objective quality of women, saying that women's freedom depends on freeing mankind in general.

Coming back to cinema, he spoke of the difficulty in defeating the immediate logic of the visual.... where everything is presented as an object. "We have to change our conception of feminine form (curves, smooth lines etc)", he said. The women's question is difficult to unravel, he went on, because of the long history of exploitation which makes instant solutions far from possible. And yet, he said, "The task of the filmmaker is to restore the sensuous and to restore that activity of man which can change society."

His speech was followed by a long and lively debate, where the director was grilled about his work, his own exploitation of Smita Patil's sexuality, which he strongly denied, and a general question and answer session about the condition of women in film and society. Sadanand Menon, a journalist from Madras, spoke on the portrayal of women in South Indian films. He lamented the fact that while men's roles have undergone tremendous differentiation over the years,

for help? At this juncture when no short term solution seems to be working, the situation warrants a radical change in the functioning of society. This applies to all the issues we are involved with and the Gayatri struggle is only one such example.

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women were still trapped in iconic images like those of the Umman Cult, where primal woman, the handmaiden of superstitious bigotry, reigns supreme.

"Why do women consume their own devaluation?" he also asked. That is a question easily answered. Even now, when women are beginning to take part in world affairs, it is still a world of men. A woman still seeks a definition of herself through the eyes of men, and if men portray her as a seductress and doormat, it is hard for her to break that image.

That is why a new cinema, a cinema of and for women, is so strongly needed in India. The big screen is the only means of mass entertainment development. If it is influential enough to serve as a trampoline into the political arena, it is also a major cultural vehicle for change. A few signs are showing that women are coming into their own in Indian cinema.... not very radically so, but at least differently from men. Hopefully, in a larger context, film festivals and discussions like the one presented by Vimochana, have their own role to play in fostering a climate for this social transformation.

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