

## **Women's Anger Erupts In Delhi – AIDWA Demands Freedom From Violence, Fear, Hunger And Unemployment, Condemns BJP Regime**

**Mariam Dhawale**

It was a truly memorable rally. Nearly 10,000 women marched on the roads of Delhi for two hours - in torrential rain throughout! But even the drenching could not subdue their indomitable spirit. They came from the nooks and corners of 23 states in the country. They belonged to every caste, religion and community. The women marched, the old and the young with children in their arms, from Mandi House to Parliament Street on September 4, 2018 under the banner of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA). They marched to demand freedom from violence, fear, hunger and unemployment. They came to express their deep anger against the Modi government. They declared that they were undeterred by the terror tactics of the RSS-BJP.

Narendra Modi made a lot of promises before the 2014 elections, but has done nothing for women. This government has failed on all accounts. Women expressed their anger against the alarming increase in violence and brutality against women, especially girl children, threatened food security, the grim spectre of starvation and malnutrition, rising unemployment, and the escalating communal and casteist attacks by the goons of the RSS-BJP. Crimes against women have increased by 34 per cent in the last four years. Women are not safe under the BJP central and state governments. Rapists are roaming free while women and children are forced to stay indoors. The jumla of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao stands exposed. Now the slogan should be – BJP se Beti Bachao! This protest rally resolved to expose the BJP Government for having reneged on its promise to provide safety and security for the women of our country.

There are serious livelihood problems also. The government has not provided regular work under MNREGA. Due to the slashing of the budget for MNREGA, work is now not available. How do we light our stoves in these times of inflation, demanded the women. Price rise of all essential commodities and gas cylinders has forced half our population to go to bed hungry. The biometric machines do not recognise the finger prints of the majority of the women who labour hard in fields and as unorganised labour. "I am standing right there, but my existence is denied and I have to return home empty handed to my hungry children," said a woman from Jharkhand with anger in her eyes. The Aadhar card and biometric machines must be discarded.

Naari Uthi Hai Ab Lalkaar, Nahi Sahege Bhaajapa Sarkar! Haath Me Kaam Do, Kaam Ka Pura Daam Do! Rozi Roti De Na Sake Jo, Woh Sarkar Nikammi Hai! Jo Sarkar Nikammi Hai, Woh Sarkar Badalni Hai! These were some of the slogans that rent the air.

AIDWA Patron Brinda Karat said that the last four years of Modi rule have been a betrayal of its election promises. Instead of giving food grains, they have forced linkage of the Aadhar card and have thus increased starvation deaths. Women are being pushed back into their homes instead of being provided jobs. Communal and caste tensions are on the rise. Atrocities on women are increasing and the BJP goons are standing in support of the criminals, as glaringly seen in Kathua and Unnao. This is an anti-women government and it must go.

The rally was presided over by AIDWA President Malini Bhattacharya and was addressed by Vice President Subhashini Ali. Delhi State Secretary Asha Sharma welcomed the rally participants. The Resolution of the rally was placed by AIDWA General Secretary Mariam Dhawale

The resolution vowed to confront the BJP regime, refusing to be silenced by the BJP-RSS culture of fear and stand up for equality and basic rights enshrined in the Constitution. It vowed to expose the Sangh Parivar and the Modi-led government for the failure to deliver on its promises.

The rally also witnessed heart rending testimonies of women who are struggling for justice for victims of violence and right wing vigilantism. They systematically demonstrated how the BJP government supported by the Sangh Parivar is subverting all democratic norms in the country. They also showed the spirit of resistance and hope by demonstrating how they, in their own ways, were resisting such political forces to bring about social transformation.

Adv Deepika Rajawat (Lawyer of the Kathua rape victim) is the brave and fearless advocate at the Jammu and Kashmir High Court who has been subjected to endless persecution and threats, ever since she took up the case for the family of the Kathua rape victim. "You will not be forgiven" is the threat meted out to her. Her colleagues from the Bar Association have branded her as anti-national and socially boycotted her. The police have not taken action against any of the people who have issued death threats to her. But she has stood her ground and faced these challenges courageously. In her own words: "I am a lawyer, and it is my duty to work for such people. When I wear robes, I have no religion."

Mamta Rani was a victim of honour killing in Rohtak, Haryana. Her mother-in-law Saroj addressed the rally. Mamta Rani of Singhpura village in Rohtak, who belonged to the Jat community, was murdered by contract killers hired by her parents for marrying a Dalit boy of her own choice and against the wishes of her family, inside the court premises where she had arrived to record her statement. A police sub-inspector, Narinder Kumar, who was deputed to provide security to her, was also killed along with Mamta. Police have arrested eight persons in this case, including her foster and biological parents, but the main conspirator of the double

murder, Sunil Kumar, who had issued threats to Mamta in the past, has not yet been arrested. Her in-laws still live in fear that he might attack their family members any time.

Vinita Chaudhari, victim of political violence in Tripura narrated the goondaism indulged in by BJP goons immediately after it won elections in Tripura. They unleashed concerted violence against AIDWA activists. Vinita was also attacked and suffered serious injuries. The homes of many AIDWA activists were vandalized and looted by BJP supporters. Many activists were attacked in broad daylight by lethal weapons and petrol bombs. Many AIDWA activists have been displaced from their homes and are unable to enter their own houses because of political targeting. But the women in Tripura continue to resist these attacks and fight to protect the poor.

Swapna Ghosh elaborated on the violence unleashed during the Panchayat elections in West Bengal. Women and children faced murderous attacks. TMC armed gangs captured booths in almost all districts, chased away voters and cordoned villages to force people to remain indoors. Polling agents were driven away from the booths. Hundreds of complaints had been registered with the State Election Commission but no action was taken. In many places even election officials were attacked and driven out from the booths. Ballot papers were snatched, looted and burnt. Despite these attacks, women, encouraged by AIDWA, tried to exercise their voting rights. In many villages women tried to build resistance and fought with TMC criminals. Many young girls came out and took part in the resistance. They seized the bikes of the criminals and faced them so bravely that they had to flee the place.

Lahani Dauda from Maharashtra spoke about the struggles that they have organised for food security. She is a tribal and hails from Palghar district which suffers from serious malnutrition and shortage of food. Every year many tribal women and children die of malnutrition. Women belonging to AIDWA have waged big struggles in this district against the prevailing conditions of hunger and poverty. These have led to the tribals being given food grains despite the biometric machines not recognizing their fingerprints.

Babita Rai from Madhubani district in Bihar spoke on MNREGA. Women workers of Ramnagar panchayat in Madhubani district were promised job cards and employment under MNREGA. 500 women applied and got the job cards but they did not get any work. All the work related to digging of ponds and lifting up of clay was being done through the use of machines. AIDWA women waged a struggle against it and could consequently expose the corruption scandal amounting to Rs 45 lakh. The sarpanch of Ramnagar is behind bars and majority of women workers have been provided with MNREGA work now.

Santro from Panipat, Haryana narrated the struggles that they waged by organising the Mothers' Groups. Women working in the Anganwadi Mothers' Groups belong to very poor

families. They have been preparing food for the Anganwadis for the last 11 years. They are paid a meagre amount of Rs 1.60 per child and pregnant woman. They have to arrange the fuel, utensils, food grains within this amount! Recently, the Haryana State Government reduced their days of work to only three days a week. Their wages amount to as meagre as Rs 200 to 250 per month and this amount too is denied to them for months together. The Mothers' Group women in Haryana are waging a continuous battle for their right to work.

Poonam, a domestic worker from NOIDA spoke about the abuse she faced at her place of work. Poonam worked in the house of the owner of Amrapali Society in Noida. When she asked for her pending wages of more than a year, she was accused of theft, badly beaten and fired. An FIR was also lodged against her in the police station and the police invariably worked in favour of the employers and did not file the victim's complaint despite there being enough evidence of abuse. With the intervention of AIDWA and Gharelu Kamgar Union of CITU, justice was ensured to the victim. Poonam succeeded in getting her full wages and the case of theft was withdrawn against her. An FIR was filed against the employer demanding legal action for filing a fictitious complaint against her. She said that she developed the strength to fight for justice after she joined AIDWA.

Each speaker exposed the BJP rule for being totally insensitive and heartless towards the plight of the impoverished sections of the people, especially women. The determination with which each one of the speakers declared that they would fight the Manuwadi forces till they are defeated was extremely inspiring.

The Rally ended with a resolve to intensify the nation-wide campaign against the Modi Government and expose the sinister designs of the Sangh Parivar and its armed vigilante groups. The women vowed to continue their campaign against the anti-women character of the right-wing Modi Government and mobilise the mass of women in all states on December 10, International Human Rights Day.

This rally was the result of extensive and intensive preparations by AIDWA over four months. The AIDWA CEC took the decision to hold this rally and to strengthen the struggles on the above issues in the states towards that end. Many state-level conventions were organised. Hundreds of meetings in each state were held in villages and bastis. Thousands of leaflets were distributed to mobilise women for this rally. Posters were printed in various states. The AIDWA website was inaugurated on September 1 by Brinda Karat. The AIDWA centre in coordination with the states made concerted efforts and made good use of the social media for the publicity of this rally.