

CPI(M)

Lok Sabha Election 2009

AAM AADMI SUFFERS IN 'HIGH GROWTH' INDIA

Women

A Litany of Broken Promises

CAMPAIGN FOLDER



Vote CPI(M)

**Strengthen the Left and Democratic Forces
to Ensure an Alternative Secular
Government at the Centre**

The Common Minimum Programme adopted by the Congress led UPA Government when it came to power in May 2004 had proclaimed “to fully empower women politically, educationally, economically and legally.”

But the past five years of UPA rule have been a litany of broken promises as far as women are concerned.

There was no effort on the part of the government to prioritise social mobilisations against continuing retrograde practices such as sex-determination tests, dowry demands, child marriages and violence against women. On the contrary the political agendas of the government had little place for women. In the government itself the Women and Child Ministry was not even given a cabinet status. The status of the National Commission of Women was also kept lower than that given to other Commissions. Thus second class status to women started from the very top during the tenure of this government.

POLITICALLY: THE GREAT BETRAYAL

~ Just like the earlier BJP-led NDA government, the Congress-led government utterly failed to pass an Act that would have reserved one-third seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. At the insistence of the CPI(M) and the Left Parties the CMP included an assurance to “take the lead” for the passage of the Women’s Reservation Bill that has been pending for 12 years. The CPI(M) and other Left Parties time and again raised the demand for the passage of the Bill. But the UPA went back on its commitment and prevaricated in the name of “consensus”. It took the government a full four years to merely introduce the Bill in the Rajya Sabha in May 2008. Thereafter, it was sent to a Parliamentary Standing Committee. The Congress party sacrificed women’s interests to stick to power. That is why it made a deal within the deal with the Samajwadi Party that it would give up the Women’s Bill in return for SP support on the Indo-US Nuclear deal. Thus the Bill has been put in cold storage.

~ In the elections held to as many as 18 states in the last 5 years, just 5.3 percent women were elected which could have been 33 percent had the bill been adopted. Thus women were denied their democratic right to representation in the highest decision making bodies in the country.

The CPI(M) reiterates its firm support to the Women’s

Reservation Bill with the conviction that it will help women of all communities to be represented in Parliament and State Assemblies.

LEGALLY: TOO LITTLE

~ The Common Minimum Programme had promised “legislation on domestic violence and against gender discrimination and complete legal equality for women in all spheres”.

~ The Congress-led government brought in a series of amendments to the CrPC which include liberalization of bail provisions for crimes which have a sentence of under seven years. This will allow many of those guilty of crimes against women to escape arrest. This clause must be repealed.

~ Under the pressure of women’s organisations a positive step was taken to enact the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. But by refusing to provide any central budgetary support for the implementation of the Act, it has weakened the implementation, such as in the appointment of Protection Officers. Meanwhile, incidents of cruelty by husbands and relatives have gone up hugely; in 2004, the number was 58,121, in 2007 it had gone up to 75,930, an increase of over 30%. The number of dowry deaths is shocking – 22 every day, or almost one every hour!

~ National Crime Records Bureau data also shows that incidents of rape increased from 18,233 (in 2004) to 20,737 (in 2008), an increase of 14%, and molestation from 34,567 to 38,734 respectively, an increase of 12%. What is worse, in 25% of these cases, the victims were below 18 years of age. This points to the urgent need for comprehensive legislation to deal with sexual assault that also includes provisions for child sexual abuse. But shamefully, the government refused to move on this in spite of the recommendations of the Law Commission and the National Commission of Women.

~ There was also a 16% increase in the incidents of rape of dalit women, but a singular failure to utilize the SC-ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act to deal with such crimes, exemplified by the heinous Khairlanjee case where two women were brutalized by an upper caste mob in September 2006.

~ Even though 12 years have passed since the Supreme Court passed the *Vishakha* orders directing the government to pass a comprehensive Act to deal with sexual harassment at the workplace, and though women’s organizations and the National Commission of Women have discussed and drafted

the Bill, the Congress-led government ignored this major problem faced by all sections of working women. As a result, many private and particularly multinational organizations have been free to victimize women who complain of sexual harassment.

~ In fact, instead of strengthening laws to deal with violence against women, the Congress-led government wanted to introduce changes in the Criminal Procedure Code that would make it easier to pressurize victims of violence to withdraw cases against the perpetrators of such crimes. These included S406 (criminal breach of trust), S354 (sexual assault), S494 (bigamy), S509 (outrage of modesty). It is only because of the strong intervention of CPI(M) MPs that the amendments were withdrawn at the last moment.

~ In actuality, there is a host of legislation that is urgently required to deal with different issues related to women, including the rampant trafficking of women and children, honour killings, commercial surrogacy, cyber crimes, acid attacks, etc. Similarly, laws to ensure compulsory registration of marriages, and giving equal rights to women in matrimonial property, and in agricultural land need to be passed. But the Congress-led government ignored these demands.

The CPI(M) stands in favour of the enactment of gender just laws.

ECONOMICALLY: IMPOVERISHING

~ Neo-liberal policies have hit women hard. In particular the impact of the current global crisis will make thousands of women jobless. Already in some export-oriented industries like garments, thousands of women have been retrenched. The Congress party however is determined and committed to the same disastrous neo-liberal framework which has caused the crisis in the first place.

~ Today there are more than 3 crore Self Help Groups that function in different parts of the country, catering to the small credit needs of women. SHGs have a known record of repayment. But while the Congress-led government continued to lower interest rates for the corporates, it refused to treat the credit needs of the SHGs as a priority sector, and did not accede to their demand for interest rates at 4% per annum.

~ Price rise has hit women particularly hard. Food security is one of the most pressing problems of women. Not only are the poor being denied their right to food, but the concept of

targeting has been expanded to every possible government scheme. Consequently, poor women have no access to free medical care, pensions, or even subsidized loans for Self Help Groups.

~ The Arjun Sengupta Committee (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector) has pointed out that around 8 crore women work as home based workers, and almost 80% of them work as piece rated workers. Even in the capital city of Delhi, the wages they earn are shocking – as low as 1 rupee for making 144 hair bands, or Rs 4 for sticking 144 bindi packets. On the whole it is estimated that there are around 12 crore women in the unorganized sector who work in unregulated conditions without the cover of protective legislation. During its last days in office, the Congress-led government passed a bogus social security Act, much on the same lines as the previous NDA government that only provides for the setting up of committees to suggest the implementation of certain welfare schemes. These will be only for those unorganized sector workers who meet the criteria of BPL eligibility. There is no separate Act for the protection of over 11 crore landless agricultural workers in the country.

~ Over 59,943 farmers have committed suicide during the UPA rule, and now with the current recession, handloom workers, industrial workers, etc., have also started to take their own lives, as they face a huge crisis. Already it is reported that 71 diamond workers from Gujarat have committed suicide. The plight of women and young girls in suicide-affected families is an untold story. The special packages for farmers announced by the Congress-led government have totally ignored these vulnerable single women, who continue to face the burden of private debts from money lender, and the social stigma of widowhood.

The CPI(M) stands for alternative economic policies which will be pro-people and take specific steps to ensure economic justice to women.

EDUCATIONALLY MARGINALISED

~ The CMP had pledged to spend at least 6% of the GDP on education. But successive budgets of the Congress-led government have failed on this count, with expenditure barely reaching 3%. NSSO data indicates that 15% of girls in the age group 5-14 do not enter school, and their proportion in the age group 15-19 is 17%. This points to the need to pass a law

to make education free and compulsory, starting from the pre-primary stage. During its last leg in power the UPA government introduced the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill but it covers children only in the age group 6 to 14, and the onus of expenditure is entirely on the state governments.

The CPI(M) stands for free, compulsory universal education.

CONCLUSION

In 2004, women voted the BJP-led NDA government out, with its record of unspeakable communal violence that targeted women, as in Gujarat in 2002, and its anti-people economic policies that led to the impoverishment of the majority of the working people in the country. The anti-women stance of the BJP that originates in the Hindutva ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has surfaced regularly, be it in the manner in which it has consistently indulged in double speak on the Women's Reservation Bill, its support to the rapists of the young nun and other Christian tribal women in Orissa and to those who have attacked young women in the name of culture and tradition.

In 2009 the Congress has to be made accountable for frittering away its mandate and betraying its pledges to women.

**Reject the Congress and the BJP
Vote CPI(M)**

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