Trying To Live By Her Principles

Indumati Kelkar
talks to
Madhu Kishwar

Many of the women who were involved in the movement for national independence dropped out of politics after independence was achieved. Some were sucked into domesticity; others grew disillusioned with the power politics that came to the fore after Gandhi's death. A few found places in the political establishment, usually along with their husbands. Indumati Kelkar is one of the very few women who, despite her disillusionment, continued to struggle for the principles she believed in. She and her husband live, even today, with stark simplicity, wearing khadi and staying in a one and a half room chawl, with the bare minimum of furniture and only a small table fan, a gas stove and a telephone by way of modern conveniences. They have no regrets about having given up an affluent lifestyle and the politics of power and position. There is a rare integrity in their adherence to their principles, particularly to the principle of nonaccumulation.

Indutai's gravitation towards the socialist party took her in the direction more of individual heroism than of mass politics since the party, while swearing by the masses, did not manage to build a mass base. Although it used weapons like satyagraha, developed by Gandhi to mobilise the masses, and often advocated worthwhile policies, the party's actions were usually carried out by a handful of people. The party surrendered its identity by merging with the Janata party in 1977, leading to further marginalisation of its ideology.

Having to work as an isolated individual with campaign methods that demand mass participation for their success seems to have bred a growing alienation from contemporary politics in Indutai as in other socialists of her generation. This alienation is not confined to mistrust of mainstream electoral parties but extends to today's political and social movements. This estrangement in part explains her today expressing her political commitment through writing alone.

Indutai's own life and that of her mother, Yashodatai, as narrated by her, confirm that women manage to be politically active only when the men of their families are supportive of them. Indutai's having escaped embroilment in domesticity of the kind that overtook most other women like her after independence, seems to have been largely due to the joint decision she and her husband took not to have children and to keep domestic concerns to a minimum, in the brief phase when she lived with her in-laws, her activities did get circumscribed. However, even given the social ferment of the times and the unusual support she received from the men involved, the complete absence of conflict, especially of any inner conflict or dilemma, appears somewhat unreal. The following extracts from a taped interview are translated from Hindi.

I was born in 1922 in Bombay. My father, Madhavrao Bhat, belonged to a priestly Brahman family, and was himself a scholar. He came to Bombay after doing his BA LIB, and became a lawyer in the high court. My mother, Yashodabai Bhat, was born in 1886. She belonged to Bavdhan village in Satara district. She was married at the age of 16. My father was more than 20 years older than she—in those days that was normal. We had a house in Bombay and another in Pune, and used to spend some time in both places.

When my mother came to Bombay, she had studied only up to class three. But she was very fond of reading, and my father encouraged her to read. He got her newspapers, magazines, whatever she wanted. She had to be in the kitchen all day, because we had a big house, with many relatives always staying over, including people from her family. Yet, she was so fond of reading that she would stay up at night or get up early in the morning to read. She fell on books and devoured them.

My father had a good practice, built up by his own efforts, and was earning well—about Rs 2,000 a month, which was a lot 80 years ago. So my mother could also indulge her fondness for fine silk *saris* and jewellery. She also got involved in social work. She participated in the activities of organisations like Arya Mahila Samaj and Sewa Sadan.

Around this time, she made the acquaintance of two famous Marathi novelists—Haribhao Apte and Sahkari Krishna. They both lived in Pune. These two novelists encouraged my mother to write. Her stories and articles began to appear in weekly and monthly magazines. She wrote mostly on social issues—women's reform, women's education. Also some historical stories. Soon, she earned a name for herself as a woman writer. Her first novelette "The Effects of Education" was about a rural girl who makes great progress by educating herself. This appeared as one of a series of novels published by Sahkari Krishna. She also wrote a novel on Shivaji's mother, *Rajmata Jijabai.*

She also won prizes in essay competitions—one in a contest organised by Lokmanya Tilak in 1914 on the topic "What do women think of Swaraj?" and another in the Sewa Sadan contest on the topic of women's education.

Well, my mother was lost in her literary pursuits when something happened. Gandhiji came, and his coming was miraculous—like that of a magician. He came to Bombay in 1919-1920. My mother was 24 years old at the time.

Gandhiji's coming brought about a revolution in my mother's life. She threw all her fine *saris* and foreign clothes in the bonfire. Her interest in jewellery also diminished. She came into politics. My father remained engrossed in his profession but he supported my mother in her activities.

My mother and Avantikabai Gokhale—these two were like twins who worked together. Gandhiji gave both of them *saris* made of *khadi* spun with his own hands. These two were active in the women's spinning committee and also in the Hindu Mahila Samaj. They adopted two methods to spread the ideas of nationalism and of women's education—speeches and *kirtan.* There is a tradition of *kirtan* in Maharashtra. In their *kirtans* there was a preponderance of heroic feeling and ideas of *swadeshi.* These two women created a storm in Bombay with their propaganda for boycott of foreign goods and foreign education.

In 1927 my mother was one of the main organisers of the third centenary celebrations of Shivaji in Bombay. The programme continued for 10 days and Shivaji was projected as a nationalist—not at all as some people project him today as a Hindu who was opposed to Muslims. Muslim girls too were involved in the celebrations. My mother wrote a short play for the occasion.

My mother now wore only *khadi.* My father wore it too but not all the time. I was brought up wearing only *khadi* right from childhood, and was given only Indian made toys to play with. My brother, who was much older than I, born in 1907, had grown up with expensive foreign clothes and toys.

In 1930, Gandhiji began the salt *satyagraha.* At that time, my mother was touring rural Khandesh. She used to get many invitations from rural areas to go and organise meetings and *kirtans* there. She used to travel all over Maharashtra. While she was propagandising for noncooperation in Khandesh she was arrested and sentenced to nine months' rigorous imprisonment. She was sent to Dhulia jail. I have one or two memories from that time. I remember my father

Yashodabai Bhat

insisting that I write to my mother. I was lazy about it, but used to write under his instructions. The letters did not reach my mother and when she enquired, the jailor told her that her daughter was dead. She began to fast in protest against her communication with her family being cut off. A telegram came and my father took me to Dhulia. I was allowed to go in and meet her. In 1930, my father retired and we shifted from Bombay to Pune.

On March 12, Gandhiji's Dandi march began, he picked up salt on April 16 and was arrested on May 5. On the second monthly anniversary of his arrest, July 5, a big procession was organised in Pune, in which many women took part. The police

Madhavrao Bhat

lathi charged and my mother was injured.

In the 1932 agitation, college students in many places had closed down their colleges. Students of Ferguson College, Pune, met my mother and her coworkers, like Satyabhamabai, Dwarkabai, Lakshmibai, and asked them to picket their college. They promised that as soon as the picketing started, they would come out from their classes. At that time, picketing of colleges was a new idea in Pune, although picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops was well known.

When about a dozen women picketed the college on August 14 and 15, 1932, the college principal, his wife and some students came out and tried to break the women's cordon. Many Sanatani newspapers in Pune like *Bhala, Kesari, Gyanprakash* harshly criticised the women. They went so far as to say: "Are there no men left in the country? What business have women in politics? Why need they enter politics?" My mother spoke at a big meeting in Bombay presided over by Kasturba Gandhi, and narrated all that had happened. The Bombay newspapers raised the issue and criticised the reaction of the Pune newspapers.

After this most of the women got busy in organising a camp. But my mother was more interested in struggle. She went to the secretary of the Maharashtra Congress Committee, Bhausaheb Ranade, and asked him to send her for *satyagfaha* to any place where government officials in charge were very strict. At that time, there was martial law in Solapur and my mother was sent there to break it. She was made a Congress "dictator" or team leader.

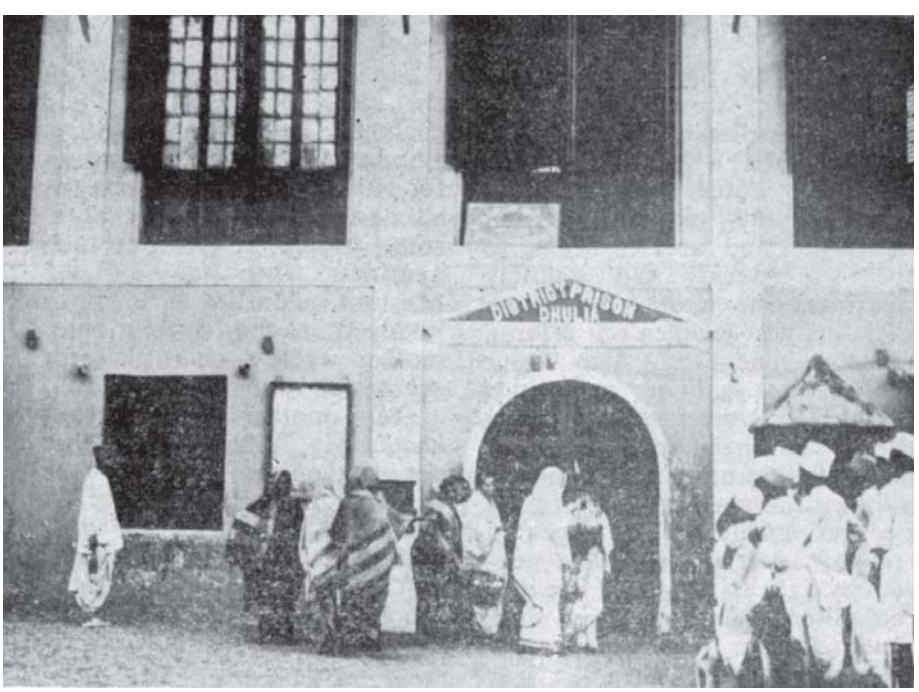
People told her not to go, because she was not well. She had already had plague earlier and had been so seriously ill that she had been reported dead in some newspapers. But my father finally said that if she had a desire to go, she should go. He never stopped her. He was a very liberal man. He had grown up in an age of reform, and had been influenced by Agarkar when studying in Deccan College, Pune. At that time, ideas of women's education were widely prevalent. The books of people like J. S. Mill were read by many students. In fact, people have in some ways become more conservative today. At that time, many men educated their wives and encouraged them to do what they wanted. When my mother was away, we had relatives staying in the house and a maid-servant to do the cooking.

At that time, four people had already been sentenced to death in Solapur and many others arrested. Anyone found giving shelter to a *satyagraha* was also punishable with two years' imprisonment. So there was no question of staying in anyone's house. When my mother reached, the *tonga* driver asked where she wanted to go. She said: "Nowhere. Leave me here", and spent the night under a tree. Next morning, she participated in *satyagraha* and her desire was fulfilled—for a harsh punishment. In Bombay and Pune women were usually sentenced to three to six months' imprisonment. But here, she was sentenced to one and a half years, and a fine. If she did not pay the fine, four months more in prison. She was sent to Yeravda jail.

In those days, women considered their symbols of wedded status very important. When my mother reached the jail, the jailor told her to remove her *mangalsutra* and bangles, saying that she might break and swallow the glass to commit suicide. My mother refused to remove these symbols of her marriage and went on fast in the jail courtyard. The jail authorities had to give in, and let her enter the jail as she was.

After six months in jail, my mother's blood pressure became very high, and she

Dhulia Jail



was unwell. The jail authorities offered to release her provided she signed a statement promising not to engage in political activity. She refused, saying she would rather die in jail. Finally, after 20 months in jail, when she fell seriously ill, she was released unconditionally.

When she came home, she was like a skeleton. Our family doctor advised complete rest. But how could she rest? Whenever she was at home, she enjoyed cooking delicacies for us and for all those who came to visit. Soon, she again started her speeches and *kirtans.* In 1936 was the big Congress convention at Faizpur, Khandesh district. Activists from Khandesh invited my mother. She was given the responsibility of organising the serving of food to the delegates. She went from village to village mobilising women into a team for this work. She told the women they would not have another opportunity to witness such a historic event. She mobilised more than 100 women.

After this my mother's health deteriorated. In 1940 she had a paralytic stroke. She had already had plague twice, and also TB and osteomalacea. She had continued working all this time on sheer will power. After the stroke, her voice disappeared. Her work—of speaking and singing—had to stop. She could manage to move around the house and talk to us, but could not be active as formerly. She began to feel suffocated.

In 1941 the individual *satyagraha* began. My mother lost her will to live—she felt her life had no meaning. At this time I was in the first year of college. I said: "I will go in your place."

Before this, I had shown no interest in politics. I thought my mother was doing good work, and I also wore *khadi* but I refused to be active even when many people asked me to join. Even when in 1932 my mother became a member of the AICC which was a rare honour for a woman in those days, and became close to Gandhiji and used to ask me to go with her and meet him, I used to put it off, saying I was busy with my studies. I had a very busy schedule, as I was learning music and painting in addition to my regular studies. My mother always wanted me to learn everything I could—to drive a car, horse riding, swimming.

Indumati (front row, right corner) with college mates

My ambition was to be a great painter. So, though I worked for brief periods in the Vanar Sena and Sewa Sadan, I always refused to commit myself to regular work.

But in 1942 everything changed. The atmosphere was such. I said to my mother: "You don't go, I'll go. Pass on your torch to me."

I had read the writings of Gandhi and Marx. I had made some attempts to join the underground activists but they did not take me on, so I was sent by my coworker, Vasant Bapat, to a rural area in Thane district. My mother was not too happy about this, because she knew if I was arrested from Pune I would be sent to Yeravda jail where she could meet me, whereas if I was in some distant rural jail, she might not be able to see me, and she was not at all well. However, she allowed me to go.

I participated in rallies and made speeches, and was detained as an undertrial for one and a half months and then sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment. I was sent to Yeravda. It was a big jail with four big barracks, each for 20 women. But the jail was overflowing.

Many women had been picked up under preventive detention. These detenus were A class prisoners whereas I and my companions were C class. The food for C class prisoners was very bad—just *rotis* and *dal* in the morning, and in the evening, *rotis* and a very badly cooked vegetable which often had rotten stuff in it. We were not allowed to receive food from home either. However, A, B and C class prisoners used to share their food and eat together. A few women who objected to this practice ate separately.

Some of us girls who were considered mischievous were always being punished—we would not be allowed to receive letters or meet visitors. I was one of them and so was my close friend Sindhu Deshpande. We two were always up to something or the other. Like, once we saw superintendent Barker, a white man, passing by and we yelled "Quit India". He was very angry and said we should obey jail rules. But from the start we refused to obey jail rules because Gandhiji had said

that we should consider ourselves free in jail. We refused to do the work allotted to us as labour in jail. When asked to work, we would sit down with our spinning wheels.

We carried on all our activities—spinning, Sewa Dal and flag hoisting, in jail too. It was hard for the jailors to control us girls— we were just like monkeys! We used to climb up electric poles and trees. One day I climbed up on a high place and was looking at the road outside the jail when the matron appeared. She shouted: "What's going on here?" I said "Nothing. I'm watching the sunset—it's beautiful. Shall I give you a hand—come up and watch it too." She was furious.

On January 26, 1943 a group of us decided to hoist the flag. We had prepared it ourselves earlier. On the 25th night I climbed on the shoulders of a tall girl and, along with Vatsala Deshmukh, hoisted the flag. The next day the newspapers carried the news "The tricolour on Yeravda jail." We were ready to declare that we had done it, as we felt they could hardly punish us any more—they had already deprived us of letters and visits. My mother used to make a long journey to see me but we were not allowed to meet.

Another time, some women prisoners, who were in jail for criminal offences, made a ladder and hid it in the jail yard. When it was discovered, the jail officials said: "Indu and Sindhu must have made this." All the women protested, saying that we two would not do such a childish thing.

The officials decided to lock all of us up as a punishment. Normally, prisoners are locked up from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. But because the jail was so overcrowded, we used to be allowed to stay in the yard if we wished. We began a *satyagraha*. Each one caught hold of a tree or a pole and refused to go into the cells. Sindhu and I were finally kept in solitary confinement for two days.

In 1943, Gandhiji went on fast in protest against the British government's charges against him of having organised violence and sabotage. We also fasted in jail for a week. Then he announced that no one should fast along with him, so we gave up our fast. At that time, he was confined in Aga Khan palace, right next to Yeravda jail so we got regular news of him.

I was released after a year, in September 1943, and in October my father died, of old age. He was 80 years old.

After this, I studied for one and a half months and passed the intermediate examination. I was approached by the communists at this time, to join their party, but I refused, not only because of ideological differences, but also because I felt they had betrayed the movement, even informing on many people and getting them arrested.

After this, I went to Bengal where the great famine was raging, and did relief work there for three months. When I returned, I joined the Rashtra Sewa Dal. So did many other girls who had been in jail. I participated in a camp in Aundh, and immediately after, I was made a provincial organiser of the Sewa Dal. In this capacity, I worked in Maharashtra organising different kinds of propaganda through rallies, songs, tableaux, plays. I also travelled in rural areas, training singers and addressing meetings.

Sripad Kelkar was also a Sewa Dal provincial organiser and we worked together in Pune. That is how we met and got to know each other. He had been underground in 1942 and had spent two years in jail.

In 1946 my mother died suddenly. It was in 1946 too that the Sewa Dal left the Congress. At a big Sewa Dal rally in Satara, some old Congressmen accused the Sewa Dal of mobilising youth for the benefit of the socialist party instead of the Congress. In view of this attitude of the Congress, the Sewa Dal decided to leave the party. This was before the Congress Socialist Party came out of the Congress party—which happened in 1947.

In December 1947 Sripad and I got married. Earlier, I always used to say that I would not marry. From childhood, this was my feeling. Sometimes, I used to tell my mother that if I ever married, I would marry a Muslim or an untouchable. But, after my mother's death, I did not much like staying at home with my brother. Nor did I like the idea of living alone.

But, in any case, we were determined not to marry before independence was achieved. Immediately after marriage, both of us took a joint decision not to have children. This was because we wanted to be fully committed to our work. We did not want to take jobs which we would have had to do to bring up a family. I had no desire for children. My only aspiration was to continue my work.

We have never regretted this decision. I think we did well—we escaped this *moh*, I remained free from those problems. Many people used to tell us that we must have children, but we always said this was our personal affair, and we would do as we wished, no one had a right to interfere.

When Gandhiji was in Noakhali, I was very anxious to join him there. Sindhu and I requested several friends like Achyut Patwardhan and Dr Lohia to ask him to let us go there but he was not ready to incur more risks so he refused. There were no communal riots in Pune at the time.

After Gandhiji was murdered, riots broke out in Pune and in rural Maharashtra too. Brahman houses and establishments were burnt. The pretext was that Godse was a Brahman; actually, this was the result of anti Brahman feeling amongst other castes, particularly Marathas. Sripad went and tried to stop the rioters in Pune. I was not able to go because I had a lot of work in my in-laws' place. Of course, I did not give up my political work—10 days after my wedding, I went off to Khandesh for the celebrations of the Rashtra Sewa Dal anniversary on December 28.

A year after marriage, we settled down in this *chawl* where we are still living. The rent for these two rooms was then Rs 10—we have now of our own accord raised it to Rs 20.

In 1948, Sripad left the Sewa Dal and began to work for the socialist party. I continued in the Sewa Dal but was close to the socialist party. At that time, a large section of the Sewa Dal was close to the

socialist party. But another large section opposed the idea of the Sewa Dal joining any party; they said we should stay "above politics." I thought that was foolish —we had to have our feet on the ground, not be like Yudhishthir's chariot, floating in the air. I argued that we must join some party. This debate continued in the Sewa Dal. The nonpolitical members wanted the Sewa Dal to do only constructive work, and not join in any struggle that involved breaking the law. I found this very foolish.

Nevertheless I continued to work as a Sewa Dal full timer, and was getting Rs 75 a month. Our work was to organise rallies, meetings, discussions and camps. I also completed my BA.

After Gandhiji's death, I had begun to hate the Congress. I saw that Nehru had more or less completely given up simplicity in his life. Even Gandhiji called him the last Englishman of India! He was entirely Westernised. He gave speeches against liquor parties, and said that blackmarketeers would be publicly hanged, but his behaviour was in contradiction to his words. As long as Gandhiji was alive, there was some hope but after his death, it was impossible to remain with the Congress.

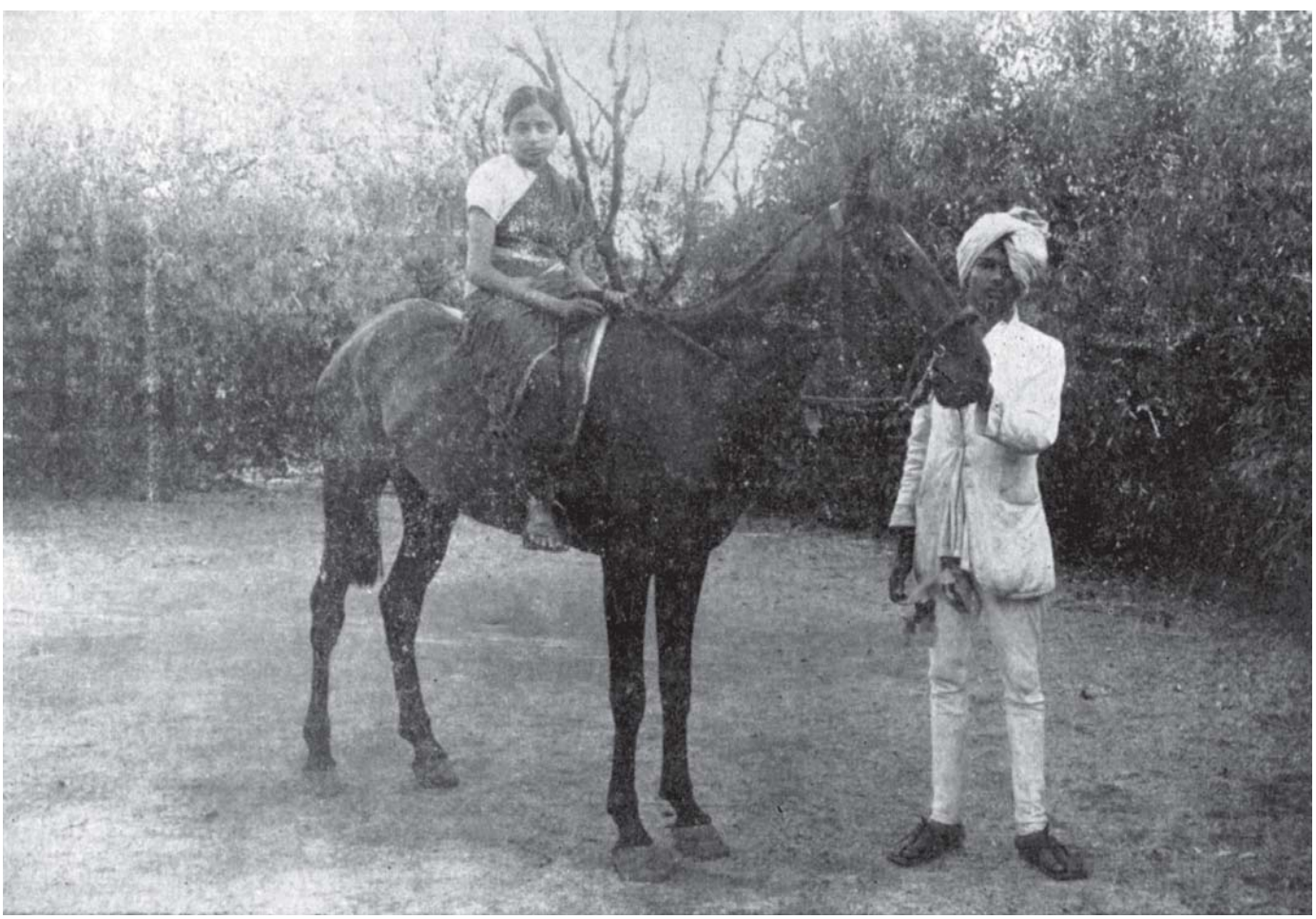
In 1953, I too left the Sewa Dal and joined the socialist party. I had been deeply influenced by Dr Lohia. After Gandhiji, he is the leader who was most concerned to bring women forward. He also emphasised the importance of practising what we preach.

There were many factions and splits in the party and in 1955, a new socialist party was established. At this convention I made a proposal that every active member of the party must enrol at least five women members out of the total of 20 members that an active member was supposed to enrol. My proposal was accepted but it was not implemented. Even Dr Lohia said it would be hard to implement, especially in places like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where it was hard to reach women at all.

Dr Lohia asked me to take up the post of deputy secretary in the socialist party centre office. I refused, because I had decided not to take up any post of power. I felt that leaders tend to behave differently from activists and to neglect them. When I was in the Sewa Dal too, I had noticed how some Congress leaders treated us like servants. Gandhiji was the exception—he liked to mix with common people.

Also, I found that most men in the

Indumati taking riding lessons



socialist party were neglectful of woman. When I offered to work for elections in the Konkan in 1949, the Maharashtra party leader's response was: "No, women are not needed." There was a lot of anger in me. I felt that even if I accepted a post, the men would continue to behave oppressively, forcing me to accept their decisions. Women did not have any say in party policy.

There were very few exceptional men, like Sripad, who genuinely acted on the principle of equality. He has never, even once, behaved otherwise, throughout our life together. This has even drawn comments from others. For example, people would comment if he made and served tea instead of my doing it, but he was not deterred.

From the beginning, I was against the idea of women having a separate organisation or party. I continuously fought for women to have a growing influence within the party. I feel that just as earlier women were confined to a limited sphere, that of kitchen, children, *saris* and jewels, so also, today, organisations have a tendency to say "Here's your women's organisation; go and do whatever you want there, amongst women." This narrows women's vision, keeps them unaware of all the issues.

It is not a question of giving women favours, but of giving them an equal status. Dr Lohia used to say to his partymen that they should be like the manure for women, untouchables, tribals and religious minorities to blossom, grow and bear fruit, that is, we should put them forward. But very few people acted on this principle, especially after his death.

In the Congress too, there was always a tendency to give a few token women positions. Sarojini Naidu was put on the first Congress Committee, because people felt one woman was needed as a sort of *tilak* on the forehead—one woman, one Muslim, one untouchable. But Dr Lohia was the first to say that women's rights should be established so as to equalise their status, not as a matter of charity. He advocated 60 percent reservations for women, tribals, untouchables and religious minorities.

In Dr Lohia's lifetime, although the number of socialist party leaders and activists was small we had a great influence, out of proportion to our numbers. Just 17 members in the Lok Sabha were enough to shake it up. We were active in a number of agitations—we were the first to lead the landless to take over land in rural Maharashtra. We worked among tribals. We were also active in the movement to free Goa from Portugese rule.

I chose the *Angrezi Hatao* agitation as my special area of activity. I was more than 30 times sent to jail after independence for *satyagraha* on this issue. This issue touches me deeply because when I worked amongst tribals in rural areas, I saw how difficult it is for them to get their rights when all government offices and courts function in English. They cannot understand what their own lawyer is saying on their behalf in court. If they get an official letter, they have to walk 25 miles to get it read and translated.

Even though we were few in number, sometimes just half a dozen, we used to carry out *satyagraha* programmes. For instance, in 1959, I and one Radhakrishnan, who is now principal of the law college at Malegaon, blacked out a number of English signboards and were sentenced to two months' imprisonment. Another time, a dozen of us walked into the education department and brought out an English typewriter. Outside the office, a crowd collected and I spoke against English. We were sentenced to two and a half months' imprisonment.

After Lohia's death, the socialist party failed to grow, because of internal factions. Everywhere, the party was constantly splitting up, and there was usually more than one party, so that no one could make out which one was genuine. Another reason was that the leaders became obsessed with elections. They had a one point programme —winning elections. They did not practise what they preached.

In 1971, while a socialist party convention was going on, elections were suddenly announced. The leaders immediately ended the convention because they said we must prepare for the elections.

I was disillusioned by the leadership, and by the kind of electoral alliances they entered into with the United Congress and the Jan Sangh. In 1973 some of us organised separate conferences for activists, apart from the leadership. In 1973 I left the party; Sripad had already left earlier. We never joined any other party.

Even after the Emergency, we did not join the Janata party although we campaigned for it during the elections. It happened like this. When Emergency was declared, Sripad was writing a book on the Quit India movement, and we were touring the country interviewing people who had participated. We decided that I would go and work against the Emergency. I did not see any sense in going underground because I had no organisational support. So I decided to protest openly. I went to Karad where a very big literary conference was being organised. Yashwantrao Chavan was to inaugurate it. I suggested to some literatteurs that we should offer *satyagraha*, but none of them responded, because everyone was very afraid, I noticed that I was being followed by spies, but I pretended that I had come there not as an activist but as a writer.

At the inauguration, when Chavan stood up to speak, I too stood up and said: "You have no right to speak here. This is a conference of those who believe in freedom of thought and you are a minister in Indira Gandhi's Emergency regime." I was dragged out and a bone in my foot was broken. To my misfortune, no one said a word of protest.

The magistrate of Karad was good—he sentenced me to only 20 days in jail. I knew that after this I was likely to be detained, as already most political people were under detention. Therefore, on the day I was to be released, I requested the matron to release me at 6 instead of the

appointed time, 8.30. She did so, and I went off to Bombay. I heard that at 8.30 the police van arrived to take me into detention. After this, a law was made that no prisoner would be released before 8.30.

I decided to organise a painting exhibition on the theme "Satyagrahi Gandhiji" on his death anniversary, January 30, in Pune. Chandubhai, the editor of the daily *Prabhat* to which both of us were regular contributors, agreed to lend his hall for the exhibition, even though there was a risk of its being confiscated, I printed a leaflet carrying some of Gandhiji's sayings on *satyagraha* and democracy. Then a ban was imposed on the exhibition. On January 29, the police suddenly informed me that the ban had been lifted. I am not sure exactly how this happened. In one night, I ran around and contacted as many artist friends as I could. I also made some pictures—of Gandhiji's three monkeys who cannot see, hear or speak even though they have eyes, ears and mouth; also of a huge fire burning up everything with the title "All is destroyed." I had invited my *guru* Shri Gondhalekar, to inaugurate the exhibition and he did so, taking a big risk despite his advanced age.

After the exhibition I was arrested as a detenu under MISA. Thus, I was arrested for taking Gandhiji's name, for holding an exhibition on Gandhiji. I was in jail for a year and was released when the elections were announced.

At that time, I was full of very strong feeling, youthful enthusiasm, even though I was 54 years old. I was determined that Indira Gandhi should be defeated at all costs. I had a lot of experience of working for elections. So I went and worked for Raj Narayan's election. I wrote an article in the *Prabhat* analysing the situation in Rae Bareilly. The article was entitled: "Raj Narayanji will win by 55,000 votes." Everyone called me a fool for this. But when the news of Indira Gandhi's defeat came, the house was full of people coming to greet me.

I also campaigned for the legislative assembly elections, only in those constituencies where the candidate was a woman or an untouchable. That was the end. After that, I have had no connections with elections. I worked as the president of the *Angrezi Hatao* organisation for a few years, and also was one of the founders of the Lohia Vichar Manch in 1973.

Speaking at an Angrezi Hatao Conference

Now we occupy ourselves with our writing. In 1952 after passing the BA examination, I had considered taking up a job but Sripad said it was not necessary, we would manage somehow. We used to each write a weekly column for the *Prabhat*. We also wrote for *Dinaman*, and now for *Dharmyug*. We also got royalties on some of our books, and did some paid translation work for the National Book Trust. We translated Dr Lohia's collected works into Marathi,

but did not take any payment for that.

Dr Lohia inspired me to write a novel on Razia Sultana the first woman to occupy the throne at Delhi. I wrote a mythological novel *Pratishodh* about the injustice done by Bhishma to women, and the revenge taken on him by Amba, who underwent the equivalent of a modern sex change operation in order to fight with him.

I also wrote a novel on Jijabai. My mother had written about her as Shivaji's mother but I changed the emphasis. She was more than a mere mother; she was Shivaji's *guru* and adviser. I brought out Shivaji's nationalist role, showing how he had Muslims in his army, his bodyguard was a Muslim. The novel is titled *Stri ki Ichha* because I feel Shivaji always acted according to his mother's wish, woman's wish. My fourth novel, *Savitri-Jyoti* is about Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitri who worked for women and untouchables, 150 years ago. I have also written about my friend, Sindhu Deshpande, and I have translated a number of novels into Marathi.

Sripad and I do not take the freedom fighters pension given by the government. We feel it is a sin to take money for the sacrifices we made in our youth. How can we accept payment for serving our mother? But we do not insist that others should not take the pension. I have helped other women to get the pension by testifying that they were in jail with me.

Sripad and I manage on our income by writing. My mother had given me some cash and jewellery which was used up long ago. I sold off my jewels, even my *mangalsutra*, to run the house. I do not have a single gold ornament now. In fact, I think jewels just keep women suppressed. Bangles are nothing but a kind of beautiful chain put on women's hands. The tinkling of anklets keeps the family informed where she is, what she is doing. I say, one may wear jewels but they should be your slaves, you should not be their slave. Just like the furniture in the house which is there to serve you, not you to serve it.

Indumati and Sripad

We manage because our needs are few and our life is very simple. We are three living in the house— Sripad, I and Roshan. Roshan is a girl who came to us in a strange way. Her mother had a job and her father was in politics so they employed a woman to look after her. This woman also worked as a maid in our house. She used to bring Roshan, who was then one and a half years old, to our house. Gradually, she became very fond of us. Sripad says she is like a beautiful bird that comes and sits in your courtyard, which you grow to love. When she was a child, she used to go home to her parents but spent a lot of time with us. For the last five years, she has begun to stay here. She is very attached to us. She goes home to see her mother now and then. She is now studying in class eleven. She is a national level *kho kho* player.

Since 1977, we are not working with any party. I think it is impossible to reform any of today's political leaders. None of them has any programme. They are interested only in elections. Even Jayaprakash Narayan was not consistent—he was a Marxist, then a Gandhian, then a socialist; he supported Nehru, also Vinoba Bhave. It is true he did some good work in the last phase of his life. That is when I went to meet him. At that time, he was ready to weep when he heard Lohia's name. He said he regretted not having followed Dr Lohia's advice to adopt the politics of struggle.

I feel our society, including the status of women, has deteriorated in the last 50 years. None of the leaders practise what they preach. Those who agitated with us against television now sit and watch it with their children. Members of the Janata party who had boycotted and burnt synthetic clothes now wear nylon clothes. Even the communists in West Bengal join in Durga Puja and religious celebrations. As for the new peasant movements, I think they are only for big farmers, not for the small farmers and the landless.

In the new women's organisations, I do not find women playing a revolutionary role. I do not like terms like "women's liberation." I am not in favour of separate women's organisations. I think we should work together. Today, I do not find any political formation towards which I have any leaning, because none of them live by their principles. ❐