

## FROM THE EDITOR

### IN THIS MONTH OF MOTHER DURGA

Since times immemorial India has celebrated the Durga Puja, the Dusserah or the Navaratri, the worship of the Divine Mother. In no other civilisation the Supreme has been so clearly and so magnificently visualised as the Mother. She is the loving nourisher of our life, the compassionate pardoner of our faults and our luminous guardian and fiery protectress.

A menfolk that has been accustomed to this vision of the Divine Mother since the twilight of its civilisation has to have degraded itself too much to stoop to a condition when a few of its members can burn their women alive. But this degradation is a fact.

Important steps are being taken to rectify this situation. A major political party has asked its units to select a certain percentage of candidates from women to contest the Assembly and Parliament seats. (Reservation seems to come handy as a solution to the problem of backwardness on different fronts.) There are new laws to curb harassment to newly married women.

Such steps are perhaps indispensable at the social plane. But it is time for women themselves to be introspective on one vital issue. It is as much embarrassing for them to be told about this as it is for any writer to write about this. But we should not gloss over a stark naked reality.

It is said that behind every successful man there is a woman. (A cynic says, a surprised woman! But that is an aside.) Similarly, behind a murderous husband, often there is a woman—in this case a mother or a sister of the chap. Once upon a time the woman might have entered the household as a shy bride, but she has, whatever be the outer appearance, become the most dominant force in the family and she has purged herself of a venomous passion of which her son has become a repository. It is easier to exercise bad influence than good influence. The mother might have failed to make her son a noble boy, but in no time she can make him a villain. Her satisfaction is, she has influenced her boy in some way; has established her ultimate possessive right over him. Once victims of the dowry system themselves, the dominant mothers of today avenge their humiliation not by refusing to accept dowry for their sons, but by demanding more dowry.

So far, in the protest and anguish voiced over the dowry deaths and bride-burning, the accent has been on the villainy of man. But it is doubtful if such ghastly acts can take place in families where the mothers and the sisters are reasonably noble—noble in their womanhood—truly motherly and sisterly. The situation will radically change if this aspect of the truth is squarely recognised and women's organisations fighting the evil mould their strategy accordingly.

Let them resolve to do this in this month of Mother Durga.

## ON THE TIDES OF TIME

### WILL SOMEONE RECOMMEND MY CASE FOR A FREEDOM FIGHTER'S PENSION?

Your editor was itching for contributing in some way to India's struggle for freedom. But being only seven in 1942, he had no chance.

In another year or so he composed a lyric'. "It challenged the Videshi, the foreigner, to declare how long he would continue to torment India. He put the lyric to tune and played it on the harmonium. But no Videshi descended on his remote village to listen to the boy's recitation and feel guilty.

At last I had my day—rather an evening—when a tired policeman, on his way to his headquarters from some business, sought shelter in our house for the night. Father was going out for a couple of hours. He asked me to look after the guest.

"I understand that you can sing. Would you mind entertaining me to a song or two?" he said. I had my harmonium brought out and sang the rebellious ditty, in a voice vibrant with emotion. Sure that the representative of the British Raj was experiencing the discomfiture of his life, I spared him any further embarrassment by not looking at him for the duration of my demonstration.

"Wonderful!" he commented when I stopped. Surprised, I looked at him. He sat with his eyes half-closed and muttered reminiscently, "My wife used to sing a similar love song—how long, Oh how long, O Videshi—no—in her song it was Pardeshi—will you torment my heart? Bah!"

I sat crestfallen, too lifeless to oblige him with another song, reconciling to the painful realisation that my daring attempt to give a shake to this little pillar of the Raj had gone in vain.

But I did make the attempt, after all. Should that not entitle me to secure a freedom fighter's pension? I feel inspired to raise the question because I have just been - confirmed that one Mr. Z is a recipient of the honour.

Here is a very brief report on Mr. Z:

One night in 1942 our house was surrounded, invaded and plundered by a gang of dacoits. We had in our house a considerable quantity of gold and silver in form of heirlooms, jewellery and ornaments of the family deity. Added to that, being the only pukka house in a large area, it had become a treasury as so many villagers whose houses had collapsed in a terrible cyclone had deposited their packets of valuables in it.

Somehow, even in those tense days, the District authorities took a keen interest in the case, for by then the gang had made itself notorious and was proving a growing menace. After some careful work of detection, a large police force raided the citadel of the bandits off the estuary of a river. About a hundred men, dacoits and their accomplices were arrested and a part of the booty was recovered. The gang had four leaders, two daredevil musclemen and two reasonably educated 'gentlemen'. Of the former two, one died during the operation while trying to escape and the other who escaped ended up in the jaws of a beast in the forest.

The two other leaders, along with their followers, were awarded varied terms of rigorous imprisonment, along with their followers.

One of the two leaders was attending upon some political prisoners in jail. It so happened that he was released the day the political prisoners were released. He had managed to clad himself in khadi bestowed on him by one of those he served in jail, and emerged trailing the political prisoners, acknowledging with folded hands the ovation that awaited them outside.

That is Mr. Z—and his contribution to India's struggle for freedom.

But he is old. Let him enjoy the pension. I told a genuine freedom fighter who lamented the fact that innumerable fake fighters were benefited by the scheme, "Take it as a tribute to the freedom struggle. The greater thing, the greater is the fakery shadowing it."