

# **Call for Womens' Day 2020 from AIRWO India: Resist fascism! Fight for equality and dignity for women!**

Even as the divisive, communal and sinister CAA was passed amidst surging protests throughout the country, led in great part by women and youths, atrocities against women and the relentless pauperization of the masses have continued to rise steadily.

We are approaching the International Working Women's Day at a time when Indian women are not only facing unprecedented violence but also being deprived of decent jobs and wages and being pushed into an existence of dependence and penury. Data released by the National Crime Records Bureau have revealed that a total of 2,249 unemployed women committed suicide in 2018. The total number of suicides by unemployed women and men surpassed that of farmers and serve as a harsh comment on the state of joblessness and poverty in the country.

The new Codes on Labour, which will condense over 40 labour laws into four codes, is being sought to be passed in Parliament and will further affect labour rights in the country, especially those of the most vulnerable section, women. As it is the female labour participation rate in India—the share of working-age women who report either being employed, or being available for work—has fallen to a historic low of 23.3% in 2017-18, meaning that over three out of four women over the age of 15 in India are neither working nor seeking work. According to a recent Oxfam report 'Time to Care', released in January this year, such is the income inequality in India, it would take a female domestic worker

22,277 years to earn what a top CEO of a technology company makes in one year. The report further said that women and girls put in 3.26 billion hours of unpaid care work each and every day – a contribution to the Indian economy of at least Rs 19 lakh crore a year, which is 20 times the entire education budget of India in 2019 (Rs 93,000 crore). If care work had been socialized and industrialized – if communal kitchens, public laundry, crèches for children and the like had to replace today's system of individual women and girls spending billions of hours cooking, cleaning and caring for children and the elderly – then not only would employment rise but also women's unpaid work would be replaced by work for wages. Unpaid care work is the 'hidden engine' that keeps the wheels of our economies, businesses and societies moving, and little wonder that this 'hidden engine' is driven by women who have little time to get an education, earn a decent living or have a say in how the society and country is run, and who are therefore trapped at the bottom of the economy. Yet, no government till date has come up with a policy to replace this unpaid care work with socialized and paid care work as a means of empowering women.

Unable to give all able-bodied women work for wages, unable to provide equal wages for equal work, unable to create an enabling atmosphere for women to get educated and employed, unable to ensure a modicum of safety for women, the government is now bent on destroying whatever remains of the democratic and secular fabric of the country in the name of CAA-NPR-NRC. If not resisted, these communal tools will make women further vulnerable to devastation, displacement and even disenfranchisement. The evil design of transforming India into a Hindu Rashtra, based on the precepts of *Manusmriti*, where women are but objects of male desire and slaves of patriarchal families, cannot be allowed to succeed.

Thus it is indeed heartening to note that across the country women are taking to the streets in thousands. Shaheen Bagh has

already created history in women's non-violent resistance to divisive state policies. Further, Shaheen Bagh is not alone. In various cities of the country similar prolonged demonstrations by women continue to thrive. The women's mandate on CAA-NPR-NRC is clear: it cannot be allowed to stand. Kashmiri women, in the face of the most brutal kind of state terror, continue to fight for democracy.

AIRWO too resolutely opposes CAA-NPR-NRC and, besides frequently hitting the streets demanding its repeal, extends its solidarity to Shaheen Bagh and its sisters. On March 8 this year, AIRWO calls upon all democratic women to rise and organize to the following slogans:

- No to CAA-NPR-NRC
- Stop violence against women
- Equal pay for equal work
- Dignified and secure employment for all able-bodied women of working age.