

# POSTER GIRLS

*The women's movement gets visually mapped*

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**T**HE WOMEN'S movement in India has seen several campaigns since the early 1970s. But the armoury of those campaigns — the posters, and the stories and slogans that went with them — have largely been relegated to boxes in attics or tucked away under activists' beds.

Zubaan, an independent non-profit publishing house based in Delhi, is now putting together an exhibition that digs out these relics of battles past in an attempt to visually map the women's movement in India. The exhibition opens at the Lalit Kala Akademi on March 24.

"It's very exciting," says Zubaan founder Urvashi Butalia, "We have collected around 1,500 posters so far, but we know there are many more." Butalia, who has been at the forefront of the women's movement in India, says certain 'very important posters from the 1970s' can't be found.

The process of finding the images themselves has been a long and difficult one. "Posters have been collected from all over the country after collaborating with 200-plus groups," says Zubaan editor Jaya Bhattacharji. "Individuals and institutions went scrounging around when we asked for posters," she says.

So far, two images have recurred like motifs throughout the movement, and across the country: one, of woman as Durga, and another, of woman as Atlas. Posters separated by space and time show images of woman as a Devi with ten hands, multi-tasking like mad. Or carrying the world on her back.

Some of these images have seeped into craft-work. "We've seen that local craftspeople in many places have adopted images from the movement," says Bhattacharji. "For example, there's a bed-sheet from Bihar that uses cut cloth images on silk to tell the story of a women's movement among the fisher folk." Women there were allowed to sell fish but not to harvest fish, she says, but now they are — after a campaign.

Their historical value apart, some of the posters are also of artistic value. Art historian Anuradha Nambiar from the Asian Heritage Foundation says while there is a lot of interest in posters now, the value of a poster would naturally depend on who made it. There's no Husain here. For this exhibition, the best-known poster artist is probably the dancer Chandralekha.



Goddess Durga has recurred like a motif throughout the women's movement across the country