

An exhibition traces India's feminist movement through posters

Sister Act

NAMITA KOHLI

THEY are inventive and catchy. Drawing the onlooker with headline-grabbing messages, they tell stories of their times even as they mobilise public opinion. Welcome to the world of posters, beyond, of course, filmi kitsch.

Mapping the women's move-

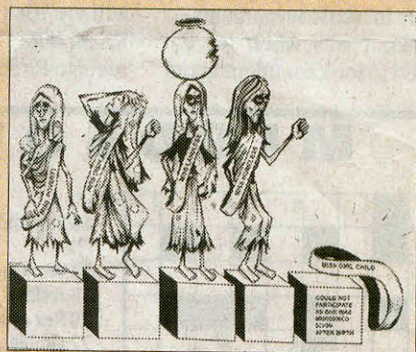
ment to their times. While the earlier charcoal sketches and hand-painted images on newspapers speak about violence and rape, the more recent ones deal with sexual harassment at work and communalism.

"By and large, the women's movement has not been properly documented. Many of these

Bihar also finds a place among the posters. "We were amazed to find that so many women in Assam and Bihar embroider their stories on traditional fabrics. These are veritable sources of information," says Jaya Bhattacharji, who collaborated with Butalia on the project.

Some posters reflect regional issues, yet others show how a local incident can galvanise public opinion into forming larger support networks: the rape of Manorama Devi in Manipur in 2004 inspired a local agency in Bihar to design a poster, venting anger and expressing solidarity at the same time.

Among the 10 categories of



Poster girls: The 200 odd posters shown at the exhibition reflect women's solidarity across the country

ment across the country, a poster exhibition at Lalit Kala Akademi presents India's engaging account of women's history and 35 years of feminism that goes beyond bra-burning and *naarebaazi*.

Titled *Poster Women*, this collection of 200-odd posters, put together by publishing house Zubaan, encompasses issues like violence, rape, dowry, gender-sensitive laws, health services, housing and political participation.

From the early 70s, the heydays of the women's movement in India, the exhibition traces issues and poster styles that were rele-

vant to their times. Through this exhibition, we wanted to show the visual history of this movement," says Urvashi Butalia of Zubaan, who drew some 200 women's groups across the country to collect the posters.

Using local lore and languages, the posters convey socially-relevant messages affecting women at the grassroots level. Some are wordy, others use pictures as the dominant point, but in the end they remain visually potent. Sometimes, black humour becomes the communication tool.

A traditional bedspread from

posters on display, there's a striking one of Durga: It depicts the goddess as a multi-tasker and a symbol of empowerment.

Butalia hopes that the exhibition will encourage preservation of these posters. "Many of them have been lost since my time but today many agencies are showing interest and setting up museums." Butalia plans to take the exhibition to Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad and Mumbai. A coffee-table book on the subject is expected to be out by end of this year.

On at the Lalit Kala Akademi till April 5.