

Right To Leisure: This poster from Hyderabad asserts that which is usually assumed

Bol, Zubaan Ab Tak Teri Hai

A female Buddha, a maternal Durga. 'Poster Women' is a stunning celebration of the women's movement over three decades, says ATUL MISHRA

WHEN THE women's movement in India hit the streets in the 70s and 80s, people noticed it. As the times changed, the raw show of determination also adapted itself to more creative ways of continuing the fight for a gender-just society. Though no longer in the public glare, the women's movement in India is by no means dead. To celebrate its history, Zubaan, a feminist publishing house based in Delhi, is organising an exhibition of posters at the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi between March 24 and April 5.

Titled *Poster Women*, the exhibition will showcase over 200 groups and individuals and their effort to express their individual and collective experiences over the last three decades. The idea for the exhibition sprouted a year ago. Urvashi Butalia, founder of Zubaan, says it is an attempt to "visually map the history of movement". "Due to their ephemeral nature, the posters cannot be sustained for long, they disappear. Hence we decided to capture them in a book and an exhibition." An impressive 1,500 posters have arrived from different parts of the country out of which 200 will be on display while the rest will be archived at Mumbai.

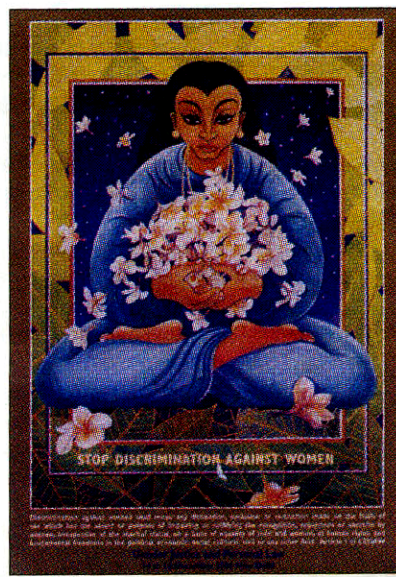
The women's movement has not been a monolithic experience. The posters convey its diversity — its trepidations of non-conformity, joys of liberation, and the past, present and future of women's unfreedom — in stunning images.

Domestic violence, anti-rape campaigns, sexual harassment, literacy

wide range of issues come together in a visual tale that offers perspective, provocation and catharsis at once. The exhibition is structured on the basis of campaigns and each campaign-category has 12 posters dealing with varied experiences.

An interesting history runs behind almost every poster at the exhibition. The commercial sex workers of

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Kolkata have superimposed their creative impulse on a Latin American masterpiece. Illiteracy has not hampered the traditional and rural from expressing their suffering, protest, victory and setbacks. For instance, from Bihar comes the story of fisherwomen who made and sold fishing nets but were not allowed to catch fish. With the help of a women's group they fought this exclusionary practice and won gloriously. Now the women have recorded their homely epic on huge banners or bedspreads made of raw silk. They have created a platform for their own story.

From the 24 Parganas in West Bengal come two posters inspired by true stories. Two members of a group called Kishori committed suicide after becoming pregnant out of marriage. Deeply upset, the group made two hand-made posters, one on suicides by unmarried young women, the other on forced child marriage. The second poster resembles the famous Raja Ravi Varma style. Strapped for funds, they could not digitally print copies of the posters. The determined members however campaigned across the 24 Parganas with the two hand-made posters raising awareness. This drew mass attention and led to a great deal of discussion.

A poster on domestic violence from the Allahabad-based Sahyog created a huge furore. It asserted that domestic violence is not a private matter but a crime. From the Northeast came posters demanding right to political participation. Other contributions include a beautiful collage of a woman and her hundred duties from Orissa and a lesbian rights poster from Gujarat. Unfortunately no impression from Kashmir could be availed given the turbulence in that region.

The exhibition is slated to travel over the year across major cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. Zubaan also plans to involve groups active in different parts of the country to help the exhibition reach small towns. So what is the exhibition's message? "It intends to make people aware that the women's movement is dynamic, complex and rich. That it has generated stunning images. That it is not over by a long shot," informs Butalia. "This is a protest, but it is also a celebration. It is an exhibition of political posters, a form of popular art that is very connected to the women's movement."

Poster Women is an effort to turn that offending cliché on its head. The