[Reports from India concern to women]

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COMMUNITY

Reports from India concern to women

By JOAN MAYO

Each week we receive the latest news bulletin from India. Whenever there is a press conference in Calgary it is enclosed. I have always been particularly interested in any items relating to issues concerning the women of India. Last week's news release included a reply to a letter written by an Ontario woman to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi expressing her concerns regarding press reports she had heard from India.

Following is the reply she received from the prime minister.

Dear Ms. Mayo:

Thank you for your letter.

Every country has its problems. You have been useful to point some of Canada's problems. You have asked questions about the reports you had about India.

When thinking about India you must remember that India is a country of great diversity and contrasts. In its passage through time, some practices grew up which are unjust and pernicious. One great national movement, which was led by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, was not only for political freedom. It was equally a movement for reforming our society. In the last 40 years we have outlawed the old practice of untouchability, and adopted a series of laws to curb child marriages and child labor. These measures have by and large yielded results, but there are scattered regions where child marriages do take place [illegible] and are said to be decreasing. These only serve [illegible] give age. The economic exploitation of children will disappear as India's battle against poverty makes further progress. When our people are poor, a child is forced to opt [illegible] and make his or her contribution to the family's earnings.

There is one point about child labour which should not be lost sight of. In pre-industrial societies children learn crafts from parents, and such early formation of skills is a form of informal education. What we have to guard against is exploitation and work-killing drudgery.

Reviving India for not bringing a straight story is a somewhat recent development. Ironically, it is a consequence of the growth which has come with economic development. We are both ashamed and concerned that such things should happen. Our people's conscience has been stirred. Civic organizations and governmental agencies are actively combating this menace.

The Toronto Times-Colonist carried a story from New Delhi on the 18th of April which dealt with free legal aid for oppressed women in India. Every state in India now has a controlling centre.

Formal legal aid came to India in 1980 when the government established a body known as the Central Implementation of Legal Aid Schemes. At present about 15 per cent of the cases heard in these courts have dealt with discrimination against women. With the increasing outcry against trials burning in which brides are killed by their in-laws for not bringing enough dowry and the death a ground off as a accidental domestic mishap, even the Muslim Women's Bill which denies maintenance for a divorced Muslim woman to the extent are expected to cause ripples.

Aside from the legal and constitutional, the government has also initiated [illegible] policy here, encouraged officers dealing strictly with women's cases. When the woman does not want to live with the [illegible] husband, the woman chooses the court. If she can no divorce, he'll just throw her out and get another wife. Unfortunately the family structure is corroding that won't transform overnight but the government of India is making great strides in the right direction as more women enter the field of law and social work.

Indo Canadian
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ARTIST
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