

# Women as Peace Makers

Are women more inclined to peace than men?

Recent Studies show that little girls are more passive, less turbulent than boys of the same age, but we cannot prove that this peculiarity is inherent in them and not caused by the different treatment they receive.<sup>1</sup>

In mythology and in ancient religions, women have often been represented as domineering and militant goddesses, sorceresses and amazons. Some examples are Hera, Athena, Medea and Circe in Greek mythology; Urmutter in Babylonian mythology and Kali, the terrible Indian goddess of vengeance and destruction. They probably represent prehistoric times when the matriarchal system dominated tribal society.

During the last 8000 years which form what we call "the patriarchal period," women have developed certain peaceful traits, due to their lack of participation in war. According to a contemporary writer, Francoise Giroud, women rulers would be more likely to reject violence because, traditionally, they have been its victims, not its initiators. A woman, on certain occasions, may be led to violence, but, on the whole and under normal conditions, she respects life more than man does. Whether the causes are biological or cultural is of no importance as long as she succeeds in abating the bloody virility of her mate.

In history, women have dealt with the oppressiveness of combat structure in two ways: first by non-compliance, as in the *Lysistrata* comedy of ancient Greece. Second, by the so-called "works of mercy," established to prevent social collapse following conquest and destruction.

During the last 150 years, a current of internationalism developed with the active participation of women who, concerned with slavery (Harriet Stowe), child labor and oppression of workers (Elizabeth Browning), war horrors (Florence Nightingale and Jane Addams), were thinking in terms of global systems rather than national welfare. In speech and in writing, women denounced the nationalist chauvinism of the majority of their male colleagues. Most noteworthy among them was Austrian Bertha Sutner who in 1894, raised the slogan "Down with arms" and persuaded Alfred Nobel to found a peace prize, which was given to Jane Addams in 1931.

In 1915 the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was founded by the women members of the International Peace Movement. Ten other international women's organisations participated in peace research carried out by several international associations. Women's international non-government organizations (NGOs) cooperated in fighting such international evils as alcoholism, prostitution and urban misery. These organizations are called transnational i.e., transcending national boundaries, hence they have been helpful in promoting world peace. They flourished in the 19th century, attracting a million women in service sisterhoods. Besides secular and religious organizations, they include professional and cultural ones. Strongly committed to the problems of the young working woman and the deserted widowed and single woman, they

extended their activity to the fields of international peace and social service.

In the 1960s, new women's peace organizations included *La Voix des Femmes*, *Women Strike for Peace* and *Another Mother for Peace*. They emphasized the mother role as the basis for an international anti-war movement. As groups and as individuals, they fought for social justice on an international basis. Recently, a philanthropist, Mrs. Fran Hosken, has undertaken by her own means an extensive research on circumcision and infibulation of women in Africa and Asia. She has succeeded in founding *Women's International News*, a periodical which reports on women's problems and needs all over the world.

## The Big Challenge

The challenge for peace-makers, both men and women, is now much more pressing than it has ever been. War has given way to *terrorism* which is much more dangerous and devastating because, unlike war, it obeys no international laws and follows no established principles. Demagoguery and racism have their fascination on autochthonous masses, more particularly on the young, who are ready to deliver authority to the most violent and to replace a moribund racism by another much more virulent. Sophisticated weapons, more deadly than any preceding ones, are encouraging wholesale slaughter and destruction. In the Third World, a hundred and twenty-five wars have occurred since 1945, killing more victims than World War II. Third World countries have spent three times as much on armaments as they have received for development projects.

States, security forces and political parties have been nearly incapacitated against terrorism. It is a moral problem, requiring concerted action for a revival of public spirit and a firm belief in truth and justice as necessary requirements in a socialized group. The deflection of all our skills, energy, know-how and social idealism into systematic militarization of the planet is the ultimate pathology of the age.

## What Women Can do

As writers, journalists and researchers, as leaders and members of non-government organizations, women have actively contributed to the recent anti-war movement. While they continue along these lines, they are expected to look for other fields of effective participation in international peace projects.

Andree Michel, in her book *Le Feminisme*,<sup>1</sup> recommends cooperation between women sociologists and economists of East and West, North and South, asking them to join hands in fighting war and armament, excessive accumulation of wealth, political repression, social and international inequality.

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1. See *Al-Raida* Vol. II, No. 8, p. 13