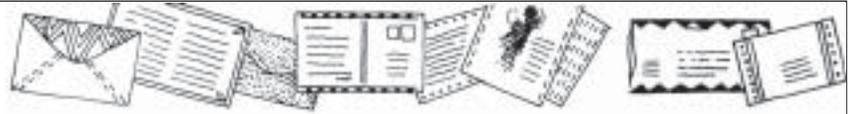


## From Dowry to *Stridhan*

The article “Destined to Fail: Inherent Flaws in the Anti-Dowry Legislation” in Issue No. 148 did a great job of pointing out both the problems with the anti-dowry laws and tracing an indigenous understanding of the tradition as *stridhan*.

Alas, the substitution of draconian inheritance laws for draconian anti-dowry laws is similarly destined to fail. To suggest that people cannot will their property as they wish, by making it illegal to disinherit daughters, is flawed since it has the state interfering with even a person’s dying right to distribute his/her own wealth as he pleases. It is also not in touch with the Indian reality in which it is the sons, in most cases, who take care of their parents’ financial and other needs during their old age.

How, then, to promote both liberty and equality in a way that is in consonance with tradition — and thus most likely to actually be implemented in practise? The original idea of *stridhan* suggests the solution. Let us transform dowry back to *stridhan* — the wealth of the daughter — that is given to her at her marriage. In effect, daughters get an early inheritance — and the suggestion of gifting immovable property in their name is an excellent one. The law can help by legalising *stridhan* (rather than outlawing it as dowry) and treating it as the wealth of the woman on official record. In the case of dissolution of the marriage, the woman should be entitled to take away all her *stridhan* since it is always officially hers. If her parents feel that her inheritance as *stridhan* was inadequate, or that the daughter played a significant role in their care in their old age, they can always leave her additional wealth in the will. By the same token, parents should also consider disinheriting sons who do



## Readers’ Responses

not step up to care for them in their old age and give away their wealth as *daan* instead.

**Sankrant Sanu, USA**

### Beware of Hypocrites

Your article “Thoughtless or Hypocritical” made for very delightful reading. Those leading the opposition to the Women’s Reservation Bill are Mulayam Singh Yadav, Laloo Prasad Yadav and Sharad Yadav. They use the specious



ground that the legislation will benefit women from wealthy and well-connected families! And as if to prove that it is bereft of ideas, the Congress is prepared to raise the strength of the legislatures, if only to ensure a smooth passage of the Bill. Other political parties are watching the fun from the sidelines and are willing to prevaricate because there is no unanimity amongst UPA allies. Trust not even the Communists. In our polity, “gender equality” is a mere shibboleth and when it comes to the crunch, it becomes mere “pro forma” support, to put it mildly, and a “hoax” to put it bluntly.

To quote our late philosopher-statesman Dr. Radhakrishnan, a Western belief is that “God could not be everywhere, so he created women”. Our own scriptures say “*Mathrudevo bhava*”, but perhaps secularism prevents us from remembering it. From Vedic times, it is our belief that “Where women are respected, there the Goddess of wealth and prosperity resides”. Laloo Prasad made his wife his successor to the office of Chief Minister in Bihar, because he did not trust anyone else and not because of her leadership qualities. When alive, nobody ever saw Mrs. Mulayam Singh. Sharad Yadav is a gold medallist in Electrical Engineering from Allahabad, but otherwise equally anti-diluvian in his thinking. The people of India, particularly women, need to beware of such leaders.

**MKD Prasada Rao, Ghaziabad, UP**

### Ladies’ Coupe

This is in response to your article “Thoughtless or Hypocritical”, (Issue No. 149). Our Constitution has granted freedom and liberty to all humans in India and does not say women are second-class citizens. The Western democracies are tearing down barriers against women as fast as they can. Since India is the champion of freeing its people from colonialism through non-violent peaceful methods, we should take the lead in the world to free our women from each and every kind of discrimination practiced by society. Thanks to Indira Gandhi’s leadership,

India won the greatest military victory recorded in the last two thousand years. India has many more women who can serve the nation in high positions. We must not lose the talents women can contribute in education, healthcare, politics and diplomacy. Without women, humanity would have disappeared from the planet. Let us accept the fact that women are equal partners in this world and build bridges to repair the damage done since humans appeared on this planet.

Arvind Amin, via email

### Missing the Joke

The idea of your article "Thoughtless or Hypocritical", in Issue No. 149 although seemingly radical, makes a lot of sense, particularly for India, which is a society with a mind-over-matter attitude. Our Indian values keep men and women in two separate worlds with separate duties and differently expected social behaviour. All this works very well and gives us a unique identity. The political establishment has to be in line with the social behaviour. So having an equal number of women representatives, who do not need to compete with male members makes a whole lot of sense for India. I suggest one change though. Let each person vote for one male and one female representative rather than men voting for men and women voting for women. How is that?

Vijay Bhatia, via email

*My proposal for setting up of two separate Lok Sabhas - for men and women was made in jest to show the absurdity of the Congress Party's latest brainwave with regard to Women's Reservation Bill. I am surprised you took it as a serious suggestion.*

Madhu Kishwar ☐



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**Melana Zyla Vickers, *Far Eastern Economic Review*,  
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