

Urdhva Mula



उर्ध्व मूलः

(Roots Upwards)



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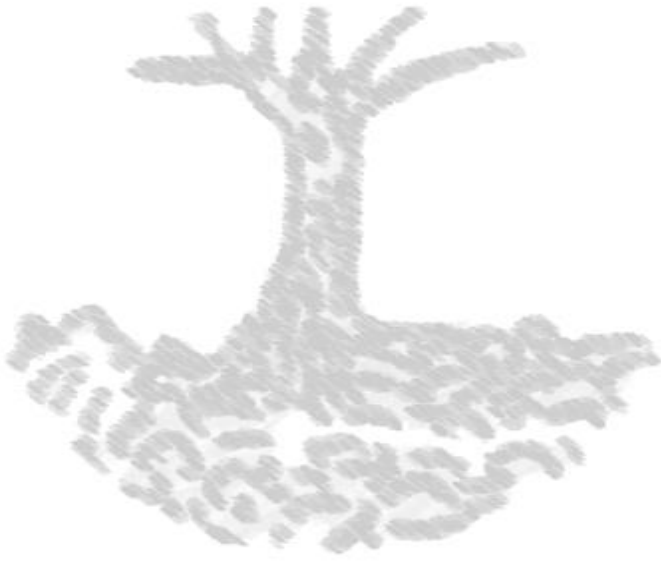
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Urdhva Mula
(Roots Upwards)
An Interdisciplinary Women's Studies Journal



The motto “*Urdhva Mula*” i.e. roots upwards. Two simple words, which can instill hope and courage when one is faced with various challenges of life.
(from *The Bhagavad Gita*)

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EDITORIAL

The COVID19 pandemic has posed multifaceted challenges for humanity in general and has exacerbated gender-based inequalities in particular. Behind new terminologies like COVID-widows and COVID orphans, anguish and pathos of thousands of women and children are hidden. Hundreds of thousands of health care professionals and workers have lost their lives while performing their duties of taking care of the patients infected by the coronavirus. *Urdhva Mula* salutes the frontline workers of the health system, of whom 70% are women; these women-doctors, nurses, sanitary workers, homebased care givers (both paid and unpaid) are SHEROES.

The current edition of *Urdhva Mula* includes a wide range of academic inquiries made by social scientists as well as interventions made by the women's rights activists.

The article titled, **Impact of Participation in Microcredit on Health of Women** by Prof. Manisha Karne and Ms. Malini Sharma, based on a case-control design featuring cross-sectional data reveals that the decision to participate in a microcredit program for health purposes leads to significant improvements in health status of women loan recipients.

Mr. Narayan Barman's study on **Gender Based Division of Labour and Wage Inequality in Potato Cultivation of West Bengal** depicts labour processes and labour relations and shows that the use of technological equipment helps to transform the agricultural practices but does not remove the gender divisions of labour.

A historical research-based article titled, **Sati, Re-married and Celibate: Exploring Indian Widowhood from a Historical and Gender Perspective** by Urvija Priyadarshini and Rekha Pande provides a detailed examination of multifaceted ways in which Indian widows

continue to suffer from patriarchal control and double standards of sexual morality. In the current context of COVID widows, there is an urgent need for a coherent public policy to address their deplorable condition.

Dr. Rohini Sudhakar and Ms Suvarna Bhujbal's article on **The mutual consent divorce within one year of marriage** is a result of a first-hand experience of Ms. Bhujbal as a marriage counsellor in the family courts in Maharashtra. The authors recommend that Pre-marriage counselling is very essential for youth for enabling them to make a conscious decision about their marriage so that they can lead a healthy, happy, and satisfying married life.

An institutional profile titled, **The Contributions of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies (CGSPS), Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife towards Gender and Development Studies in Nigeria** by Dr. Caroline Okundi MUOGHALU, Dr. Friday Asiazobor EBOIYEHI and Dr. Angela Nneka ABASILIM projects an illuminating role of the centre in gender mainstreaming of the university ecosystem by institutionalising structures and mechanisms for gender inclusiveness.

The current issue has chosen 3 recent publications for Book Review: *Engaging with the Mahatma: Multiple: Perspectives* reviewed by Ms Deepti Anil; *Youth and India's Sustainable Development Goals* reviewed by Dr. Sangeeta Desai and *Gandhi for All Times* reviewed by Dr. Lata Pujari.

The Statement and Press release section express outrage of over 10,000 Feminists, Feminist Groups and Concerned Citizens in repose to gender-based violence that escalated during the pandemic imposed social isolation.

Obituaries for Gail Omvedt (1941 – 2021), Sonal Shukla (1941 – 2021), Kamla Bhasin (1946 – 2021) are penned by their co-traveller in the women’s rights movement, Prof. Vibhuti Patel.

The *Urdhva Mula* invites researchers, academicians, scholars, policy makers, practitioners to send their original research-based articles and book reviews, poems and statements with special focus on gender concerns.

Prof. Vibhuti Patel

Dr. Ananda Amritmahal

ARTICLES

Impact of Participation in Microcredit on Health of Women

- Prof. Manisha Karne
- Ms Malini Sharma

Microfinance is primarily and normally conceptualized in a financial context, but in reality, the concept arose from developmental predicaments. The primary objective of microfinance had always been development oriented in disposition and intended at eliminating poverty. But these aims cannot be addressed adequately without factoring in the issue of 'Health'. 'Health is an economic engine for growth.' This paradigm proposes that better health leads to economic development. Improved health increases economic growth through impacts on myriad micro and macroeconomic factors. Often the poor default on repayment of loans because of their ill health and accumulated financial strain of healthcare which makes them unable to earn. For microfinance to achieve its objective of providing financial security to the poor, it has to address the issue of health security too. Hence, it is imperative to study the relationship between the two, in terms of – 'Intersection of Microcredit participation and Health Status'. Microcredit is one of the most cost effective tools to influence the health status of people particularly vulnerable segments of the population such as women. The present study uses a case control technique to report a comparative analysis of the impact of participation in microcredit on health status of members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) or beneficiaries of microcredit participation (Case group) vis-à-vis nonparticipants (Control group), primary data for which was collected through structured questionnaire-based surveys of women respondents (ages 18 and over) in urban areas of Delhi. Keywords: Case control, Microcredit, Self-Help Groups, Health status, financial context.

1. Introduction

Poverty reduction and improved income inequality has become a worldwide policy concern. Poverty impacts health and poor health can deepen poverty because of diminished ability to be economically productive. Health risks may also be positively correlated with social, economic, political and cultural exclusion. Women, in the Indian context are socially more vulnerable to deprivation. Numerous studies point out that they are deprived of health and

nutritional requirements. Thus, the health status of women is assumed to be lower than men. Apart from this, the direct and indirect impact of microcredit has not been explored widely. Since banks do not give loans for health purposes, newer arrangements are welcomed to fill the gaps in healthcare financing. Microfinance has the potential to certainly bridge this gap, since it is an easy way out to tap and pool the local resources for better outcomes. Microfinance has been evolving across India as a mechanism of financial inclusion especially for women. The present study has targeted women in the primary survey. They enjoy less economic and social independence and being overburdened by household chores, the expenditure on their health is less than minimal. The reproductive health issues and childcare responsibilities reduce their opportunities to participate in productive activities. Among other factors that have been identified to limit female economic power include lack of education, lack of awareness regarding legal rights, contingent factors such as poor housing, lack of sanitation, lack of safe drinking water, burden of household responsibilities and reproductive health related problems further affect their health status negatively. As women face a number of social, cultural and economic restrictions that may affect their ability to seek and access credit vis-à-vis men, interventions that improve women's access to credit are necessary. Regarding the health status of women in urban areas, there has been a dismal trend in terms of growing prevalence of lifestyle diseases, high morbidity, anaemia, dengue, malaria, reproductive diseases (PCOS) and respiratory infections. Apart from the disease burden, additional burden is due to low maintenance of health infrastructure, poor living conditions in the unauthorized urban settlements, rapidly increasing medical costs, accessibility, affordability, cost effectiveness and so on. This has created a situation in which access to health is based on "ability to pay". Microcredit programs are designed to support primarily women as they are left out of the formal financial system and hence are victims of poor health. The ability of a woman to access credit and its use for health purposes depends on her control and bargaining power in the intra-household resource allocation. The structural contexts in which women live are a determining factor in the effects of microcredit program on women's health status. This presents a rationale for studying the impact of microcredit participation on the health status of women in urban areas.

2. Review of Literature

This section presents an evaluation of the contemporary literature on microcredit and the direction in which research on it has developed over the past decades. Microcredit has an incredible untapped potential and plays a substantial role in poverty alleviation, reducing unemployment and overall economic development, especially relevant in developing economies like India. The beginning of microfinance in India was made with NABARD'S pilot project in Karnataka, of linking pockets of informal self-help groups (SHGs) with formal banks mediating through nongovernmental organizations. This project was known as the SHG Bank Linkage Project (Reed, 2011). Self-Help groups are the cornerstone of the microfinance activity in India. They get linked to banks via NGOs or SHPIs, for opening savings accounts and for their credit requirements. The banks lend to them after assessing their credit worthiness. SHGs thus represent a good vehicle for promotion of financial inclusion in developing countries such as India (Sharma et al., 2013). A small but growing number of studies that integrate microcredit with the other non-financial services seem to support the argument that it has positive impacts beyond the direct financial benefit, such as women's empowerment and decision-making agency (Manderson et al., 1997), and favourable health outcomes (Mohindra, 2008). Microcredit has been called "the" significant intervention within the fight against poverty for the twenty first century (Rahman, 1998,). But the thrust of the movement has been specially to interact poor women, not only alleviate their poverty, but also to extend their access to resources and enhance their power in intra household dynamics (Sundaram, 2001). Hamad and Fernald (2015) have also documented that socio economic conditions are influential determining factors of the health status of women

Women experience greater rates and depths of poverty and were especially vulnerable to poor health (United Nations Development Program, 1995; Bangser, 2002). In India, women are stereotypically at a disadvantageous position with respect to life expectancy as compared to their male counterparts, suggestive of systemic complications in the overall health status of women (Velkoff et al., 1998) and deficient accessibility to healthcare services has been cited as the most important factor contributing to high rates of maternal mortality in India (The World Bank, 1996; Jejeebhoy et al., 1995).

The cause of nearly 20 percent of all female deaths in India was found to be severe anemia (The World Bank, 1996). While malnourishment in India was predominant amid entire strata of our population, lack of a proper nutritive and balanced diet among women, begins during the stage of infancy and persists throughout adulthood and for their entire lifecycle (Chatterjee, 1990; Desai, 1994). The negative effects of malnutrition among women were compounded by poverty, by childbearing and rearing, and by special nutritional needs of women, resulting in increased susceptibility to illness and consequent higher mortality (Velkoff et al., 1998). All these factors exert a negative impact on health and nutritional status of Indian women. Gender inequity, particularly in untreated morbidity and healthcare costs continues to be severe (Sen et al., 2002). Women continue to face inequities related to healthcare and often invisible within the discourse of the aging policy (Davidson et al., 2011).

To summarize, there is only partial and limited exploratory research estimating the impact of participation in microcredit on health status of women in urban areas, using cross-sectional designs. The present study is an attempt to provide deep insights on the indirect impact of microcredit on the health status of the women in urban areas.

3. Objectives of the study

The study is an attempt to present a novel approach to test the claim that microcredit participation leads to favourable health outcomes amongst women beneficiaries. In view of this, the *material and methods* section is designed to present comparative analysis of health status of the households of women participants vis-a-vis non- participants in the sample.

4. Research Methodology

- **Study Design and Conceptual Framework.**

The main *hypothesis* of the study is that Participation in microcredit is associated with better health status of participants than non-participants. The present study was initiated in the year 2016, and the primary data was collected from February 2017 till about January 2018. The PSU (Primary Sampling Unit) has been households with eligible women or those in the age

group of 18 years and over. Multi-stage stratified sampling¹ design was used in order to generate representative samples. A well-known study design, a case-control design featuring cross-sectional data was used for the present work. Increasing the number of controls over the number of cases improves the study. A 2:3 ratio is maintained for the present study. For the present study, women involved with SHGs and their health status (outcome of interest) were matched for area, age and other attributes, with a control group or women who are not involved with SHGs. Retrospectively, it will be determined which individuals show improvement in health and what was the agent causing this change in each of the study groups.

This is a matched case control study, because cases and controls have similar socio-economic backgrounds, gender, geographical region and age structure (women of ages 18 years and over). The cases and controls are compared on all characteristics and as there is no randomization in the study, the chances of a sample bias are reduced.

- **Sample Design**

Since, the SHPIs or microcredit promoting firm are spread out in all districts of Delhi (each with different objectives and structures), we selected a sample of two SHPIs in North and Southern parts of Delhi. From the geographical area covered by the two chosen SHPIs in five major districts of Delhi, district North Delhi was selected as study area by applying simple random sampling. With the help of purposive sampling the other South Delhi district was selected, for adequate counter-factual which has socio-demographic, climatic, developmental and health indicators similar to North Delhi district on the basis of urban slums. In a nutshell, two districts viz., North Delhi district and South Delhi district were selected, where the SHPIs had their geographical presence. In both these districts Household surveys and FGDs were conducted to collect both quantitative and qualitative information, respectively. Sample data was

1 Multistage sampling refers to sampling plans where the sampling is carried out in stages using smaller and smaller sampling units at each stage. Multistage sampling can be a complex form of cluster sampling. Cluster because sampling is a type of sampling which involves dividing the population into groups (or clusters).

collected with the help of a structured questionnaire containing both open-ended and closed questions complementing each other

From each of these sample districts, census urban wards were independently selected by deploying PPS sampling. The desired number of wards were selected from each district depending upon the population of the district and the total number of such wards. At the second stage, from each of the sampled wards, census enumeration blocks (EBs) were selected. A list was made of all the EBs in the selected wards in North and South Delhi districts. With comparable population numbers; 2-3 EBs were randomly selected using multi-staged stratified sampling to generate representative samples. For areas with higher number of households and with more than one enumeration block (EB), (blocks of roughly equal population) a single EB was randomly selected. The PSU is the households (with women in age groups 18 and over). A list of households with eligible women in each sample census enumeration block (EB) was generated, with the help of the household roster maintained by the central district office. In both areas, N individual households per EB were selected by “random-walk” sampling. On the basis of information provided by the SHPI in their respective functional areas, eligible SHG member women were then selected. At this stage, respondents from various SHGs helped in contacting more SHG members from their area, due to which the sample design had an element of snowballing and convenience sampling too. This formed the case or treatment group.

For controls of the study, from the geographical area covered by the chosen SHPIs, women who are members of SHGs were matched for area, age and other attributes. It was ensured that only one woman got selected from one household. Post the two stages of stratification in the survey derived from existing frames from the census, 2011, the survey developed a sampling frame of households (with women aged 18 and over) during the subsequent stages.

- **Sample Size**

Literature search revealed and it is a usual statistical assumption that minimum prevalence about correct perception of SHG women regarding its usages is nearly 50% (Gupta & Veena, 2015) and considering 10% permissible level of

error in the estimated prevalence, the sample size was calculated using the Cochran formula (Cochran ,1977),

$$\text{Sample size } n = z^2 pq/d^2$$

Where, n = sample size, $z=Z$ statistic for a level of confidence; for 95% confidence interval $Z=1.96$, p =expected proportion or prevalence, is what the researcher is going to estimate by the study. Given, $p=50\%$ or 0.5 , $q=0.5$, $d=0.08$, the sample size, on the basis of the above formula is calculated to be 150. Assuming 5% non-response error, the actual sample size achieved was 158 for the case group. We kept extra sample size for the control group taking the possibility of non-response in to account. Hence, the actual sample size that was achieved was 261 for the control group. A 2:3 ratio of case-control study was maintained.

5. Statistical Analysis

- Independent Samples t-Test: Parametric tests of difference (t test) has been used to quantify differences in scale variables like health status scores based on their distribution as being associated with SHGs or otherwise. The case group respondents reported mean \pm standard deviation (for self-category) as 6.56 ± 2.020 , whereas, 261 subjects in the control group reported a lower, mean \pm standard deviation (3.99 ± 2.980). A similar trend was observed for the health status of not only spouse but also the first and second child as well. The average total health score is higher for SHG members in contrast to non-members (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: t-Test- Group Statistics (Health Status of Self, Spouse, Child 1, Child 2)

| Category | Type | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------------------|---------|-----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Self | Case | 158 | 6.5696 | 2.02018 | .16072 |
| | Control | 261 | 3.9923 | 2.98070 | .18450 |
| Spouse | Case | 158 | 6.06 | 2.703 | .215 |
| | Control | 261 | 5.57 | 2.231 | .138 |
| Child 1 | Case | 158 | 7.19 | 2.381 | .189 |
| | Control | 261 | 5.98 | 2.530 | .157 |
| Child 2 | Case | 158 | 6.61 | 3.064 | .244 |
| | Control | 261 | 5.79 | 2.961 | .183 |
| Total Health Score | Case | 158 | 26.4304 | 6.91474 | .55011 |
| | Control | 261 | 21.3333 | 6.35670 | .39347 |

Table 5.2: Independent Samples Test

| Category | Assumption on variances | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|---------|
| | | F | Sig. | T | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Self | Equal variances assumed | 56.628 | .000 | 9.612 | 417 | .000 | 2.57728 | .26814 | 2.05022 | 3.10435 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 10.533 | 411.708 | .000 | 2.57728 | .24468 | 2.09630 | 3.05827 |
| Spouse | Equal variances assumed | 4.936 | .027 | 2.035 | 417 | .043 | .496 | .244 | .017 | .976 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.942 | 283.995 | .053 | .496 | .256 | -.007 | .999 |
| Child 1 | Equal variances | 7.124 | .008 | 4.831 | 417 | .000 | 1.205 | .249 | .715 | 1.696 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|------|------|-------|---------|------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| | assumed | | | | | | | | | |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 4.903 | 347.001 | .000 | 1.205 | .246 | .722 | 1.689 |
| Child 2 | Equal variances assumed | .197 | .657 | 2.706 | 417 | .007 | .818 | .302 | .224 | 1.413 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 2.683 | 322.478 | .008 | .818 | .305 | .218 | 1.418 |
| Total Health Score | Equal variances assumed | .035 | .853 | 7.694 | 417 | .000 | 5.09705 | .66249 | 3.79481 | 6.39928 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 7.536 | 309.775 | .000 | 5.09705 | .67634 | 3.76624 | 6.42785 |

The t-test for equality of means, equal variances not assumed, shows that the self-health status of a woman is significantly related to her microcredit participation (p-value<0.05), t (411.7) =10.533, p-value=.000 (Table 5.2). The health status of the spouse and children is also significantly associated with the wife’s/mother’s microcredit participation. Since, all the p-values<0.05, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in means and conclude that there is in fact, a significant difference in means. Hence, SHG members (case group) demonstrate improved health statuses of not only her own self, but also, of spouse and children in contrast with non-members (control group). A strong reason for this trend is that women participation in microcredit enables them greater access to funds, which enables them to finance their healthcare expenses and thus leads to better health status.

- Two Proportions Z Test -Autonomy, Health care and Knowledge about Immunization status: 81% of cases versus 45.8% of controls have stated not only greater affordability but also better accessibility to healthcare facilities. More than half (55.7%) of the case group) are aware about two or more than two types of immunization as compared to 32.7% of those women who are not members of SHGs (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Two Proportions z Test -Autonomy w.r.t Health care and Knowledge about Immunization status

| Question asked/Parameters assessed | Type of response | Type | | | | | | Significance |
|---|------------------|-------|------------|---------|------------|-------|------------|--------------|
| | | Case | | Control | | Total | | |
| | | Count | Column N % | Count | Column N % | Count | Column N % | |
| Do you obtain health care for yourself? | Yes | 128 | 81.0% | 119 | 45.8% | 247 | 59.1% | * |
| | No | 16 | 10.1% | 111 | 42.7% | 127 | 30.4% | |
| | Don't Know | 14 | 8.9% | 30 | 11.5% | 44 | 10.5% | |
| Any depression, anxiety or other mental health problems during pregnancy, delivery or postpartum? If yes, please explain? | Yes | 20 | 12.7% | 95 | 36.5% | 115 | 27.5% | * |
| | No | 125 | 79.1% | 118 | 45.4% | 243 | 58.1% | |
| | Don't Know | 13 | 8.2% | 47 | 18.1% | 60 | 14.4% | |
| Do you know about all types of immunization? | Yes | 88 | 55.7% | 83 | 32.7% | 171 | 41.5% | * |
| | No | 1 | 0.6% | 7 | 2.8% | 7 | 1.7% | |
| | Don't Know | 68 | 43.0% | 133 | 52.4% | 201 | 48.8% | |

*Implies significance at 5%

- Two Proportion z Test-Microcredit participation and Health status: 89.4% of SHG members reported that they spend the loan amount specifically on healthcare vis-à-vis 69.9% of non-members. It was observed that 15% of case group respondents stated that they spent an aggregate amount of greater than 50 percent specifically on healthcare, while only 6.7% of non-participants informed the same. This is also evident from the finding that 35.7% of the children of SHG members versus only 16% of those of non-members were born in a medical facility. The reason for this observation is that a large number of SHG members devote the funds taken as loans to finance deliveries, pre- and post- natal care. A greater

proportion of case group respondents vis-à-vis control group ones, have stated that they have not delayed buying medicines. Moreover, 66% of the cases reported that they are aware of similar funding schemes as compared to 10.5% of the controls, (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Two Proportion Z Test-Microcredit participation and Health status

| Question asked/Parameters assessed | Type of response | Type | | | | | | Significance |
|---|------------------|-------|------------|---------|------------|-------|------------|--------------|
| | | Case | | Control | | Total | | |
| | | Count | Column N % | Count | Column N % | Count | Column N % | |
| Have you used money for health care Specifically? | Yes | 135 | 89.4% | 181 | 69.9% | 316 | 77.1% | * |
| | No | 14 | 9.3% | 65 | 25.1% | 79 | 19.3% | |
| | Don't Know | | | 13 | 5.0% | 13 | 3.2% | |
| Have delayed buying medicines and other health care products for lack of funds? | Yes | 114 | 75.5% | 185 | 72.0% | 299 | 73.3% | |
| | No | 37 | 24.5% | 39 | 15.2% | 76 | 18.6% | |
| | Don't Know | | | 33 | 12.8% | 33 | 8.1% | |
| Are you prepared for immediate or future health care needs? | Yes | 51 | 33.8% | 9 | 3.5% | 60 | 14.6% | * |
| | No | 99 | 65.6% | 121 | 46.7% | 220 | 53.7% | |
| | Don't Know | 1 | 0.7% | 129 | 49.8% | 130 | 31.7% | |
| Were your children born in a medical facility? | Yes | 51 | 35.7% | 39 | 16.4% | 90 | 23.6% | * |
| | No | 92 | 64.3% | 198 | 83.2% | 290 | 76.1% | |
| | Don't Know | | | 1 | 0.4% | 1 | 0.3% | |
| Are you a part of any other funding schemes of similar nature? | Yes | 97 | 65.5% | 27 | 10.5% | 124 | 30.5% | * |
| | No | 50 | 33.8% | 190 | 73.6% | 240 | 59.1% | |
| | Don't Know | 1 | 0.7% | 41 | 15.9% | 42 | 10.3% | |

*Implies significance at 5%

- Ordinary Least Squares Regression: An OLS regression was run with Health score as the dependent variable which is continuous and the

independent variable as the membership of SHG which is the case control variable and thus, it is dichotomous. The final result was that higher the participation in microcredit or SHG membership, higher is the health status (B is significant as $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ and has a positive coefficient=2.350), (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5: Results of OLS Regression -Health Score &SHG membership

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B | |
|-------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| | | 1 | (Constant) | 11.065 | | | .143 | |
| | Case Control | 2.350* | .233 | .443 | 10.076 | .000 | 1.892 | 2.808 |

- a. Dependent Variable: Health Domain Score *implies significant at 5%
- The Binary Logit model: Logistic regression was run at 95% and 90% confidence intervals, in order to discern the health seeking behaviour of SHG members or the case group. The dependent variable was ‘Used money for healthcare’, (a proxy for health status), which is dichotomous and coded as 1 for yes and 0 for no. A few key parameters were chosen to examine health seeking behaviour which are defined as the following:
 L115=Capacity of using money,
 L116=Delayed buying medicines,
 L117=Health Insured,
 L118=Prepared for healthcare need,
 L119=Used money for preventive healthcare,
 L120=Delay in seeking medical attention,
 L121=Concerned about child health,
 L123=Funding in similar schemes.

Certain important inferences were drawn:

- Microcredit participants had little financial awareness about diverse insurance products. A minor proportion of them had a health

insurance policy and hence, there was greater probability of using loaned funds to finance immediate healthcare rather than preventive healthcare.

- Most of the SHG members had a greater concern for the health needs of their children, and hence, a greater likelihood of spending money from loans on health.
- At 90% confidence interval, another independent variable that was statistically significant was ‘Delays in buying medicines’, due to lack of funds, before their SHG membership.

Table 5.6: Results of Logistic Regression, case group only, N=158

| Parameters | | B | S.E. | Wald | Df | Sig. | Exp(B) |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------|-------|-------|-----|-------|--------|
| | L115 | 1.939 | 1.278 | 2.302 | 1 | 0.129 | 6.950 |
| | L116 | -1.569* | 0.845 | 3.445 | 1 | 0.063 | 0.208 |
| | L117 | -1.664** | 0.756 | 4.844 | 1 | 0.028 | 0.189 |
| | L118 | 1.940 | 1.189 | 2.663 | 1 | 0.103 | 6.956 |
| | L119 | 0.293 | 1.284 | 0.052 | 1 | 0.820 | 1.340 |
| | L120 | 0.527 | 0.721 | 0.535 | 1 | 0.465 | 1.695 |
| | L121 | 1.791** | 0.575 | 9.717 | 1 | 0.002 | 5.998 |
| | L123 | 0.638 | 0.693 | 0.848 | 1 | 0.357 | 1.892 |
| | Constant | -0.048 | 0.720 | 0.004 | 1 | 0.947 | 0.954 |
| Sample size (case group) | N | 158 | 158 | 158 | 158 | 158 | 158 |
| Other statistics | R ² | 0.216 | | | | | |

- Variable(s) entered on step 1: L115, L116, L117, L118, L119, L120, L121, L123. *Implies significant at 10%; **implies significant at 5%
- Estimation of Odd Ratio: The Odds Ratio was estimated to verify and compare health seeking behaviour across case and control group subjects. The Odds are significantly higher (Odds Ratio>1), that an SHG member is more likely to spend funds acquired by her on healthcare, in contrast to non-members. The odds ratio was estimated

based on the variables indicated in tables independently. (Table 5.7a to 5.7e)

Table 5.7(a): Health Insured

| Variable | Type of response | Type | | Total | Odds Ratio |
|----------------|------------------|------|---------|-------|------------|
| | | Case | Control | | |
| Health Insured | 0 | 119 | 239 | 358 | 3.56 |
| | 1 | 39 | 22 | 61 | |
| Total | | 158 | 261 | 419 | |

This implies that odds are 3.56 times higher that a case group female will spend on a healthcare facility like health insurance than a control group female, due to availability of funds with the former (Table 5.7(a)). Likewise, table 5.7(b) shows that odds are 13.35 times higher that a case group respondent is prepared for healthcare needs than a control group female.

Table 5.7(b): Prepared for Health Care Need

| Variable | Type of response | Type | | Total | Odds Ratio |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------|---------|-------|------------|
| | | Case | Control | | |
| Prepared for Health Care Need | 0 | 107 | 252 | 359 | 13.35 |
| | 1 | 51 | 9 | 60 | |
| Total | | 158 | 261 | 419 | |

The table 5.79 (c) illustrates, that the odds are 9.3 times higher that a case group subject has used money for preventive health care vis-à-vis one in the control group.

Table 5.7(c): Used Money for Preventive Health Care

| Variable | Type of response | Type | | Total | Odds Ratio |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|------|---------|-------|------------|
| | | Case | Control | | |
| Used Money for Preventive Health Care | 0 | 109 | 249 | 358 | 9.33 |
| | 1 | 49 | 12 | 61 | |
| Total | | 158 | 261 | 419 | |

The Table 5.7(d) shows, that the odds are 1.58 times higher that a case group respondent delay seeking medical attention than a control group one. Hence the need for microcredit participation to attain better health status.

Table 5.7(d): Delay in seeking Medical Attention

| Variable | Type of response | Type | | Total | Odds Ratio |
|------------------------------------|------------------|------|---------|-------|------------|
| | | Case | Control | | |
| Delay in seeking Medical Attention | 0 | 127 | 226 | 353 | 1.58 |
| | 1 | 31 | 35 | 66 | |
| Total | | 158 | 261 | 419 | |

Likewise, odds are 13.78 times higher than the case group respondent has funding in similar schemes as they exhibit greater health seeking behaviour and are more informed while the control group does not, as displayed by the table 5.7(e).

Table 5.7(e): Funding in Similar Schemes

| Variable | Type of response | Type | | Total | Odds Ratio |
|----------------------------|------------------|------|---------|-------|------------|
| | | Case | Control | | |
| Funding in Similar Schemes | 0 | 61 | 234 | 295 | 13.78 |
| | 1 | 97 | 27 | 124 | |
| Total | | 158 | 261 | 419 | |

6. Main Findings

As demonstrated by the independent samples t-test, the mean health score of SHG members and their families is higher than that of non-members and the difference is significant at 5%. The results obtained from the z tests indicate that majority of case group members (compared to controls) spend a greater proportion of money on healthcare, owing to greater access to funds by virtue of their participation in microcredit programs. The results of the binary logit model illustrate that the case group exhibits a satisfactory health seeking

behaviour in terms of greater knowledge about healthcare, health insurance, ability to seek preventive healthcare and concern about child health. The estimation of the odds ratio brings out a comparative analysis of health seeking behaviour across the case and control sample and suggests that odds are higher for women beneficiaries of microcredit (in contrast to non-beneficiaries) to use the money obtained through microloans on healthcare. The study is a testimony to the statement that although microcredit is a micro tool but can have a macro impact on the lives of poor women in terms of their participation in it and consequently an improvement in their health status.

7. Conclusion -The way forward

Microcredit is not a panacea, but could help to improve the health of poor women by addressing certain issues relevant to context. The main findings of this research are that the decision to participate in a microcredit program for health purposes leads to significant improvements in health status of women loan recipients. There are positive externalities of group behaviour in health information and health practices. This study is expected to add insights about such positive externalities² and would be able to demonstrate how microcredit impacts the participant's health and help identify promising areas of investment, for government intervention and future exploration.

Welfarists stress that adding auxiliary services such as micro health insurance could improve the effectiveness of microcredit programs. Micro insurance refers to the protection of low-income vulnerable sections of the population especially women, against health shocks and risks, and other specific perils in exchange for regular premium payments proportionate to the likelihood and cost of the risks involved. To date, there has been very little research on the added effects of MHI. Thus, we could expand the scope of our study into areas of social protection not covered in conventional loan-based microcredit.

2 An externality is the cost or benefit that affects a party who did not choose to incur that cost or benefit. Economists often urge governments to adopt policies that "internalize" an externality, so that costs and benefits will affect mainly parties who choose to incur them.

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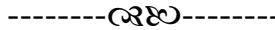
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Gender Based Division of Labour and Wage Inequality in Potato Cultivation of West Bengal

- Dr. Narayan Barman

Historically, gender divisions of labour were attributed to biological differences between men and women, where men were assumed to be more efficient in certain work and women in others. Consequently, differences in wage rates between women and men were assumed to be based on these assumptions. Differences in the status of men and women in the labour market have long been noted and debated in the Indian agricultural labour market. In West Bengal, the second highest potato producing state of the country, different types of work in potato production are highly segregated. Subsequently, the aim of this paper is to present and discuss the gender differentiations in potato cultivation and to assess wage inequality in the agricultural sector of the state. Primary data has been collected through oral interviews with potato cultivating households of Cooch Behar District. The findings show that gender divisions and wage inequality continue to prevail the potato producing agricultural sector in West Bengal.

Introduction:

The way of work which is divided between men and women based on gender is referred to as the gender division of labour (ILO, 2017). In some labour markets, labour is highly segregated along the lines of gender but with huge differences between and across cultures and regions. However, even as gender roles have been changed, men continue to dominate in paid work and women in unpaid work. For example, around the world, most of unpaid household work such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elders continue to be women's work. On the other hand, most of the heavy physical power based and paid works are done overwhelmingly by men.

In potato cultivation of West Bengal, the gender division of labour already plays an important role from the initial period of cultivation. Different types of works related to potato farming are allotted to workers based on gender. The work of men is accessed as worthy of better wages than work performed by women. The differences in wages are not based on differences in skill or

efficiency, but only on gender. These differences are especially prevalent in the unorganised agricultural sector such as in potato production where traditional labour processes have been practiced. West Bengal is one of the most important potato producing states in India. The total potato production of the state increased around 10 per cent, from about 90 lakh ton in 2019 to 105 lakh tonnes in 2020 (The Hindu, 2020). In 2019, Potato cultivation in Bengal is spread over close to 4.6 lakh hectares of land (The Hindu, 2020). Hooghly, Burdwan, Bankura, East Midnapur, West Midnapur, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar are the key potato growing districts of the state.

Therefore, the present paper presents the gender division of labour prevalence in potato producing agricultural sector and the inequality of wages among men and women labourers arising from agricultural practices. As, the gender effect of work segregation and wage discrimination impact heavily on rural women, given their unequal claims and right to resources, both at the site of production and consumption at the household level (Krishnaraj, 2007).

Literature review

There have been substantial research studies of various dimensions of gender in agriculture. Mudege et al., (2016) in a study from Malawi, explored interactions between extension services and gender relation among potato farmers. The paper has discussed how power relations worked within households and also found that social beliefs were instrumental in shaping farmer's identities. They also discussed how potato farming provides diversification opportunities for women and ways of strengthening services and input provisions for women in potato farming. The study also explored existing gender inequalities, specifically norms restricting women's mobility and decision-making power. In a similar study Oumer et al., (2013) showed how a participatory approach through farmer research groups can address gender inequalities and subsequently found that through participatory interventions women farmers enhanced their skills and knowledge. They observed that participatory interventions improved women's productivity of seed potatoes and marketing and as a consequence created more options to improve the livelihoods of women farmers and their households as well as their communities. Olagunju et al (2013) analysed sweet potato production in Nigeria and found that efficiency factors affecting the productivity of the female farmers included farming experience, marital status, number of

extensions visits and household size. Women farmers achieved better output than male sweet potato farmers. Their results also suggest that land clearing, preparation and ridging were found to be done by 90 per cent of farmers, 87.5 per cent of them were men and 12.5 per cent of women farmers did land clearing, 35 per cent of women farmers did land preparation and 10 per cent of the women farmers did ridging respectively. Sah et al (2007) examined the participation of men and women in potato cultivation in the state of Meghalaya. The study reported that the majority of the respondents reported that activities like farm yard manure application in the field, application of chemical fertilizer, potato planting and selection of the seed mostly performed by women. About 88 per cent of the respondents reported that weeding and earthing operations were performed exclusively by women. Similarly harvesting of potato was predominant by women. On the other hand, land preparation for potato planting was carried out jointly by men and women. The study found that majority of the activities related to potato production were carried out primarily by women farmers either singly or jointly with men. Singh (1996) in his study found that all India agricultural average daily wage rates for both male and female workers continue to be lower than male non-agricultural workers' wages. He also stated that in most developing countries not only have female agricultural wage workers been bypassed by the development process, but more importantly women's economic issues seem to have been relegated to the background in agricultural development and labour market studies. Chamarbagwala (2006) investigated how economic liberalization and globalisation affects the wage structure in a poor but rapidly developing economy with an abundance of unskilled agricultural labour such as India. The findings revealed that the gender wage differential narrowed considerably with improved skills and education and shifted gradually with economic growth and market liberalization. Srivastava and Sengupta (2016) explored the determinants of agricultural wages in India. The result suggests that there are four major factors that determine the agricultural wages, namely, non-farm wage factors, accessibility factors, production factors, and individual factors. They also found that the gender wage disparity was not declining instead it had increased over time. Furthermore, their results found that the daily agricultural wage of male workers exceeded the minimum wage rate prescribed by the government but in most cases, this was not true for female workers.

From the above literature review, we can conclude that gender differences in the division of labour and wages in India and other countries continue to impact female potato farmers negatively. Some of the studies referenced and did show that it is possible to create conditions that may improve the situation for women. However, none of the studies specifically targeted the gender-based divisions of labour and wage inequality of potato farmers in West Bengal, which is the focus of this paper.

Methodology

Cooch Behar district is one of the largest potato producing districts of West Bengal. In the economic year of 2011-2012, the total potato cultivating area of the district was 23.7 thousand hectares with a total potato production of 604.8 thousand tonnes. Therefore, both the primary and secondary data have been used for the present study, the primary data was obtained in the month of April, 2020 through personal interviews with pre-tested interview scheduled. A total 50 potato farming households have been interviewed for the study. While, 25 interviews were conducted with women cultivators and agricultural labourer and 25 interviews were conducted with men cultivators and agricultural labourers from the potato farming household. The age of the interviewees ranged between 20-50 years, and all are married. The primary data is supported by secondary data which are collected from different reports like newspaper, Census of India and others research articles.

Gender divisions in potato cultivation:

Cultivating potato is very labour-intensive work. From the pre-planting of the seed to marketing of the potato, potato farming goes through different work sequences. The division of labour is such that certain jobs are performed only by women, some jobs performed entirely by men and a third group jobs performed jointly by men and women together.

Table-I: Gender divisions of labour in potato cultivation

| Work done only by Women | Work done only by Men | Work done by both |
|--|--|---|
| Cutting Potato Seed, Purifying the seed, Harvesting. | Ploughing, Transporting, spraying pesticide and Insecticide, Storing, Selling the product. | Weeding, packaging, Watering, Weighing. |

Women traditionally cut vegetables on a regular basis when preparing domestic food. This competence is transferred to potato production where women are assigned the duty to prepare the potato seeds for planting during the pre-planting periods of the potato seeds. Each germinated piece of the seeds potato is cut into a separate piece and planted as a separate potato seed in the fields. Often the cultivators brought the potato seeds from cold storage/traders and keep into open ground with covering the sheet for germination purpose. It took around one week to 10 days and during this period the farmers always keep watchful eye, so that rats or domestic animals cannot eat the potato seeds. Although the cutting procedure is traditionally women's work, men in some families also engage in the cutting procedure. During the field survey it has been found that 98 percent of the cutting and seed refining works have done by women. During the seed plantation the traditional equipment like hand-drawn plough, spade have been used to make the planting row where hand-draw plough mostly (90%) operated by men and spade have mostly (80%) operated by women to cover the planted potato seeds. Indian farming is still highly depended upon plough animals, especially the area where land holding is very small. Small farmers cannot afford to adopt machinery for cultivation because of their lack of capital. So, they plough the agricultural land with the help of oxen, consequently many tasks related to potato farming are highly depended on men. In Cooch Behar district among the potato cultivating family, about 100 per cent land is ploughed by men. The other heavy work such as spraying pesticide and insecticide is also done by men since more physical strength is needed to carry the water drum. While, the work related to land preparation is overwhelmingly done by men, their works like ploughing, laddering have done by men with the help of oxen and spading have done collectively. The modern equipment like tractors, power tiller also operates (100%) by men for preparing the land, women use only that equipment which is traditional and highly dependent on physical labour to operate like the scythe and spade.

Earlier extensive weeding was needed for potato cultivation and weeding activities were overwhelmingly dependent on the women labour force. But now days innovation changed the scenario, after sprouting the seedling on the ground the farmers spray the weed killers which is mainly done by men. And after spraying weed killer the remaining grass is weeded by women. This technological transformation of agricultural work instructed the partiality of

innovation towards men in the agricultural sector. Whereas, in the present study area the ‘river lift’ and ‘tube well’ irrigation is practised and women contribute the work like carrying, laying delivery pipe which has been considered passive in the society. Here, men operate the motor and supervise the irrigation process.

Likewise, during potato harvesting, women’s participation is also very significant. Harvesting potatoes is labour intensive and the potatoes first is dug-up, then collected and finally moved to a separate space for sorting and grading. Traditionally, men break the soil to dig up the potatoes. The intensive repetitive work of bending and lifting to collect and move the potato bags are done by women. The present study finds that about 95 per cent work related to harvesting was done by women.

After harvesting the potatoes at the field, the farmers initially transported and stored the potatoes in their own house, they often store their potatoes for two to three months while waiting for the best possible price to sell their product. Initially the potatoes are transported from the field to farmer’s house by hand rickshaw which is operated by men. Men perform the majority of the transport related work from field to house and house to market, and also engage in storing a certain number of potatoes in cold storage for next year’s seeds. In sum, it was found that 80 per cent of the potato farmers keep their potato temporarily after harvesting.

Gender divisions in unpaid family labour

Despite the increase in women’s relative earnings, women continue to do most of the home labour in heterosexual married couple households (Sanz et al., 2010). However, the share of women’s time in unpaid labour (both household and childcare) remains high as most of the unpaid family work such as cooking, cleaning; caring of child and animals, collection of fodder continues to be done by women. Unpaid family work is also not exempt from the gender division of labour which is mostly controlled by the social norms of the society.

Table -II: Gender divisions in unpaid family Work

| Work done only by Women | Work done only by Men | Work done by both |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| Cooking, caring of children, Watering feeding animals, cleaning household, Mending of cloths | Collection Fuel, fodder, Gardening, | Mending of Household, Shopping, Caring of animals. |

Unpaid family work is segregated more on the basis of social norms rather than efficiency. As traditionally, women are engaged in cooking, cleaning, child caring etc. In the present study, it is found that 99 percent of cooking, 98 per cent of household cleaning is done by women. One of the respondents answered that she woke up every early morning and cleaned the household premises before her husband and kids awoke. And every day she cooked the food three times and prepared tea two times. As she thinks that serving her husband is her duty as a woman and that cooking, cleaning, child care is her work. Earlier LPG gas connection was not available in most of the rural households. Cooking was entirely dependent upon either cow dung cake or wooden fuel, but nowadays, most of the household in the present study area has LPG connection and men usually collect the LPG gas. Similarly, 95 per cent household's gardening is done by men. On the other hand, certain unpaid family work like repairing work, shopping, caring for household animals are done together by both. Men are traditionally assumed to be more efficient for repair work so they do the main work and women are their assistants. In agricultural households in Cooch Behar, a typical characteristic as regards of animal care revealed that men take care of bullocks while women mostly care for cows, goats and poultry. In the study, 99 per cent of the households reported that care of goats, poultry etc., are totally done by women as they considered it a way for women to earn pocket money. Women put their earning to productive use to pay tuition fees of their children, buying books, cloths etc.

There is a large difference of working hours between men and women in the agricultural households. Women do the 60 per cent of the unpaid work in the house which is very frequent and sequential as well. To consider, for example, this study in the life of Arati Barman, a Bengali woman of Cooch

Behar: “After getting up in the morning I must wash the pots and sweep. Then I go to collect cow dung for fuel and agricultural uses and feed the bullock, subsequently prepare breakfast. In the afternoon, I cook the mid-day meal and go to collect grass for the bullock and feed other animals like goats and hens. In between daily home-based work, I work in the field too. I must plant the paddy, spread fertilizer, turn over the earth around the potato, and help in harvesting. At night again, I cook for dinner and serve to all family members.” During harvesting season women work at an average of 12 hours and men work about 10 hours. Men’s working hours fluctuate more than women’s working hours in between peak harvesting season and off season. Men’s work averages at about 6 hours during off season where women work 8 hours. Difference is also found among large land holders’ family and small farmers and agricultural labourers. Amongst large land holder’s family women’s involvement outside the household are restricted because in a cultural setting where women’s involvement in other than domestic work is considered non-prestigious (Agarwal, 1985).

Male out migration and feminisation of labour

All cultivators have marginal land holding of the study village in this report. The average land holding of Gopalpur is 1 hectare, consequently, there is a trend of male migration which is the dominant survival strategy of coping with poverty and the increasing cost of living compared to 25 years ago (Sandbergen, 2018). During the field survey, the respondent answered that investing in agriculture is more burdening because in any agricultural production, it takes two or three months and there is no assurance about the profits to be earned from that agricultural production. On the other hand, the labourers who did the casual work on a daily basis on other’s land also would also not get the maximum payment assured. Apart from that, agricultural work is also irregular and highly seasonal. The demand of the agricultural sector in the present area peaks in the pre-Monsoon season when rice planting is done and post-Monsoon when potato seed is planted. It is exceedingly difficult to find work during the off season and therefore, there is a predominant migration of male family members. As they get a better daily wage with regular work at these places which assures their minimum work and wage earning. The overwhelming trend to migrate to Kerala is pertinent in the area because of the higher wages in state of Kerala (Rs (600-1000) per

day) which are extremely attractive for men compared to the local wages rates of Rs (300- 400) per day. The migrant workers usually work in the construction sector as unskilled casual workers. As a result, women of migrant's households often replace their men as cultivators. The outcome for women cultivators is a different scenario than men. Since the traditional gender division of labour assumes that women cannot perform certain male gender coded tasks, women cultivators must hire men for ploughing, however in the absence of men, women take on duties such as spraying, applying pesticide and insecticide as well as transporting the agricultural product. As the women said, "We are helpless, so, we do not bother about others' opinion, because nobody will do my work free of cost." Usually, selling of potatoes is dominated by men but in the absence of men in the household, women cultivators either sell their product to a wholesale merchant, where they call the merchant to their home to discuss price, quality etc., or they hire a male labourer to sell the product in the market.

Modernisation of agriculture and gender neutralisation of agricultural labour market

Technological changes and modernisation of agriculture have been acknowledged as the principal driver of productivity, growth as well as it also helps to reduced gender divisions of labour (Otchia, 2014). However, it is worth mentioning that the innovation, selection and adoption of new technologies depend on the agricultural frontier, factor endowment, and market imperfections (Otchia, 2014). In Gopalpur, the application of machinery such as tractors, power tillers and other instruments played an important role to reduce the gender divisions of labour. As tractor and power tiller replace the ploughing in the agricultural labour market and men extend their hand to other works which is dominated by women. On the other hand, electrification of different machines such as electric motor for spraying, battery integrated vehicles make spraying and transportation less labour intensive. So, nowadays, women are also doing this work. As in Gopalpur, 5 percent women do the spraying in their cultivated land and about 10 percent women transported their product by motor vehicles. Tribal women especially are far ahead in this regard. The survey found that 60 per cent of tribal women transported their product from the cultivated land to their home, which is 5 percent higher than among non-tribal groups. There is a positive relation with

growing education level of women and growing purchasing and selling activity of agricultural product. As education bring confidence to bargain with merchants during selling of the production at home and during purchasing in retail shops.

Wage inequality in agriculture

Gender wage gap is often found among different industries and sectors of developing countries, the wage gap is also expected to persist across different levels of educational attainment of workers in urban and rural regions. Most of the studies on gender differentials have supported the existence of gender inequality in wages (Lama & Majumder, 2018). As agriculture becomes feminized due to male migration, an increasing number of women will be faced with the primary responsibility for farming (Agarwal, 2003). However, increasing feminisation of agriculture has not increased wage rates. In the present study, it is found that women are paid only 66.67 per cent of men's daily wage.

Where the men's daily wage is Rs 300 with lunch, the women's daily wage is Rs 200 with lunch. When the interviewer tried to reason the cause behind this inequality, the three main reasons were given by interviewees. First, social norms in traditional agrarian practices, played an especially important role. The women have extremely limited choice in work tasks. There are some tasks which are only allotted for women in the field and some are done by men only. In the present study, it was found that even when men and women do the same work, women are paid less than men. There are some women respondents who are happy with their less payment as they think that these kind of practices are from an earlier period and performing tasks socially allotted for men will create respect issues in the society. Other women respondents thought that paying women unequal wages is a fraud which society is perpetrating on them, they are willing to do the work which is only allotted for men. Lack of confidence is another attribute which makes women scared. Some women wanted to protest against unequal wages but thought that people will not support them. They also think that the work which is generally done by men is not appropriate for them as they do not have the physical strength. Lack of equal competency is the most important thing which makes women less demanding in the agricultural labour market. As men can do all type of work and do the most physical strength-based work in the farming

sector which women cannot do. One of the farmers reported that during farming time, he can demand any work from men which women cannot do. And in the field men do all the hard work where women do the less difficult work. So, women do not deserve equal wage. Though above are the main causes of unequal wage distribution but clearly the definition cannot explain women's exclusion (Agarwal, 2003).

Impact of government policies to reduce wage inequality in the agricultural sector

In 1976, the equal remuneration act was adopted for equal pay both of male and female agricultural labourers for the "same work or work of a similar nature" to protect the rights of female labourers against unfair wage practices (Kundu and Das, 2019). Yet it is observed that the men and women's wage rate is not equal in the agricultural labour market. Though many governments policy like MGNREGA, Sarvashiksha Abhiyan and Self-Help Group contributed an important role for spreading awareness about equal wages among women. In 2002, the Government of India started Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to universalize primary education. Consequently, with the expansion of primary education among women, it played a significant role in reducing gender discrimination in terms of wage among women labourers. Spreading of education among women mainly in the rural areas generate awareness about rights among the female labour force which also helps their bargaining strength during the time of deciding women's farm wages. Apart from that, it is also found that after getting education women of rural areas become more interested in non-farming activities which reduce the women's participation in agriculture and unskilled work. In 2005, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has been passed to enhance livelihood security of rural people especially the backward group such as women. By MGNREGA act 2005, government ensured the equal wages of men and women, therefore, from the same experience, women's bargaining capacity has gone up. As now, there is the trend of demanding equal wage among women agricultural labour force in the ground level. Similarly, in the contemporary period, the microfinance system under the joint liability credit process through forming Self-Help groups become extremely popular in rural India, especially among poor, women agricultural labourers and small landholding household women. The group has built up mainly among the same locality's women. Therefore,

they can stay connected with each other and social awareness has grown up and through the participation of these microfinance programmes, the rural women have got an alternative source of income, and also become self-reliant day by day. Consequently, the self-reliant women are not very interested to work in the field with discriminative wages. This has led to force the employers to increase the wages of women and decline the wage gap and increase the labour supply of women in the agricultural sector.

Conclusion

In India, women are still economically backward, they do not get the opportunity to enter the labour market like men. Traditionalists think that maintaining the household should be the top priority for women. In this landscape, women's possibility to engage in paid work is largely determined by the socio-cultural and economic factors of the society. Within their limited option, they face different constraints in the workplace. Women's work is considered as a lack of quality. As a result, they face a biased attitude in the labour market. The women do most of the unpaid, low paid and casual work which makes them disadvantaged to upward mobility. From the present study, it has been found that irregular and seasonal character of rural agricultural employment directs the male out of state migration and then women are forced to take on double work responsibility both indoor and outdoor. But, with increasing of the workload, the recognition has not yet been given by the society which women deserved. Although, the use of technological equipment helps to transform the agricultural practices but it was not able to remove the gender divisions of labour. Rather, technology dilutes the men's physical labour in agricultural work, where women's work remains the same, they are considered as passive and sub-ordinate workers in the agricultural sector and paid discriminative wages. Rural women's work ranges from family maintenance to cottage industry, they spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties (Behera & Behera, 2013). In spite of that women's contribution is not recognized as properly as they deserve.

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Sati, Re-married and Celibate: Exploring Indian Widowhood from a Historical and Gender Perspective

- Urvija Priyadarshini
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The figure of the Hindu upper-caste widow has been central especially in the colonial and post-colonial scholarship and has been a subject to much academic deliberation and scrutiny. This paper attempts to undertake a historical and gendered analysis of the recourses to widowhood in India. Niyoga, sati, remarriage and celibacy were the four 'options' that a widowed woman could resort to at varied points in history. The recourses follow their own individual historical trajectory and are fraught with complexities, each one becoming prominent at a certain historical time due to the prevalent socio-political environment. As the gendered analysis demonstrates, these practices emanated from the need to maintain caste purity and patriarchal supremacy of the Hindu male and worked towards ultimate obliteration of the widow.

Introduction

The historicizing and contextualizing of the phenomenon of widowhood in India is a complex task. A systematic gendered history of widowhood centring women's voices is yet to be written even though academic discussions and theorizations abound around the discourse of widowhood. Though widowhood is as universal as marriage and family, it pans out uniquely in the Indian socio-cultural and historical context. Of all the social relations pertinent to a woman's life-cycle, marriage and motherhood are considered of prime importance in the Indian context. Her full potential as a woman is realized upon becoming a man's wife and bearing his children. Both the life-goals elevate her social position and respectability in society. To be a married woman and to be fertile to give birth are considered the epitome of feminine duties. Thus, they are positively reinforced to a great extent especially in religious prescriptions and customs and rituals.

The ideal scenario for a woman's life is to live the entire course of her life remaining married and giving birth preferably to sons who will ensure that she is well taken care of in her old-age. Statistics, however, have shown that this is seldom the case with Indian women. Consider the fact that during marriage

the normative age difference between women and men is a minimum of four to five years with the man being more aged than the woman. Also, studies have shown that men generally have a higher mortality rate as compared to women in India (Stanistreet, 2005). This makes the phenomenon of widowhood inevitable in many cases.

Widowhood is a universal phenomenon. What stands out about the Indian widowhood experience is its severity, its longevity and the blatant stigma attached to a widow's personhood. Elaborate customs and rituals demarcate the death of the husband. Ritual mourning to denote the loss of the husband as the most important loss in a woman's life is undertaken publicly. Widowhood as an experience in the Indian socio-cultural context is much more pronounced, brazen and agonizing both at a personal and social level.

Contours of a History of Widowhood in India

“The history of women is not linear, nor does it have a well-organized structure” (Desai and Thakkar, 2001). The history of widowhood in India is unequally written though it is perhaps the most passionately debated and theorized aspect of Indian femininities. Widows from specific regions such as West Bengal have undergone more rigorous scrutiny. It predominantly constitutes a history of Hindu upper-caste widowhood even though wide variations are prevalent on the lines of religion and region. Certain dimensions of widowhood experience are more pronounced and shed more light upon as compared to others. Both Spivak and Mani, for example, have recognized the colonial preoccupation with Sati on their work on issues of Indian women in the postcolonial context (Rajan, 2003).

The history of widowhood in India closely corresponds to the history of patriarchy, Aryan supremacy and the caste system in India. It is also a history of systematic subjugation of women in general translating into an enhanced subjugation of widows considering their lost status upon the husband's death. Tharakan and Tharakan (1975) note that in the early period the ownership of property was common and kinship dominated social relationships. In such arrangement women were the 'identifiable parent' and thus enjoyed a fair status in society. They were equal participants in agriculture too and their status remained elevated before the advent of the plough. In the medieval period the 'growth and consolidation of private property' adversely affected

the status of women since men's control on the 'means of production' grew at a steadfast rate. Men controlled the "surplus" and started exercising their mastery over the same. The decline in the overall status of women became a consolidated phenomenon around 1000 BC. (pp. 116-118) Uma Chakravarti conceptualized "Brahminical patriarchy" to understand the intersectionality of gender, caste and class in ancient Indian history. According to Chakravarti (1993) the rudimentary caste and class divisions in the society evolved with the shift to an agricultural economy around (800- 600) BC. The Brahmins gained prominence and patrilineal succession was established as the predominant family system. The increase in the stratification of society, establishment of control over land along with patrilineal transmission of private property and emergence of hereditary kingship along with the need to preserve caste purity to sustain dominance required close regulation of "sexual purity" of certain categories of women. Female sexuality from here on needed to only be expressed for the purposes of reproduction which ensured "caste purity" and "patrilineal succession". (p.581) The most effective way of regulating sexuality (especially that of Brahmin wives) was to ascribe sinfulness and maliciousness to women's innate nature and their sexuality. The menstrual cycle of the female body was used as evidence to prove impurity of women. Thus, the origin of the caste system and Brahminical patriarchy was roughly the beginning of the 'historic defeat of the female sex' in the Indian sub-continent.

A widowed woman posed an impending threat to the moral and social order and could potentially end carefully established endogamy practices by sexually intermingling with men of lower castes. The alleged precarity of the widow's sexuality lay in the fact that she had already experienced the pleasures of sexual unison; a pleasure taken away from her with the death of her husband. Her supposed voracious sexuality was bound to lead her astray and seek sexual pleasures from other men.

An upper caste Hindu woman losing her husband to death was historically dealt with in four ways. *Niyoga* was the practice of sexual union between the widow and an appointed person primarily for the purpose of the birth of a son. Sati was the act of burning the widow on the funeral pyre along with her husband. Celibacy was and remains to date the lifelong practice of undergoing severe social and personal austerities to demonstrate allegiance to the dead

husband. Remarriage, as the term suggests, involved marrying the widow to another person for her reintegration in the Hindu social order. Each of these historically follow individual trajectories.

Niyoga

Niyoga was one of the first systems that evolved to deal with the question of widows in society. It has been defined as the appointment of a wife or a widow to procreate a son from intercourse with an appointed male (Kane, 1974). The chief focus of the practice was to ensure that patrilineal succession of property which constituted one of the main pillars of the caste system, continued even after the death of the Brahmin man. To beget a son was one of the greatest responsibilities of a conjugal unit and in the absence of a son the brother-in-law was supposed to beget a son for the deceased brother by entering into a sexual union with his widow. *Niyoga* warranted that the resultant progeny had the blood of the mother and blood of the father's closest relative. Besides a smooth passage of private property from one generation to the other *niyoga* also ensured that the productive and reproductive labour of the Brahmin widow stayed within the confines of the conjugal family unit.

Since Sati was fairly uncommon in Vedic times, celibacy or *niyoga* were more common practices for widows. Chakravarti finds mention of *niyoga* in the *Dharmasutras* as early as 500-200 BC. (2001) She suggests that it survived until approximately the first century AD. It even found mention in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. Up to the time of the *Rig Veda* the Hindu texts allowed 'redeploying of the sexuality of the widow after a specified period of celibacy and mourning' (Chakravarti 1995, p.2251). The *Mahabharata* also mentions *niyoga* like unions, prominent amongst those are Satyawati's request to Bhishma to enter *Niyoga* with her daughters-in-law for a male heir and Pandu asking his wife Kunti to birth a son through *Niyoga* with an appropriate Brahmin to ensure that he attains heaven upon his death (Sahgal, 2011).

Niyoga was a temporary arrangement of union with the prime motive of reproduction. As evident from the instances of the *Mahabharata* quoted above, the need for a male heir, attainment of spiritual salvation (a person could not attain heaven unless he had sons as mentioned in the scriptures) and so on were the reason why *Niyoga* was allowed. Experience of sexual pleasure was strictly prohibited in the process. Tripathi explains that to further

ascertain that the man and the woman involved in the process don't develop an affinity for each other they were to behave as a teacher and disciple (guru and shishya) (2005).

Niyoga was denounced by Manu and in his codification, it was marked as a ritual undertaken by the lower castes and animals (IX 64-67). The *Manusmriti* stated that a woman who remains committed to her husband sexually and morally even after his death would go to heaven whether she had a male progeny or not but a woman who violated her vows to her deceased husband because she was desirous for offspring was the object of reprimand on earth and would not get any benefits in the after-world too. 'No (legal) progeny are begotten here by another man or in another man's wife; nor is a second husband ever prescribed for virtuous women.' (Chakravarti, 2001 p.37).

The advent of Brahmanical patriarchy and its ascetic ideals were a road block to the practice of *Niyoga*. The evolution of stricter moral codes, glorification of marriage vows, advent of monogamy as the Hindu ideal and utmost importance to fidelity as a virtue were factors that were a deterrent to the continuation of the practice which was considered immoral. The practice could potentially hold the seed for family and marital discord and could even pose as a danger for breaking the family unit. After the death of the husband, the other men in the family would eye the widow as a potential sexual mate which was sanctified by the practice.

Adopted progeny was advanced as a preference in the absence of a real son since that would be within the moral codes and strictures which were increasingly being enforced. Additional progeny from *Niyoga* would also give rise to additional claimants to property. The practice of *Niyoga* ultimately became a marker of low caste. Whereas celibacy was upheld for the upper caste widow *Niyoga* ensured the utilization of the labour of low caste widow within her ranks. Chakravarti draws on Kolenda's study on widows belonging to Chuhra caste and puts forth the argument that the customs belonging to people from lower castes were perhaps a continuation of a pre-brahminical system rather than 'unsanskritic aberrations' as projected by later Brahmanical texts such as the *Manusmriti*. (1995, p:2255) From the 6th century onwards the practice of *Niyoga* went out of trend and subsequent texts prohibited it as a practice. (Altekar 1956, p 175)

Though it was denounced as immoral and barbaric it provided some respite for the widows who were otherwise destined to either lead a difficult life of celibacy or be annihilated through Sati. Considering the time frame of reference producing a son could perhaps be the only means through which a widow could attain social security for herself. It would be anachronistic to assume that there were 'feminist' women present who recognized their own agency and believed in existing without a male guardian or an heir. It is evident that the decision to undergo *Niyoga* was seldom the widow's choice. Sahgal points out that in the context of the *Mahabharata* that 'Ambika closed her eyes on being forced to mate with ugly Veda Vyasa, Ambalika turned pale. Sudesna also tricked *Dirghatamasa* by sending in her maid' (185). These instances can be read as signs of protest from women who were made to undergo the custom.

Sati

The origin of the idea of Sati was the ancient belief that a person would require his material possession even after his death. The woman was thus conceptualized as a personal property, an object which will be of use even in the afterlife. Thus, it was but natural for a wife to be 'sent' with him through the commission of act of Sati. (Altekar, 1956 p.135)

The practice of Sati does not find a mention in the *Rigveda*, one of the most ancient texts of Hinduism which might be indicative of the relative nonexistence of the practice in ancient India. Thapar (1988) gives an extensive account of Sanskrit critiques of widow immolation by Brahmins in the Vedic age. There were elaborate prescriptions encoded for the widows especially in the *Dharmasutras* and *Manusmriti* but nowhere there existed a mention of widow immolation. Widows in the time corresponding to the Vedic age were not expected to die with their husband on the pyre and they were supposed to lead a well-off life with their offspring and property.

Exceptional references begin to be made to Sati around 300 BC. The *Mahabharata* mentions a case of Sati. Madri, wife of King Pandu, took the decision of self-immolation on her own accord. She wanted to mount the funeral pyre because she was the cause of her husband's death, if she continued to live her passions would be unbridled making it difficult to live a chaste life. Also, she would not be in a position to mete out just treatment to

her sons and stepsons and treat them equally (Altekar 1956, p. 140). This constitutes one of the earliest instances of glorification of Sati. The willingness to become Sati after the husband's death was idealized and free will in this regard was revered and held in awe. Further the portrayal of woman's nature as treacherous and deceitful is reiterated in the reasoning put forth by Madri; that the wives can be instrumental in the survival and well-being or demise of husbands, that their bodily passions are unrestrained and that they have the potential to be unjust and partial.

In the *Mahabharata* however, there was no clear delineation of the practice of Sati. Apart from the instance of Madri, there are references to widows of the slain men who participated in funeral rituals; thus, it did not propound Sati. (Chakravarti, 2001 p.45-48). The same is the case with the *Ramayana* which does not quote any instance of sati in the original version.

By 400 AD the Puranas start to have a mention of Sati. The custom might have been emerging in the Indian-subcontinent. The earliest historical proof recorded of Sati is that of the wife of a Hindu general named Keteus whose two wives competed to ascend his pyre. Since the older wife had a child the wish of the younger wife prevailed who was led to the pyre by her brother. She is said to have wilfully and pleasantly mounted the pyre and maintain a pleased stature while flames engulfed her. (Altekar 1956, p. 142).

Greek historians have recorded earliest instances of Sati in the Punjab province of the Indian subcontinent. The very first account of Sati has been attributed to Greek historian Diodorus of Sicily. (Modi, 1929 p. 111). It was noted that the practice was restricted to a few Kshatriya communities. It became more popular from 400 AD. However, this was not propounded as an ideal but merely identified as a practice at that time. In fact, an ascetic lifestyle for a widow was preferred to death by immolation. The *Manusmriti* does not mention Sati.

Despite vehement opposition the practice slowly but surely gained popularity. The Hindu way of life was undergoing the solidification process and Sati became a tool for co-opting women into self-immolation by offering a promise of greatness and martyrdom. Conjugal-bliss in afterlife was propounded to appease women. It came to be viewed as an act of 'supreme self-sacrifice' (Altekar 1956, p.147) since Sati was helping alleviate her husband's bad

karma. The custom began to foreground itself from the 7th century onwards and the proposition that the only recourse for a widowed woman was Sati came into existence. From 700 to 1100 AD Sati became common in north India and especially amongst ruling classes in the Kashmir region. It also became extended to mistresses, mothers, sisters and even ministers, servants and nurses. Sati, at this point in time, was fairly uncommon amongst rulers in South India but by 12th to 14th century the practice had spread to the southern part of the Indian subcontinent too (Altekar 1956, 149-51).

The medieval era in India recorded many cases of Sati especially amongst the Rajputs. The origin of Sati among Rajputs has been traced by uncovering and dating of Sati stones belonging to second half of the 9th century. Harle (1970, p.163) confirms that such stone structures seldom appear on the scene of Indian architecture before this time. Further, Michaels (2002, 149) indicates the proliferation in Sati tombstones from the 11th century onwards.

Soon the custom began to be followed by the Sikh community once it developed into a fighting community/warrior class. (For a detailed discussion refer to Singh, 2010). The intention was to emulate the martial traditions of the Rajputs. Though prohibited by Sikh gurus, the custom nevertheless became popular. Though the practice did not become common amongst the Marathas claiming Rajput descent, there were exceptional cases of Sati recorded amongst them too.

Before the British intervened stringently in the practice of Sati it was the Muslim rulers who raised opposition to it. Humayun, the second Mughal emperor is said to have proposed the prohibition of Sati for women passing the child-bearing age and his son Akbar had appointed inspectors to ensure that no widow is pressurized to commit Sati under any pressure from the relatives and community. They reluctantly allowed Sati only under the pre-condition that the act is undertaken voluntarily by the woman (Bosch 2002, p 174). Just before India's tryst with British imperialism European travellers such as Sonnerat, Varthema and della Valle inscribed the European imagination with their narrative accounts of Sati in India (Lewis, 1994, p 72). In 1680 the Governor of Madras prohibited Sati of a Hindu widow which constituted the first formal response of the British towards the practice. (Varma, 2008, p 444). In 1829 the Governor General of India, Lord William Bentinck, declared the official abolition of Sati. Bentinck argued that the commission of Sati was

against the human nature and thus it constituted an inhuman practice. The custom lingered around for 30 odds more years especially amongst the Rajputs. From 1861 the incidence of Sati almost became nil. The last recorded case of Sati in India is of Roop Kanwar, an 18-year-old woman who immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband on September 3rd 1987 which led to the enactment of The Commission of Sati (Prevention) act of 1987.

Sati is perhaps the most deliberated upon dimension of widowhood and assumes symbolic dimensions especially in feminist, colonial and post-colonial scholarship. Whether widows would willingly take upon themselves the extremities of pain caused by burning during Sati is a matter of contemplation. Bosch (1956, p.177) notes that material interests of the husband's family were served in undertaking Sati. The fact that special arrangements were made to ensure that the woman does not escape the pyre is indicative of the fact that even women who agreed upon burning could potentially flinch at the last moment at the thought of excruciating agony.

Sati can be viewed as the epitome of the extreme lengths to which the Brahmin caste would go to maintain caste purity. A total annihilation of the living widow would ensure that any chance of dilution of caste by her sexual union with a person outside the caste was ruled out. Moreover, a widow's complicity in her own annihilation was warranted by ascribing the act with greatness, courage, valour and spiritual salvation. Thus, socio-economic factors were the foundation beneath upon which spiritual martyrdom was super-inscribed. The celibate widow's life was a cruel life of drudgery and enforced austerity in addition to being a potential economic burden on the natal family. There was fear of unwanted sexual advances by relatives, and outright sexual violence and harassment. Caste ostracism constituted a reality so ghastly that a death by Sati could have appealed to a widow more than a life of celibacy. This still does not ensure that a widow, in actuality, would choose a ghastly death by burning.

The ceremonial nature of Sati was as grand as a wedding. It entailed a grand procession with music and dance to the cremation grounds. The woman was bathed and readied with all jewellery and make-up like a bride with her bridal symbols on her body. She would bid farewell to her near and dear before the commencement of Sati. (Bosch 2002, p 178). She was ascribed spiritual

powers through which she could bestow a blessing or cast a curse especially during her final procession thus becoming an earthly being possessing supernatural powers by virtue of agreeing to undergo immolation.

In several cases of Sati women were intoxicated. The pyre would be set up in deep pits in parts of Western and Deccan India which would make an escape difficult. In other parts such as Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh a wooden house was constructed and the woman tied to one of the wooden posts. In Bengal, the feet of the widows were tied to wooden posts to prevent escaping. The widow was customarily asked thrice if she was willing to undertake immolation and the pyre would be lit. (Altekar 1956, p 157)

The women who managed to escape the funeral pyre were treated as outcasts and untouchables. Bosch notes:

“In common practice, though, the decision of a wife to become a *sati* was regarded as irrevocable. A *sati* who revoked her promise was a disgrace to her family and, for this reason, she was cast out, in spite of religious texts which prescribed specific penances to nullify her defilement.” (Bosch L. v., 2002)

Thus, Sati came to be recognized as a moral and religious obligation of married Hindu upper caste women and became a symbol of courage and determination of women.

Widow- Remarriage

Remarriage of a widow was allowed in Vedic times. The option of both remarriage and *Niyoga* was open to the widow but the latter was prevalent so the cases of former were few. (Altekar 1956, p 178). The deceased husband’s brother was the most likely candidate for both the arrangements as this would ensure endogamy. Consider the following hymn from the *Rig Veda* translated by Macdonell that indicates that the widow was remarried:

“Rise up; come to the world of life, O woman,
 Thou liest here by one whose soul has left him,
 Come: thou hast now entered upon the wifehood

Of this thy lord who takes thy hand and woos thee.” (1900, p 126)

Malik notes that from 1000 BC to 500 BC the practice of *Niyoga* and widow remarriage were allowed in the society but from 500 BC to 500 AD even though the practice was allowed the public opinion against it witnessed steady growth. The restriction on the practice gave rise to a number of childless young widows. These women were granted rights to inherit a part of the deceased husband’s property and to stay separately. By 1200 AD the widow’s right to inherit a part of husband’s property came to be recognized all over the country under the Dayabhaga law. Ironically, this proved counter-productive towards well-being of widows as demonstrated by Kulkarni (2017). Kulkarni establishes that a rise in inheritance of widows led to an increase in instances of Sati in areas where Dayabhaga law was practiced. Between 500 AD and 1800 AD the status of women in India declined drastically, the age of marriage was lowered to 8 years. Sati became a common practice and remarriages were banned. Like *Niyoga*, it was relegated to the status of a lower caste practice. (2013, pp. 24-26)

The growth of Hindu orthodoxy especially with the codification of the *Manusmriti* formalized the prohibition on re-marriage. According to Manu (Chapter IX, verse 71):

“Let no prudent man, after giving his daughter to one (man), give her again to another; for he who gives (his daughter) whom he had before given, incurs (the guilt of) speaking falsely regarding a human being.”

It was not until 1856 when Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar crusaded against the ban on widow remarriage that this practice gained some respectability and legitimacy in Indian society. The enactment of the law was a recognition of the fact that enforced celibacy especially on a number of child widows was outright cruel. ‘Good morals’ and ‘public welfare’ were cited as reasons behind the enactment (The Hindu Widows Remarriage Act, 1856).

Celibacy

Olson discusses celibacy as a means to control and discipline the body and its sexual urges. (2008, p. 5). Moreover, he considers it as a form of violence inflicted upon the self in case of voluntary celibacy or violence on self, embodied within a religious institution to ascribe membership to a certain

religious group. (p 8) In case of a widow celibacy has historically been imputed, deriving sanction from Hindu religious texts. Consider the following excerpt from the *Manusmriti* for example:

“When her husband is dead, she may fast as much as she likes, (living) on auspicious flowers, roots and fruits, but she should not even mention the name of another man. She should be long suffering until death, self-restrained and chaste, striving (to fulfill) the unsurpassed duty of women who have one husband.” (Chakravarti, 2001 p.37)

Celibacy as a religious ideal was fairly uncommon in Vedic times and as noted by Olivelle it became a popular and revered ideal in Hinduism only by first millennium BCE. (2008, p.163). However, celibacy as a spiritual tool was reserved for men. For women, especially the widow’s celibacy was a means to make her self-suffer voluntarily until death since she was held responsible for the untimely death of the husband.

Celibacy as a resort for widowed women existed in Indian society since Vedic times. It was prevalent simultaneously along with Niyoga and the advent of Sati and was considered a more respectable option to a remarriage. Celibate widowhood has traversed different time periods in Indian history and continues to be the predominant mode of widow’s existence in contemporary times.

The Four Recourses to Widowhood: A Gendered Analysis

At any given point in time, none of the four alternatives presented itself as a ‘choice’ in front of the widow. The recourse that she could resort to was determined by external factors like her family, community and the larger socio-political and cultural milieu of the time period that she existed in. It aimed at maximizing the extraction of her productive and reproductive capacities, suppressing her sexuality, and as Sati demonstrated, her complete annihilation lest her existence threatened the prevailing order in the society. The earliest references to *Niyoga* emerged at a time when the pastoral societies of Vedic times engaged in tribal wars which required male participants. A woman compulsorily had to beget children in such a scenario, preferably sons who could participate in these wars and secure victory for the dominant warring group. In the later Vedic period when land succession and transmission became prominent through patrilineal inheritance male heirs

were required thus *Niyoga* remained a legitimate practice not only for widows but also women who could not beget sons from their husbands. With the consolidation of Brahmanical supremacy in the late Vedic period when the dominance of the Brahmins was already established in the society, maintaining caste purity became the primary occupation which led to de-recognition and criticism of the *Niyoga* practice. Children born out of *Niyoga* were gradually out casted and their inheritance rights restricted. Thus, the little social security that a widow could have procured for herself by resorting to a willing or unwilling *Niyoga* sexual union and giving birth to a son was snatched away. Also, since society was highly patriarchal a widow could perhaps access any sort of power only through a son. *Niyoga* like unions continued in the lower rungs of the caste system though to continue maximum utilization of woman's procreative and physical labour.

The practice of Sati encapsulated the abomination with which widowed women were viewed in a brahmanical society. Sati holds particular significance in the historical trajectory of the discourse of widowhood since it not only symbolized an inhuman practice but became a socio-cultural symbol of the barbaric nature of Indians. Sutherland notes that Suttee (the act of immolation as christened by colonial forces) was viewed as the epitome of non-Christian behaviour and in turn became a moral justification for British imperial forces to colonize India as part of its civilizing mission. (p. 1595). It is an established fact that the incidence of widow immolation increased numerically in the pre-colonial and colonial period. This increase can be read as the cultural assertion of Indians especially Hindus against the colonial forces invading not only the land and its resources but also interfering in the cultural and religious codes and norms governing society. The brunt of this cultural assertion was borne by the widow who was forced to commit Sati as evident from myriad accounts of the phenomenon. The magnitude of the heinousness of Sati was tangibly recognized by the new conscientious class of Indian social reformers who were influenced by the ideals of social justice propounded by Western education during the colonial period. It is imperative to note that this very conscience lay dormant and posed little resistance to the commission of Sati a few decades earlier.

Remarriage as a social phenomenon precisely arose out of the guilty conscience of the newly western educated middle-class men who could not

bear the burden of the inhuman treatment of widows as small as 6 and 7 years old. Added to the guilt was the anxiety of integration of a large number of Brahmin widows back in the rungs of the society. This conflicted psyche of wave of social reform is well demonstrated by Chandra (1987) in his analysis of novels of the 19th century where literary stalwarts like Tagore and Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay couldn't free their widowed protagonists from the drudgery of celibacy or clutches of death. Thus, though progressive laws were formulated to address the widow's question in India, the Indian sub-conscious and conscience replete with ethics of upper caste Hinduism couldn't come to terms with the thought of a widow returning to the society and leading a normal life.

The failure of remarriage is aptly demonstrated by Altekar:

“Social reformers, who were championing this cause, were not at all sincere in their advocacy. Many of them expressed public apology for their association with widow marriages, and some of them refused to follow the gospel they preached, when eventually occasions arose for them to contract a second marriage. In these days social and religious boycott was a terrible weapon, which leaders of orthodox thought could use with tremendous effect. So, for a decade or two, even ardent social reformers dare not follow what they preached.” (pp. 186-87)

Celibate widowhood as the epitome code of conduct for widows was hailed since ancient times. But practicing celibacy and chastity as strictly as the widows could did not bear any reward equalling enhanced social status in the society. It merely secured a social tolerance for the widow who faced the worst social ostracism. Celibate widows were the living examples of punishment that they had to suffer for not voluntarily giving up their lives on the funeral pyres of their husbands. Celibacy and child marriages came just next to Sati in shaping the colonial attitudes towards the perceived and constructed savagery of people of India. Celibate widowhood was adopted in the nationalist discourse and hailed as a tool of inculcating inner spiritual power. Gandhi (1926) considered the voluntary celibacy practiced by Hindu widows a great strength of character since in his opinion such women had learnt to be content in their suffering. In his words ‘a real Hindu widow is a treasure. She is one of the gifts of Hinduism to humanity.’ Thus, on one hand the celibacy of the Hindu widow was revered but on the other, not much

groundwork went into alleviation of her precarious position in the society. She was co-opted and used for the perpetuation of caste and of a nationalistic vision of an ideal femininity. Chatterjee has demonstrated that the social reform of the 19th century was selective in its approach and never really challenged the core problematic issues such as caste distinctions, patriarchal familial authority, and sanctity of scriptures. (1997, p.117). Thus the women's question and in turn the widow's question was subsumed within the politics of ideological tussle between the colonizing British forces and the colonized Indians. Widowhood and its perils did not receive much attention in the years to come.

Widowhood post-Independence and the Way Forward

The 'Towards Equality' report published by the Committee on Status of Women in India in 1974 was submitted to the government by Veena Mazumdar. The report can be ascribed the status of the founding text which brought to light the dismal socio-economic condition of women in India. The 1974 report acknowledged widowhood to be a problem of large proportion even though the population that would not allow widow remarriage was infinitesimal. It was further acknowledged that Brahminical patriarchy had a strong hold in the region since there was an attempt at emulation of higher caste rituals and customs to gain respectability in society. Thus, apparent solutions like remarriage were generally frowned upon. It recognized that society's attitude towards widows was still awaiting a change in spite of progressive laws such as the Widow Remarriage act and the Prevention of Sati act.

The advent of the women's movement in India marked a phase of extensive study, debates and discussions around various women's issues including the issue of widowhood. For the first time, issues hindering women's equal status in Indian society were treated as symptomatic of deeply entrenched patriarchy especially in Indian culture and religion. The systematic devaluation and degradation of women was propounded by each prevalent social structure that resulted in a dismal picture of women's overall subordinate status in Indian society. Widowhood was legitimately recognized as a position of structural marginalization produced through the lattice of class and caste hierarchies. A systematic shift in treating the cases of violation of widow's rights and violence against them took place from the position of being considered as

separate acts of violence to being considered as a collective systematic structure of subordination. A major conference on the socio-economic condition of widows was undertaken in March 1994 which was attended by academicians, activists and widows themselves from various parts of the country. In depth deliberations and long drawn dialogues with the widows resulted in the identification of major areas of concern. These comprised of socio-economic violence faced by them at the hands of family and community, lack of legal provisions such as the right to inherit property to secure economic well-being, the psychological and emotional trauma of widowhood and the right to spend a life of dignity. (Marty, Dreze 1991). From then onwards, widowhood has been an active discursive issue in the arena of human and women's rights. Its intersection with issues of survival, ageing, and its regional variations has been studied actively. In December 2001, the United Nations published a worldwide comprehensive report on the status of widows across the globe (Owen, 2001). In a further step, 23 June was declared as the international day of the widows by United Nations which started being celebrated around the world since 2011. (UN)

India continues to have one of the largest widow populations in the world, around 33 million, without a coherent public policy to address this vulnerable population. Though some laws such as the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 granted inheritance rights to widows their position largely remains dismal. Structural challenges such as caste hierarchy, son preference and patriarchal marital norms continue to obstruct the empowerment of widows. What needs equal dismantling is the continued colonial construction of the widow as a victim with no voice of her own. In the current socio-economic milieu centring widow's voices and their needs could potentially pave the way for effective redressal of the needs of this specific group in India.

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The Mutual Consent Divorce Within One Year of Marriage

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- Ms. Suvarna Bhujbal

Once the institution of marriage is recognised legally then divorce is a must to terminate this marital relation legally. Marriage is not always a happy ending. It was noticed by the authors that youth in the age group of 25 to 35 years is taking the decision of mutual consent divorce instead of contesting litigation of divorce against each other, if marriage is not a happy, satisfying relationship. So, the study was conducted in the Family Court, Mumbai to understand the changing trends in the mutual consent divorce cases, which are increasing in number and happening with the separation within one year of marriage. A mixed-method research approach was applied in the study. The quantitative study was conducted with the 377 litigants (Women 190 and Men 187) by survey method and qualitative data collected from 31 (Women 14 and Men 17) out of 377 respondents by in-depth interview. The key finding is that non-compatibility issues are major for mutual consent divorce and which are realised by them within one year of their marriage. Another finding is that no rational and conceptual thought was given to the decision of marriage and no mindful preparation was done for building a marital relationship. Respondents wanted to terminate the unsatisfying relationship and move on in life instead of being in it. The role expected in the marriage by spouses has changed and needs gender equality in relations. Researchers observed the need for Pre-marital counselling for young people and their parents.

Introduction

A family is a group of people related to one another by sexual mating, by blood relation, and may be legal ties. Family is a social unit and has changed its form over the years. Family is viewed as an institute by sociologists so is marriage. Marriage and family institutes are known and studied worldwide by sociologists, psychologists, economists, anthropologists, and different branches of social sciences. Different studies have explained to us the changes taking place in the family as a unit and as an institute. The researcher has observed an increase in the number of mutual consents in the Family Court, Mumbai. It is also noted that the number of cases is high, where the breakdown of the marriage occurs within a period of one year of their

marriage. Being the marriage counsellor in the Family court, the researcher has witnessed a change in the marital relationship of the litigants in the Family Court, Mumbai. Most of the litigants, who file a petition for mutual consent divorce mention the issues of compatibility for the breakdown of a relationship and the reason for the decision of mutual consent divorce to the marriage counsellor. The researcher has not found any study which gives reasons for mutual consent divorce with the separation, within one year of the marriage. So, the researcher thought of exploring the profile, marriage details, issues of conflicts, the terms of mutual consent divorce from the litigants who file petition for mutual consent divorce.

The Study Design

Mixed methods research approach was applied for the present study. This view holds the basic assumption that collecting diverse types of data best provides an understanding of a research problem. This study began with a broad survey in order to generalize results to the population and then, in the second phase, focused on qualitative, open-ended interviews to collect detailed views and thoughts from the participants.

Review of Literature

A review of the literature was conducted to study different theories related to marital discords, divorce, marriage, and family systems to understand the subject, discussions, conclusions, and methodology applied in the research.

The review of related literature suggests there is a dearth of data on the mutual consent divorce within one year of marriage. But there were some studies which has reference to breaking up in marital relationship as a focal point. Following are the major findings which was relating to the present subject.

Dysfunctions of romanticism and changing attitudes:

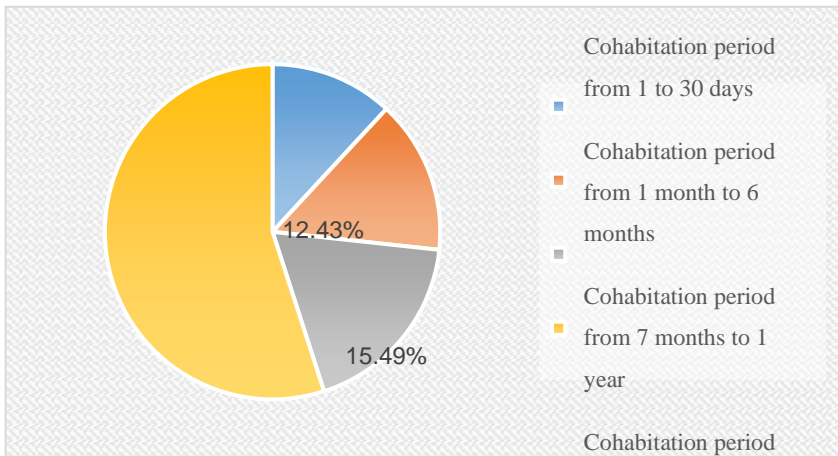
Singh, Renuka, 2015 conducted a study in Bangalore, India in IT city, by selecting 200 IT professionals working in various firms in Bangalore like software Engineer, BPO executives, and from the service industry. The study revealed that ‘traditional patterns of family and marriage system

are affected by the IT work culture’. Further, rise of contractual relationship is very prominent among the IT workers. Many respondents had mentioned that career and money matter a lot for them.

Separation with short married life

It is observed that the age of marriage has gone up to 25-30years (Desai and Bhujbal2004). The data from 1st Jan, 13 to 30 June 13 from the Marriage Counsellors, Family Court, Mumbai had been studied and it highlighted that 47% of the couples in the age group of 25 to 35 years got separated during cohabitation period of less than one year. (Graph No. 1).

Graph No. 1



Significant increase in the number of mutual consent divorces

Records available in the Mumbai Family Court (2007-2017) as shown in Table has no significant increase in the total number of petitions filed in the Family Court, Mumbai every year, though the number of “petitions for mutual consent divorce” has risen steadily since 2007 as compared to petitions filed for “matrimonial relief”. The number of total petitions filed for matrimonial relief other than mutual consent divorce in the year 2007 were 2609 and in the year 2017 is 3095, which is on increase of 18%, whereas the petitions filed for

mutual consent divorce in the year 2007 is 1525 has increased to 3160 in the year 2017, which is an increase of 107 %. The total number of petitions in 2007 was 6761 and it has increased to 7999 in 2017, which is a 22% increase.

Table No. 1

| Year | Total petitions filed in the Family Court, Mumbai | Petitions filed for divorce, judicial separation, restitution of conjugal right, and Annulment of marriage (A) | Petitions filed for mutual consent divorce (F) | Petitions for declaration as to validity of marriage (B) | Petitions filed for maintenance, custody, recovery of maintenance, execution petitions and miscellaneous applications |
|------|---|--|--|--|---|
| 2007 | 6761 | 2609 | 1525 | 120 | 2507 |
| 2008 | 7526 | 2763 | 1692 | 185 | 2886 |
| 2009 | 7507 | 2803 | 1821 | 166 | 2717 |
| 2010 | 7388 | 2886 | 1930 | 132 | 2440 |
| 2011 | 7391 | 3017 | 2098 | 98 | 2178 |
| 2012 | 7256 | 2825 | 2108 | 95 | 2228 |
| 2013 | 8370 | 3329 | 2411 | 83 | 2547 |
| 2014 | 8228 | 3377 | 2572 | 101 | 2178 |
| 2015 | 7691 | 3013 | 2701 | 82 | 1895 |
| 2016 | 7726 | 3191 | 2789 | 81 | 1665 |
| 2017 | 7999 | 3095 | 3160 | 84 | 1660 |

Issues of marital conflict

The PhD thesis (Law) of Dr. Madhavi Desai, Marriage Counsellor, Family Court, Mumbai, conducted during the period of 1998 to 2006 in the Family courts of Maharashtra, reported that 89% of the couples, who approached Family courts belonged to the age group of 21 to 40 years. Out of these 23% of couples had cohabited for less than a year of their marriage.

Another relevant study of the judicial dissolution of marriage with special reference to Dakshina Kannada district during the period 2000 to 2008 from the files of the Court. The major findings of this study revealed that in 46% of

cases the couples had spent less than one year together and 45.6% of the cases the couples had 1-5 years of married life.

Aspects of gender equality:

It was also observed that issues of marital discord have shifted from physical, mental violence, abuse, addiction financial problems to relationship issues. There are researchers like Kapadia; 1959, Desai; 1972 in favour of the law of divorce. They were of the view that divorce would liberate women in reorganizing their family and that it better to secure a divorce than dragging a miserable family.

Changing concepts of marital satisfaction:

It is always considered that the relationship satisfaction for women depends on the fulfilment of her basic needs of comfort, care and financial stability. The most striking finding of the study done by Kelly, E. (1984) is the relatively strong predictive relation of personality traits and marital compatibility. Kelly, E. observed that overall marital satisfaction in stable marriages was influenced by several personality and social backgrounds and found neuroticism (and, in later life, impulsiveness) exerted negative influences on the marital satisfaction of both sexes.

Need of the study

After reviewing different research studies and books, it was found that very few empirical studies have taken place in India with regard to the reasons for divorce. There was not a single study conducted in Family Court, Mumbai to understand the factors of the increasing number of mutual consent divorces. The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

Objectives

To define the profile of married couples who opted for a mutual consent divorce within one year of the marital relation.

To examine the factors for a breakdown of relationship within a year of marriage.

To study the factors for legalizing their decision by accepting the provision of mutual consent divorce.

To explore the experiences of the litigants, the Marriage counsellors, Judges, and Lawyers working in the Family Court about the decision of mutual consent divorce.

Methodology and Research design

The mixed-method design is used in the proposed study. The purpose to use this method was that mere quantitative data (numerical data of the Family court and demographic data of the participants) or qualitative data (Responses of the participants) would not have offered an in-depth understanding of the subject.

The quantitative data collected from the records of the Family Court, Mumbai, the socio-economic demographic data, data related to the decision-making aspects of marriage and divorce, expectations from marriage and spouse were collected from 377 individuals (Women- 190 and Men- 187) by survey method by giving them a questionnaire to fill by themselves, and qualitative data collected from the 31 individuals (14- Women and 17- Men) out of those 377 individuals, by in-depth interview. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection and its analysis were done simultaneously. Then quantitative and qualitative data interpreted together for more understanding of the issue. Quantitative data collected from 377 participants used for screening of participants for the qualitative sample.

Research site: the Family Court

The research was carried out in the Family Court, Mumbai. The Family Court in Mumbai is established by the State Government of Maharashtra as per the Maharashtra Family Court Rules 1987. In Mumbai, there are 7 Family Courts and 14 marriage counsellors. The Family Court is at Bandra-Kurla Complex,

Mumbai. This court was established on 7th October 1989. Till today, the Family Courts have been established in the 25 Districts of the State of Maharashtra.

Sample profile:

As mentioned above, the petition filed for mutual consent divorce is numbered with the alphabet 'F' in the Family Court, Mumbai, which is the theoretical population for this study. From this theoretical population, couples who filed a petition for a mutual consent divorce with the breakdown of marital relationship within one year is the study population.

Data Collection

Quantitative data collected from 377 individuals in the first stage and qualitative data collected from 31 litigants (14 women and men 17) in the second stage. Researcher selected 377 litigants with the probability based-survey sample with a simple random sample method for the study during the period from May 2016 to July 2016. The survey method was used to quantify the socio-economic demographic data, marriage, and divorce-related data.

In the second phase, researcher contacted 170 participants who had agreed to an in-depth interview. Total 31 litigants (14 women and men 17) were interviewed in the second stage.

The questionnaire was used to collect information on the following areas from men and women litigants, who had filed a petition for mutual consent divorce.

Personal Profile of the respondents

It is observed, that the proportion of male and female clients is almost equal in the sample included in the study. Age of the respondents is categorized into three major categories. As the study is focused on mutual consent divorce the proportion of clients in (20-30) years is as high as 64 percent followed by clients in the (31-40) years age group (34%). The proportion of respondents

with 41 years and above is very negligible. It can be observed that majority of the clients who have filed their petition for mutual consent divorce were Hindu followed by Jain which was more than 11 percent.

Work Profile

It is observed and assumed that financial issues or work status of the partner can be one of the major reasons for mutual consent divorce. Hence present income and income at the time of marriage was also asked the respondents and a comparative table and Diagram is drawn. It can be observed that almost 6 percent of them did not want to disclose their present income. It is also noted that a large chunk of them falls in a low-income category presently. The proportion is around 46 percent. The majority of the respondents were having medium-income whereas this proportion has reduced to only 30 percent in case of current income.

Marriage profile

It is observed that the majority of the marriages are arranged marriages with the consent of the respondents whereas 31 % of marriages were love marriages (50 % of it was with the consent of their parents). The proportion of respondents who have settled for arranged marriage unwillingly is only 3 percent. Hence it can be inferred that 77 % of marriages are done with the consent of the parents as well as the clients have filed a petition for mutual consent divorce within 1 year of their marriage. It is not correct to say that divorce rate is higher in the love marriages.

Respondents who had love marriage had highest personal/individual differences as the cause of conflict than that of social, financial issues, and sexual issues.

The proportion of marriage by religion or caste of their spouse

In the case of the religion or caste of the spouse, it was noted that almost 38% of the marriages were inter-caste or inter-religious marriages and the remaining 62 % of respondents had their spouses from their own caste or the

same religion. It was observed that the trend of match making in the caste and religion had changed.

The proportion of respondents who had taken help of an astrologer for matching horoscopes.

It was also observed that the proportion of taking help from an astrologer for matching horoscopes was 46 %. It was observed that more than 54 % of them had not matched their horoscope or gone for astrologers' consultation. It can be inferred that reliance on horoscope matching has minimized and other factors of match making are considered like education, career, financial stability and other criteria.

The proportion of respondents reporting their family structure

After marriage 65 % of the respondents stayed in the joint family, with husband's parents/ relatives. The proportion of respondents who did not stay together was around 9 %. It is observed that in the love marriages respondents get married and stay with their own parents. They get married considering that their parents would accept their marriage once it is disclosed.

The proportion of respondents having child/children from this marriage

As the study focused on the mutual consent divorce within one year of marriage, the proportion of respondents having a child was almost none or as negligible as 1 %.

The proportion of respondents reporting violence during their married life

Among the 377 respondents irrespective of the gender 15% have reported experiencing physical violence during their married life.

Association between educational qualification and causes of conflict

It was observed in the association that the proportion of couples having differences and conflicts are more likely to have higher educational

qualification. Overall, the respondents who have attained their graduation and above are more likely to have more conflicts and personality differences as compared to respondents who have studied till graduation. However, the chi-square does not support the variation between these two variables hence it can be inferred that there is no association between educational qualifications and causes of conflict.

Association between economic independence and causes of conflict

The educational qualification and economic independence of the respondents was also assessed by asking the information about their work profile at the time of marriage. Cross-tabulation between the economic independence and causes of conflict is also done to see the association between these two parameters. It can be observed from the analysis that overall, the proportion of personality and behavioural issues are considerably higher than the social and financial issues irrespective of the economic independence and work profile of the respondents. No significant difference can be observed in these two parameters as far as the association is concerned. Even the chi-square and p-value also do not support the variation. Hence it can be inferred that there is no association between economic independence and causes of conflict.

Causes of conflicts

The causes of conflicts that compelled the respondents to opt for mutual consent divorce are mentioned below. The responses were qualitative and hence categorized into major five categories as personality differences, social issues, financial issues, sexual issues, and psychological issues. The detailed listing of the causes of conflict in qualitative form was explained in the section of qualitative data presentation.

It was observed that the majority of the respondents reported individual differences as a major cause for mutual consent divorce, i.e. 52.7 %. Social issues attributed to the second-highest proportion of respondents with around 39 %. The proportion of respondents reporting sexual and financial issues was 4.1% and 4.4 percent respectively. There was a negligible number of cases having psychological issues.

- 1. Personal/individual differences:** Spouses having different personality traits, values, attitudes, expectations from each other as well as from their career and life. Physical differences, intelligent capacities, possessiveness for each other, temperamental issues, mistrust, ego issues, humiliating the other, behavioural issues, and bad habits were creating issues between the couple.
- 2. Social Issues:** Different lifestyle, different culture, monetary or material demands (dowry), interference of parents, relatives, marriage performed due to parents or social pressure, mental or/and physical violence, extramarital relationship, addictions, different job schedules, no privacy or personal space to a spouse, poor or no communication between spouse or family members, Gender-based issues, gender inequality, women being vocal about rights and democratic values.
- 3. Financial issues:** Different financial conditions, irregularity in job/business, loss of job/ business, different financial needs and expectations, unwanted loans, different ways of financial management.
- 4. Sexual issues:** non-consummation of marriage, sexual deprivation, unwanted or uncomfortable sexual acts, forceful sex, demand for sex without mutual love and affection.
- 5. Psychological issues:** Suspicious nature, personality disorder

Observations from the in-depth Interviews

17 men and 14 women interviewed out of 170 participants, who had given willingness for in-depth interview. From these interviews, the following observations are made which are proved to be supportive to the observations made from the quantitative analysis. Educational qualification or income sources or financial issues were not noted as the cause of disputes among the husband and wife. From the qualitative and quantitative data, it is observed that while the family structure and family life has changed but the marriage system has not changed and is based on the conventional patterns. Lifestyle, expectations, values, thoughts, role expected in the relationship is found to be the issues of disagreements in couples. Still 46 % of the families believed in

horoscope matching and take the help of an astrologer even though it is a love marriage. Participants may or may not agree or believe in it but follow the horoscope as per the wishes of their parents at the time of match making. Another observation was that more than 65 % of the respondents reported that the marriage had taken place with their consent but in the in-depth interview most of them have mentioned that they were not fully prepared for the marriage or not willing to marry the person whom they have married.

While the proportion of love marriages have increased but the expectations from the spouse or marriage and the reasons for divorce are observed to be the same like arranged marriages.

It is also observed that dislikes and negative feelings about the spouse lead to disappointment and vice versa.

Most of the respondents especially males have reported parents' interference in their lives as a major reason for divorce.

Primary selection based on education, financial status, and looks refers to not having any idea about each other's (couples) characteristics, personality before marriage, that consequently leads to disagreements between couples and divorce.

Now, women believe that they are equal to the men in the management of the family and do not accept the dominance of a man. Rather they expect equal status, equal respect, and equality in the decision-making process. She has her own choices to implement. Women's demand for their rights and economical independence, equal power in the family, which is not acceptable by men, lead to divorce. Unmet emotional needs of women lead to dissatisfaction, which creates conflict between couple. Fiery temper and interference of spousal family were also one of the major causes for divorce. Lack of privacy and space for the couple is also one of the main causes of conflict. Unwanted interference and involvement by family members in the married life of two, creates a conflicting situation.

In few cases cultural difference, low sexual desire, addiction were few other causes which compelled the couples to file the petition for mutual divorce. Lack of rational thinking and understanding also leads to conflict and emotional disturbance. This study also gives one important message for the society that the selection of a consistent life partner is the most important aspect.

It was found that participants had a concept that second marriage would work better as they have realized the mistakes that happened in the earlier marriage. They thought that they will get married with more understanding and will not repeat the things which caused the disagreements. It was also observed that relationship building, developing emotional bonds with the spouse and his/her family members, the importance of proper communication was not given much thought.

Most commonly the maladjustment between a married woman with her mother-in-law or/and sister-in-law is what spoiled the husband-wife relationship. Men were finding it difficult to manage the conflict between wife and mother. Now the times have changed, parents are educating their children making them financially independent. Being employed and having financial security, women no longer wanted to make one sided adjustment and have revolted against their husband's family. Women are becoming more aware of their rights. Couples jump into the relationship too fast without appropriately knowing their prospective spouse and also end the relationship by divorce very early.

Reasons for acceptance of legal provision:

The responses collected from the interviews also, show the various reasons for accepting the legal provisions and going for mutual consent divorce. It is very important to note that around 43 % of the respondents wanted to have a respectful separation and to avoid the allegations, blames so they had opted for this choice. Around 16 % wanted to avoid allegations whereas around 19 % wanted to save time and get free at the earliest from the relationship. More than 13%t of the respondents did not have any other choice hence opted for mutual consent divorce and its legal provisions.

The role of trained social workers

Marriage counsellors appointed in the Family Courts are trained, social workers. The role of a marriage counsellor is very vital in the legal proceeding. They provide emotional support as well as help them to reconcile and resolve conflicts in an amicable way. The role is very important in the judicial system where a person does not want to land up and gets emotionally drained out.

Trained Social workers also play a major role in providing support to the couple who wish to get married and maintain healthy and supportive family relations. But, for this sake, there is a need to create a demand for premarital counselling in the minds of society, mobilize society to establish pre-marital counselling centres in every village, Taluka, and at District places. Family courts need to be established in Taluka places. Professional Social Workers can understand the concerns of couples, reflect on their feelings, express support, and counsel them. Professional social workers follow up the cases, network with others to ensure that the couples in need of some support would get that in time. Thus, Professional Social Workers would contribute to the smooth functioning of the institute of “Marriage”.

Conclusion

Pre-marriage counselling is very essential for youth for enabling them to make a conscious decision about their marriage so that they can lead a healthy, happy, and satisfying married life. It would help youth in preparing themselves for marriage and understand their expectations from marriage and also from the spouse. They can think rationally about the marriage decision and can have their choice about why to marry, when to marry, whether to marry or not, whom to marry. Further, if the youth is trained in decision making, communication, and problem-solving it would help them to manage their differences and understand conflict resolution and their ability to communicate and share emotions, likes, dislikes and will make youth get more mature, responsible, caring and understanding another person in a marital relationship. There is a need to help couples to be more acceptable to each other. They need to learn to increase patience, management skills, communication skills, conflict resolution skills.

While taking the decision of marriage it is very important to note that youth and their parents need counselling and information so that matchmaking can be done in a way to have a compatible relation. People need to learn the rational way of thinking and come out of romantic concepts of love, marriage and a relationship.

There is a need to make people aware of gender equality to ensure that they change their mind set. People need to be made aware about accepting the fact that women have changed a lot and adopted democratic values and want a respectful and peaceful life. They have the choice to an education, career, life with freedom, and a life without violence. A man has to change to get to the terms that women do have their aspirations to fulfil, that they need their pace and space to grow, and want a relationship that will not have mental and physical violence. The parents need not keep asking girls to perform roles as they used to do before. If the families wish to have women with a career there has to be support from both sides and within the families. And also, will need to have different arrangements in the family to cope with the changed role of women.

Mutual consent divorces are increasing in number. Youth and their families are having additional stress due to busy, hard-working life and marital conflicts. People do not want to get engaged in the litigation process and wait for six months for mutual consent divorce. It is observed that the family system is changing and the marriage system needs to undergo change to meet changing the needs of the time. Further, the present Indian law needs amendments to the dissolution of marriage by mutual consent.

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(This poster was presented at Genderlogue 2020-21, Sophia College, Mumbai)

The Contributions of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife towards Gender and Development Studies in Nigeria

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- Dr. Angela Nneka ABASILIM

This paper examines the contributions of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies (CGSPS), Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Nigeria towards gender and development studies in Nigeria. Relying on secondary data from the CGSPS itself and Planning, Monitory and Budgeting Unit (PMBU) of the University, the study indicates various contributions made by the Centre to mainstream gender equity in all facets of the University life resulting to improvements in staff employment, teaching of gender courses, research, student enrolment and membership of statutory committees making the University a gender equitable organization. The study concludes that the establishment of the CGSPS has in many ways contributed in making OAU as one of the most gender equitable and effective universities in Nigeria. The study advocates for the establishment of more centres and solicits support for the existing ones.

Introduction

Issues relating to gender studies are relatively new in Nigeria. Historical evidences have shown that women have always been relegated to the background as they are portrayed as second-class citizens. Thus, it is not surprising that everything about women is culturally perceived as inferior. This depiction of African woman has a negative influence on the introduction of gender studies in most Nigerian universities. Like in the wider African society, patriarchy has played a major role in the general perception of women who traditionally, are seen as inferior beings; hence the subjugation that accompanied it. Despondently, most worlds' societies are patriarchal in nature and this has made women's predicament universal. It is not surprising therefore that wherever one goes; the situation of women remains basically the same. Little wonder that Betty Friedan (1963) memorably describes women's problem as "a problem without a name". Even in ancient times, philosophers

like Plato and Aristotle advanced that women's domain should be in the domestic arena where they would serve and obey men. It was believed that women do not have the brain to be involved in public life like politics, education and policy decisions (Smith, 1983). This was probably the reason why women did not have the right to vote and be voted for because they were regarded as second-class citizens.

The fact that patriarchal tendency has permeated deeply into the fabric of most societies, also becomes a big problem. For instance, in some of these societies, it was a taboo for women to participate in higher education whether as students or staff. This scenario only changed in 1848 when Oberlin University, United States of America (USA) admitted the first female undergraduates though they were admitted to specific courses like catering, home management and teaching; an extension of what women do at home. These new students were referred to as "freshmen" because it was believed that faculty and university education was the domain of men. Any woman who bulldozed her way into the university was either seen as a "tomboy" or "unfeminine".

It therefore, took a lot of struggle, activism and agitation for women to have access to higher education in most developed countries of the world. These agitations started when women realized that their personal development ambition was becoming political and therefore decided to join forces to fight their marginalization throughout the world marking the birth of feminist movements around the world. It first started as activism in the larger society in Europe and America and later on, it entered higher education as academic disciplines in the form of gender centres.

In her book titled *African Women and Higher Education: Ugandan Experience* Kwesiga (2002) talked about the long trek which Ugandan women had to endure before having access to Ugandan higher education. She pointed out some of the cultural practices that militated against women's access to higher education in Uganda. In Nigeria as in most African countries, these cultural practices are not different. For instance, the United Nations Children Children's Fund's report on Nigeria (UNICEF, 2001) stated that "if resources are limited, the family would ask the girl to withdraw from school so that they could pull resources together to sustain the boy in school". Several challenges militating against the girl child education in Nigeria were attributed to early

marriage, son preference, poverty and girl child being seen first as mother and wife. The National Universities Commission's report as well as the UNICEF's (1992) review of higher education in Nigeria identified a number of factors that contribute to low representation of women in higher education. It was reported that "when there are social and economic constraints and limited parental resources, girls are rated as being of lower priority concerning higher education". Powers (1994) corroborated this finding in a qualitative study he carried out on female students at the University of Malawi on the obstacles confronting African women pursuing higher education in Malawi and found that only 3 percent of girls who attend primary school go on to secondary school and even a smaller proportion of these attend university.

The years between 1842 and 1948 became significant periods in the history of women education in Nigeria (Amadi, 1977). These periods were when the colonial missionaries brought formal education to Nigeria. In the missionary educational curriculum, women were trained to be seamstresses, caterers, teachers and nurses tailored towards caring and nurturing jobs as a woman was basically perceived as a mother and a wife. Any other role is seen as secondary and thus was not fully encouraged by the family and society. In spite of the inestimable value placed on education, women's illiteracy level has been reported to be relatively high as they were more disadvantaged in Nigeria (Fabiya 2002). It was therefore not surprising that men enjoyed early advantage in education and till date this gap in education between men and women still persists (Ijere 1991).

Consequently, it took a long time for women to gain admission into higher education in Nigeria. According to Charmaine (2007), "the culture of higher education in Nigeria is such that it is portrayed to be gender neutral as there is a deafening silence on gender issues". This is why even after designing and approving the federal character principle which was introduced to address the issue of diversity in the country; this principle is still silent on gender issues. The federal character only addresses issues of ethnic diversities and nobody cares to look at how ethnic diversities are interwoven with gender to place women in disadvantaged positions. As such, in Nigerian higher education, women are under-represented in student enrolment, staff employment and decision making. Charmaine (2007) went on to suggest that women in academia are not sheltered from diminished citizenship status. In practice,

university women like women elsewhere in society experience the erosion of full citizenship status through a wide range of discriminatory administrative, legal and customary practices.

Apart from the problem of low percentage of women in enrolment, employment and decision making, there is also the problem of quality of women's experience of higher education in Nigeria (Morley, Unterhalter, and Gold 2001). Even when women are in the higher educational system, they need to work harder than their male counterparts in order to earn promotion and other privileges. In the process, many of them suffer sexual discrimination, abuse and frustration while others are highly discouraged.

With these problems being more pronounced in Africa, there is a great need for the establishment of Centre for Gender Studies in African universities in order to address these imbalances. However, establishing such centres is only half of the story due to the patriarchal nature of African societies which has permeated into the university system and makes it almost impossible to have great changes in the ways things are done. So far, the centres for gender studies in many African universities have not developed to the level at which they can make a great impact. According to Association of African Universities (AAU, 2006), the introduction of gender courses in departments and faculties of agriculture, law, medicine, education and sociology is reflecting individual commitment of teacher, deans and Vice Chancellors. There has not been a concerted and synchronized policy and plan for integrating gender into university functions as a whole. However, conducting and publishing gender research from all over Africa, is gaining momentum throughout the continent as other institutions mobilize the support needed to embark on systematic programmes to mainstream gender into the entire aspect of the university organization. The reason why the Centre for Gender and social policy (CGSPS) was established in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria formed our next focus of this study.

The Establishment of the CGSPS, OAU, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

The Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) was the first University to institutionalize gender studies in the Nigerian higher educational system although some Private, State and public universities continue to work to set up similar centres on their campuses while others are just in the process of

starting theirs. The OAU Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies (CGSPS) was fully statutorily established in 1996 by the University as a Centre of Excellence for the interdisciplinary study of gender and development issues (OAU Gender Policy, 2010). The Centre's mandate is to consolidate and expand academic interests in development studies, especially as it relates to women, children and vulnerable groups; and to develop relevant social and economic strategies to help the nation to overcome poverty and ensure sustainable human development (Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies' Curriculum, 2012).

Initial efforts of the Women's Studies Programme (WSP) in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the University in the 1980s attracted collaborative research in women/gender studies both within and outside the University. Notably, this period witnessed academic linkages with the following Universities: University of Ibadan (Women Research and Documentation Centre – WORDOC); University of Dalhousie, and Saint Mount Vincent University (both in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada). This initiative was supported with funds from the Canadian International Development Agency – CIDA). From January 6 to January 8, 1988 a joint workshop on “Theoretical and Methodological issues in Women's Studies in Nigeria and Canada” was held at the Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife (Awe and Mba, 1991). Subsequently, the OAU, Ile-Ife Women/Gender Studies Group played a leadership role in agenda setting for the Women's/Gender Studies Network for Nigeria. To date, the Centre has participated both locally and internationally in various aspects of research and training on women's/gender issues. The Centre is also a member of the African Universities Consortium for national capacity building for child survival and development and networks with other national and international gender and development institutions.

With Senate approval in 1996, it was renamed ‘Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies’ (CGSPS) from Women's Studies Programme (WSP) and was established as an autonomous research Centre with its own Board and Accounting Procedures (BAP). The Centre was established to support the University's interests in pro-poor development issues and to design appropriate development policies and programmes in order to attain

sustainable development and improved living standards for both men and women.

The Centre's current interest in academic programme in women's/gender studies and social development is to build requisite capacity and skills to support government efforts at designing appropriate development programmes and policies. Such efforts are critical for improving the standard of living of vulnerable groups including women and children and are imperatives for achieving the SDGs.

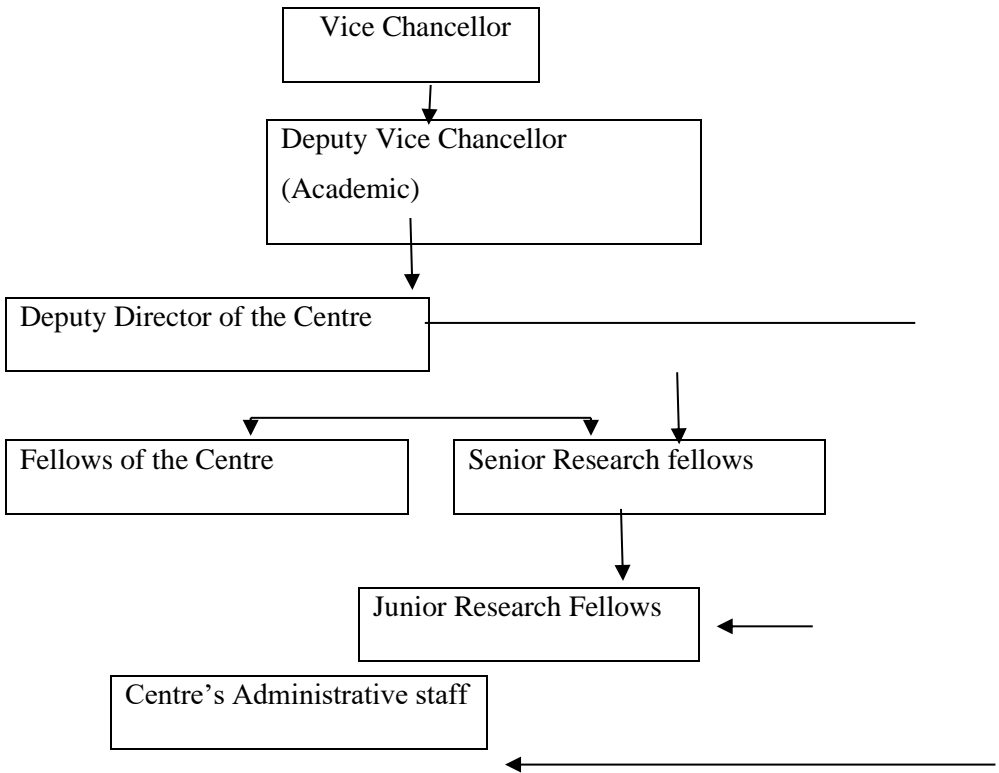
The mission of the Centre

The mission of the centre is to establish an adequate institutional base for the interdisciplinary study of gender, child survival, development and social policy. Part of its mission is also to provide a high standard of teaching, research and policy advocacy in gender and development, thereby contributing to enhance quality of life for sustainable development. Thus, the centre organizes training, research, policy design and action programmes in the identified areas and encourage networking locally and internationally. The specific objectives of the Centre are to

- consolidate and expand the University's focus on social policy;
- promote an interdisciplinary research and policy analysis and sustainable development;
- promote research into issues of equity and equality associated with gender, class, ethnic and political differentiation;
- build national capacity on gender and development, planning and policy analysis through teaching, training, consultancy, documentation and networking;
- run short courses in gender and development studies; and
- Maintain a data base for all research on gender and social policy issues.

The above stated objectives are to provide a focus for gender studies in Nigeria through teaching, coordination of research projects on gender issues in Nigeria.

The Organogram of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies,
OAU, Ile-Ife



Source: CGSPS' Organogram (1996)

The above organizational chart depicts graphically the relationship of one official to another or others. The organizational structure of the Centre is arranged in such a way that the delegation of responsibility is achieved through hierarchy. The structure consists of activities such as task allocation, coordination and supervision which are directed towards the achievement of its goal.

The Organogram /Organizational Structure are as follows:

- Vice Chancellor
- The Deputy Vice Chancellor who is the Chairman of the Centre
- The Director of the Centre of a professorial cadre
- Deputy Director
- Senior Research Fellows
- Fellows of the Centre
- Junior Research Fellows
- Centre's Administrative Staff.

Vice Chancellor

The Vice Chancellor is at the helm of affairs and oversees the activities of the University generally and the Centre in particular.

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)

The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) is also the main stakeholder in the Centre. S/he is the Chairperson of the Centre's Governing Board which is made up of representatives of the University, Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.

Director

S/he is a full-time professorial rank who serves as the Chief Accounting Officer and is responsible for the day to day running of its activities. S/he manages the day-to-day activities of the Centre, initiates projects and source for grants from donor agencies. s/he is appointed by the University Vice Chancellor.

The Deputy Director

The Deputy Director assists the Director in running the daily affairs of the Centre and passing instructions down to the Research fellows.

The Fellows of the Centre

The Fellows of the Centre are University academic staff who are already having their places of primary assignment but who from time to time come to the Centre to help in running the Centre's programmes. They perform these functions due to their interest in gender studies.

Senior Research Fellows

They are Centre's senior academic staffs. Their primary functions are proposal writing, teaching and carry out researches on gender issues. They also engage in trainings and workshops, supervise postgraduate students and allocate jobs to the junior Research fellows who are still undergoing training in post graduate programmes.

The Administrative Staff

The administrative staff takes charge of the administrative activities of the Centre and takes instructions from the Director and Deputy Director.

Methodology

Secondary data for this study were obtained from CGSPS documents and data on students and staff from the Planning, Budgeting and Monitoring Unit (PBMU) of the University. Other data emanated from two of the authors who are presently academic staff at the CGSPS and Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

Findings

In this study, three main contributions of the Centre were identified. These include; community outreaches, teaching and research.

Gender Equity Outreach Programme

Since its inception, the Centre has been carrying out gender equity outreach programmes. As part of the effort of the Carnegie/OAU Gender Equity Project initiated to create awareness and sensitize the neighbouring communities on gender related matters. During this period, the Centre started a Television Outreach Broadcast on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA). Through this medium, the Centre enlightened and educated the public on issues that pertain to gender as they affect the larger society (OAU-Carnegie Gender Equity Initiative Bi-Annual Bulletin, 2005:2). Among the broad themes discussed were

- Gender-based violence;
- Educating the girl child;
- Gender issues in HIV/AIDS;

- Women in leadership positions;
- Gender, science and technology;
- Gender, Conflict and Peacekeeping;
- Women in agriculture and the problems of food insecurity in Nigeria;
- Gender and Environment;
- Gender and Reproductive Health Issues in Nigeria;
- Gender, religion and culture;
- Child survival, protection and rights; gender issues of human rights;
- Gender, social policy and sustainable developments (OAU-Carnegie Gender Equity Initiative Bi-Annual Bulletin, 2005:2).

Expertise for these discussions was drawn from the coordinated pool of research associates across the University's Faculties and Units (ibid).

Scholarship Scheme

During the period, a total of 1,890 undergraduate female scholarships, 176 female postgraduate scholarships and 50 female staff fellowships were awarded between 2002/2003 and 2012/2013 academic sessions. This was to ensure that those on the programme received a financial support to successfully complete their studies. Scholarships were also awarded to female students on a merit basis as a source of motivation for them to excel in their studies. However, the third phase of the scholarship mainly focused on female students in Science and Technology where the gender gaps were the highest. The purpose was to redress gender gap, and create a pool of female postgraduate students for recruitment into the academia. To achieve this, 176 female postgraduate scholarships covering tuition, laboratory experiments and fieldwork were awarded. The fellowships offered female academic staff on postgraduate studies opportunities to spend 3 months abroad building international linkages, and using state of the art equipment and libraries for scientific research. The fellowship also exposes the female staff to universities outside the country and makes them acquire more skills and competence.

Gender Sensitization and Awareness Programme

The Centre has carried out many seminars and workshops to sensitize the members of the university community on gender issues. Through these seminars and workshops, the Centre had been able to create awareness on gender concerns in the university and its environs. It sensitized the university management (i.e., those in decision making positions in the university) on gender issues. Students were sensitized on gender issues making both staff and students to be conscious of gender issues, particularly in choosing members of statutory committees and other appointments in the university. The Centre also organizes workshops on gender desegregation of data in the university. This was to enable the university imbibe the habit of separating data according to sex. The rationale behind this is to enable the authorities to have knowledge of gender issues on ground and take appropriate actions. Through the activities, the official language used in the university has since become gender sensitive. For instance, freshmen are now referred to as fresh students while faculty members are now being referred to as “men and women” instead of “men” implying that the dominant and stereotyped image of women is changing.

The sensitization and motivation programmes known as Gender Forum on Air are aired through the radios and televisions. The other programme - Gender web forum provides an avenue through which gender issues are discussed on the internet. Play-lets on gender issues such as son preference, discouragement of females from educational attainments, early marriage, wife battering and other gender ills in the society are used to stage plays and educate members of the public and the University community on how these societal ills could enhance gender marginalization and thus impede human and economic development.

Community Engagement and Advocacy

The Centre also organizes bimonthly Community Assembly where members of the University community and her immediate and large host community through narratives that are either biographical or autobiographical, bear witness to some phenomena that women and men have to grapple with, and which somewhat, shape their lives are discussed. Other engagements include “the Annual Walk Against Gender-based violence”, “biennial lecture and endowment”, “International Women Day” and “Biennial Conference on

Gender and Development”. The Centre also provides library services to students, staff and host community.

Publication of Gender Equity Bulletin

The Centre also publishes a biannual Bulletin (the Gender Equity Initiative Bulletin) which features gender news/issues on the activities of the Centre, the University, and Nigeria as a whole.

Gender Clinic

The Centre houses a Gender clinic which provides counselling and support for victims of gender-based violence, social support programmes for the indigent and needy women and children. Through this clinic, victims of gender-based violence are attended to, contact the culprit and prosecute him/her either through the University security outfit or the Nigerian police as the case may be. The Centre has proposed to expand the gender clinic so that more staff would be available to attend to the people who need such services.

Crèches for the University

In order to ensure that nursing mothers, particularly the staff and students who have no place to put their babies while at work or when receiving lectures, the Centre received a donation to establish a crèche for them. The Centre is in the process of commencing work on the project.

Gender Policy for the University

As part of the affirmative action in mainstreaming gender into the academic curricula and other aspects of the University life, the CGSPS has formulated a Gender Policy for the University. This document was approved by the University Senate in 2007. The Gender Policy covers areas of training and gender awareness creation, issues of student enrolment/admission, staff employment, participation in decision making; minimum percentage of women composition statutory committees and other decision-making bodies in the University. The monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Gender Policy is undertaken by the Centre.

Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy

The Centre for Gender drafted the Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy for the University. The policy was inaugurated in August, 2021. This policy is acting as a reference document for punishing and disciplining any student and staff who is involved in sexual harassment related offences.

Gender Focal Points

Gender Focal Points (GFP) are university staff in strategic positions in the University administrative system such as the Deans of faculties, secretaries and administrators. Each faculty in the University has a Gender Focal Point and their responsibility is to ensure that the principle of gender equity is observed in everything that is done in the faculty.

Teaching and Research Programmes

A. Teaching

In order to achieve its overall objective, the Centre runs the following interdisciplinary academic programmes:

- Postgraduate Diploma in Gender and Development;
- M.Sc. in Gender and Development; and
- Ph.D. in Gender and Development.

These courses have helped in launching gender studies into the full academic realm as they have been producing the much-needed teachers in gender studies which have further enhanced the gender mainstreaming in the University and provided the much-needed human resource capabilities in gender and development for government, individuals, NGOs, educational institutions, the private sector, development partners, and the nation as whole. Apart from these academic programmes, Centre organizes gender-training and certificate programmes for professionals, NGOs, CBOs, and government Departments in the following areas:

- Gender and development;
- Child survival and development;
- Women and health;
- Gender and governance;

- Gender mainstreaming;
- Gender, management and leadership training;
- Research methodologies/gender analysis;
- Capacity building workshop for trainers of the centre for specialist course on women in Health management;
- Coordination of Women in Health management specialist course;
- National baseline study on Harmful Traditional Practices in Nigeria;
- Workshop on mobilizing grassroots women for political participation;
- Workshop on mainstreaming Gender into the National Programme of development in Nigeria;
- Eight (8-weeks) short courses on Gender and development;
- Workshop on Gender and Social Policy, National Network of Institutions for Women/Gender studies;
- National workshop on poverty and theoretical policy; and
- Women in Health Management Course.

Special Electives

The Centre has also proposed to include gender studies as special electives for undergraduates of the University. The goal is enabled undergraduate students to have a first-hand knowledge of gender issues thereby helping in boosting the required knowledge in gender studies which they can transfer to others.

B. Research

The Centre has a capacity profile that indicates a wide range of experience in conducting research on gender and development issues. So far it has conducted over fifty (50) basic and action research studies with funding support coming from international donors and national agencies. Some of the CGSPS's past and recent research covers a wide spectrum of empirical studies but emphasizes methodological and theoretical issues. They include the followings:

- Gender and HIV/AIDS in Nigeria;
 - Harmful traditional practices;
 - Gender and reproductive health;
 - Gender and poverty.
- Other research programmes also include:

- Gender and environment;
- Gender and reproductive health;
- Gender, violence and conflict;
- Gender science and technology;
- Gender, education and management;
- Gender, human rights, governance and democracy;
- Gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS;
- Gender, poverty and human security;
- Child's rights, survival and youth development;
- Gender, social policy and sustainable development;
- Food and nutrition policy development;
- Issues of maternal and child health in Nigeria;
- Baseline for monitoring data on child survival and development goal in the 1990;
- Survey of harmful |traditional practices affecting Girls and women in Nigeria;
- Research on the role of women in Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Management;
- Study on training of women in Agriculture in higher Institution;
- Gender and HIV/AIDS;
- Engendering Reproductive Health Care in Nigeria;
- TOT- training in gender and Organizational change Development;
- Sustainable fuel wood management (SFM) – Improved cook stoves
- exploring the risk factors in suicide attempt and strategies for suicide prevention in Nigeria among others.

Research Journal

The Centre publishes a journal –African journal of Gender and Development. It is a biannual journal that features original researches and review discourses on gender and development issues in Africa and beyond. This journal covers issues of gender and education, violence, health, nutrition, employment, environment and lots more. These publications are widely circulated.

Some discussions

In her quest to attain a gender sensitive and equitable university organization, the Obafemi Awolowo University has included gender equity as part of her strategic plans over the years. The establishment of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies was to create an avenue through which this dream of building a gender equitable university organization could be realized. Since the establishment of the Centre, so many things have changed in the University. For instance, the disaggregation of data according to sex has brought to the fore the problem of women's low representation. This finding corroborates Afonja *et al* (2002). There is no doubt that this accomplishment has encouraged the University to make a conscious effort in improving women representation in student enrolment and staff employment.

The implication of this is the presence of many women in the university who are now role models who have been encouraging the up-coming ones to also want to be part of the university system. This trend has facilitated reduction in gender gaps in the university. Furthermore, it makes it possible for the university community to become more gender sensitive, implying that the potentials of both males and female members of the institution are fully harnessed. Moreover, the importance of having an approved gender policy for the university has provided a framework for affirmative actions. Finally, the gender policy and anti-sexual harassment policy documents have served as reference materials for prosecuting offenders who are engaging gender-based discriminations and sexual harassment in the university.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that the Centre for Gender and Social Studies has contributed immensely towards the creation of a gender sensitive/responsive academic environment not only in the university but in Nigeria as a whole. Undoubtedly, this feat, has not only created gender sensitive awareness among staff and students but also enhanced the female's participation in the decision-making process. The study recommends that more centres for gender studies be established in Nigeria and solicit support for the existing ones.

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घुसमट

हे विश्वची माझे घर, त्यात जाईन मी सामावून,
आभाळ माझा बाप, धरती माझी माय
खळखळणारा वारा, मंद मंद दरवळणारा सुगंध
होईन मी मग्न, होऊनी मनाने मंत्रमुग्ध
मनात येईल ते सर्व करती, नसती कोणाची भीती,

आनंदी आनंद सगळीकडे, असते कुटुंब माझ्या संगती
कुठूनी आली लाठ समुद्राची, सर्व काही वाहून नेती,
भाऊ कोणाचा, बहीण कोणाची सर्व नाती विसरूनी
जाती,
बाहेर जावे मुख झाकूनी, हसावे लागते डोळ्यातूनी

दिसला कोणी ओळखीचा, जावे लागते त्याला डवलूनी
लपूनी छपूनी भेटताना, धडधड वाढायची हृदयाची,
मनात ठेवुनी सर्व काही, बोलावे लागते, सुरक्षित अंतर
ठेवुनी
पन्नास वर्षाची संगत आपली, रंग आपला वेगळा

व्याख्या केली आपली आजी-आजोबा म्हणती त्यांना,
वेळ भेटला आपल्या कुठुंबाला, एकत्र येऊनी
सायला
सुख - दुःख वाटून घेतले, आलेल्या संकटाला सामोरी
जायला

अनेकांचे संसार मोडती, घातलेली घडी विस्कटून जाती,
ती सावरण्यासाठी, अवती भवती देवदूत फिरती
घुसमट होते आपल्या मनाची, वाईट भावना मनात
येती,
कधी होईल सुटका यातुनी, नंतर उडणार का पाखरू
होऊनी

आशेची किरण येईल हाती, सर्व दुःख पळवून न्हेती,
हरवलेली मने, दुखावलेली घरे, पुन्हा होतील सुखी
नको करू आता हाल देवा, पुरे झाली मस्करी आता
बाहेर काढ यातून सर्वांना, सुखी कर सगळ्या जगाला

चांगली अददल घडली आम्हाला, सवय चांगल्या
लागल्या शरीराला,
ठाम निश्चय करू पुन्हा, परत येणार नाही भारतात
कोरोना

कु. प्राची किशोर झेंडे.

Dr. BMN College of Home Science
(This poster was presented at Genderlogue
2020-21, Sophia College, Mumbai)

BOOK REVIEW

Dr. Mala Pandurang, Mrs. Vidya Subramanian, Ms Huda Syyed, Ms Jinal Baxi, (Eds) (2020) *Engaging with the Mahatma: Multiple: Perspectives*. Mumbai: Seva Mandal Education Society's, Dr. Bhanuben Mahendra Nanavati College of Home Science, Pages: 115.

- Ms Deepti Anil

The book is a collected rendition of perspectives which echo the thoughts and principles of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation as he is called. The book helps bring forth the relevance of his ideology in today's day and age. The eight-chapter book has been published by The Gandhian Studies Centre of Dr. Bhanuben Mahendra Nanavati College of Home Science. In the first chapter of the book, '*Sabhi Log Aapne Jan*', the author Ramdas Bhatkal who has a doctoral degree in "Gandhi and his Adversaries" says that while truth, non-violence and *Satyagraha* are what one identifies Gandhi with, his greatest lesson according to the author has been "*Sabhi Log Apne Jan*" which is not an easy concept to comprehend. After an in-depth inquiry into the moral questions posed by different religions, Gandhi concluded that one must stick steadfast to the religion one is born in, all the while respecting and honouring the precepts of different religions. Gandhi's belief in *Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava* comes through via this essay.

Moving on the book explores Gandhi in Central and Eastern Europe, where in Dr Roxana Elisabeta Marinescu delves upon the reach and recognition of Gandhi and his philosophy in Central and Eastern Europe. The chapter highlights how his precepts of ahimsa as well as *Satyagraha* have been adopted in several freedom campaigns in the region especially post 1989. The author focusses on the fact that Gandhi's nonviolent approach to protest has been unknowingly adopted in many movements in the region including her birth country Romania.

Dr Betty Govinden's critical analysis of 'The South African Gandhi-Stretcher Bearer of Empire (2015) by Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed is the crux of Gandhi –of the earth, earthy. The authors in their book have tried to demystify and question the adulation of Gandhi and the way Gandhian iconography has developed over the decades. As the chapter states, the main complaint that Desai and Vahed hold is against the mythology or saintliness that seems to have developed around Gandhi. Though each in his own way have found Gandhi to be compelling and even captivating. Dr Betty Govinden says that while the critique of Gandhi is not novel the authors have taken a rather simplistic view and suggest that Gandhi was deceptive in his advocating of non-violence, promoting and choosing violence when it suited him. After having read several books on Gandhi the Dr Betty Govinden feels this book should have taken a more modulated and nuanced approach to Gandhi's South African years. To widen the parameters of discussion she offers the views of Gandhi's illustrious contemporary John Langalibele Dube and the different narratives recorded of their association. In conclusion, she feels that now more than ever the world needs a broader critical understanding of issues without the matter of one's race being a defining factor.

In Gandhi: The Making of a Mahatma, the fourth chapter of the book by Dr. Preeti Shirodkar begins by presenting the very contradictory views that we have about Gandhi which she says range from considering him as a demi-god to downright denunciation as well as criticism of him and his principles. This she rues is the irony of being such a famous and inescapable public figure like the Mahatma. In the paper she directs us to take the middle path of wisdom and learn what we can from his teachings and discard or stay away from those teachings which do not resonate with our beliefs or lives. The paper moves on to examine ten truths that Gandhiji embodied and which the author believes if emulated can enrich our lives. These include the acceptance and learning from ones mistakes, *shramdaan* (voluntary labour) for welfare, believe that even a solitary person with strong beliefs can make a difference, have a clear vision and follow through, be courageous enough to admit mistakes and step back, stand firm and lead from the front, do not give up or give in to defeat, oppose unfair treatment to others, develop a focused movement towards one's goals and understand one's opponent before fighting them. The author has inundated each truth with multiple examples of the principle in practice from Gandhi's life.

Dr. Vibhuti Patel in the enlightening fifth article on “Relevance of Gandhian Legacy on the Contemporary Women’s Movement” states that Contemporary feminist’s analysis on empowerment of women includes not only sexism but also factors related to racism, classism and imperialism as determining factors in shaping women’s status in the private and or the public realm. This development seems consonant with Satyagraha for which Gandhi was on an inclusive quest to find creative solutions. She also says that Gandhi's attitudes towards women were as much shaped by his innate sense of comparison and justice as they were by the patriarchal albeit benevolent conservatism that was the sheet anchor of his cultural and social discourse. The contradiction between his liberal feminist pronouncements, his egalitarian, loving and respectful concern for women, and his belief in their role in politics and in society are sometimes difficult to reconcile. Yet Gandhi, more than anyone else, struggled with these paradoxes in the existing social milieu. Comparing his vision of women with the current status of women and the ongoing struggle for women's empowerment will provide a measure of what has been achieved. All throughout history the author points out that Gandhi’s beliefs and his ideals as well as methods of non-violent protests were very often practiced by women. However, the author rues the fact that while women have in several spheres shed their role as slaves and faced confounding patriarchal challenges, this change is seen most in urban middle-class women and the change has not percolated to the rural poor woman who is in most need of emancipation and empowerment. In several ways Gandhi’s dream for the betterment of women across all class and caste is still sadly unfulfilled is Dr. Patel’s astute conclusion.

Dr.Sridhar Rajeswaran in “Why now? Hey Ram?” narrates his opinions on the changing perceptions of Gandhi through time. He shares his childhood incidents where in he grew up in a household with leanings towards political matters. He further shares his changing views about Gandhi over time and focusses there on Gandhi’s time in Africa and its effects. His conclusion is that despite the shortcomings and contradictions in his personality, Gandhi was a man to reckon with and truly without bias was indeed a Mahatma.

In the chapter ‘Close to the Mahatma’, Pheroze Nowrojee focusses on the close bond between Rev. Charles. F. Andrew and the Mahatma. He chronicles their trials and tribulations in Kenya in the early twentieth century, wherein

the Reverend had been beaten up after being dragged off a train by some British settler youths and its aftermath.

The book concludes with ‘Gandhi’s Earth and Other Poems’ by Dr. Betty Govinden which is a collection of poems focusing on Gandhian Ideology and values. For those interested in further reading on this subject too there is a list of collected annotations and books available from the centre.

Saigita Chittaru (Ed.), *Youth and India’s Sustainable Development Goals*. First edition (13 January 2021).

New Delhi: Vitasta Publishing Private Limited,

pages: 320, price: Rs. 750/-

- Dr. Sangeeta Desai

The book is product of a major conference held at Tata Institute of Social Sciences on the theme of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), 2030 and the role of youth and youth-based organisations in achieving these goals. The main theme of the book is about SDG and how the same can be achieved through political will, impactful policies, well-coordinated efforts of public and civic societies, channelising resources and tapping India’s sizeable youth population who are at the centre of development process of the nation. The book delves into various aspects of SDG’s and the challenges that the youth need to overcome with the assistance of supportive ecosystem that will enable to harness the immense potential of the youth and help to achieve the set goals. The book consists of 9 chapters, each focussing on a particular SDG providing a holistic view and suggests effective strategies to address the problem statement.

Changing Narrative - State and Non-State Sector’s Role in SDG & Youth.

The paper poises critical questions on State and Non-State Sectors role in shaping the youth on whose shoulders lie the tremendous responsibility of contributing and achieving the SDGs. The paper points out that while India takes pride of being called one of the youngest nations due to its high youth population, is the youth motivated, skilled, educated and guided enough to rise

up to the challenges. In the absence of opportunities and direction the social situation can be chaotic. The paper also points to the perils of the information trap which can mislead the youth and ignite unrealistic desires. The paper also puts in focus the poor quality of education, lack of employability skills, rising unemployment and layoffs with the advent of technology. Gainful employment and engaging youth in a constructive way becomes important for the development process. The paper suggests that the concept of Volunteerism has been used by some countries as a solution to some of the problems of the communities and also to raise responsible citizens. In India too State and non-state through various programmes have laid the groundwork for volunteerism. In conclusion, the paper states that the efforts of all actors can be successful through meaningful engagement and mindful participation which will help in nation building and raising consciousness.

Fostering 1st Generation Micro-entrepreneurs - Opportunities and Challenges. This paper is located within the SDG of Decent work and economic growth. It focuses on Entrepreneurship which is perceived as a viable solution to India's problems of unemployment, rising crimes and delinquency. The paper explains the basic concepts of Entrepreneurship, Microenterprises, Medium and small sized enterprises and explains the need for entrepreneurship as well as India's position in the Entrepreneurship index. The paper looks at pandemic as an opportunity for the growth of new enterprises which will be an integration of both offline and online business opportunities. The paper suggests that 1st generation microentrepreneurs who come from marginalised communities should be encouraged and a conducive ecosystem should be set up. This ecosystem could be in form of encouraging policies, access to funding, creating awareness, equipping with skills, training, platform for innovative ideas and mentorship programmes. The paper urges that the young population of India should be encouraged to become entrepreneurs and educational institutes can play a key role in nurturing and cultivating this skill. The paper concludes that informal economy of the country is witnessing a boom due to the entrepreneurs and their full potential should be realised if India wishes to achieve the SDG 8 and SDG10.

Teachers and Society in Mumbai and Hong Kong - Comparative Perspectives for Quality Education of Youth in India. This paper is located within the SDG of Education. The paper delineates how quality education is

perceived to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, reduce inequalities while simultaneously improving the quality of life and making people more tolerant. The paper highlights some of the primary differences between Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and SDG which is more outcome based, inclusive and holds learning as life long process. The paper brings out the shortfalls of the education policies while noting that for reigning in quality education one of the requirements is quality teachers, however that is not the only requirement. Over the years teachers who are the face of the education system have borne the brunt of attack on the education systems which has scored poorly in terms of delivering good quality education. The paper draws on the international comparison between the education systems of two island cities of Mumbai and Hongkong. The paper attempts to broaden the discourse on teachers in India comparing the role, working conditions and entry requirements. The comparison between the two cities can be evaluated in terms of the education philosophy, the education boards that operate, the profile and qualifications of teachers, their working hours, their responsibilities. The paper raises critical questions such as whether education should be reduced to only judging the learning outcomes or we need to have a bigger vision of education in transforming the individuals into responsible citizens and raise their consciousness. While Hongkong has a uniform local education system, Mumbai has to grapple with multiple education boards compounded with the dynamics of public and private funded schools. Lastly the paper suggests to look at multiple pathways to incorporate good quality teachers in education system. The paper also highlights the stress, parental expectations, new teaching techniques, digital onslaught all of which cause tremendous pressure on the teachers. In conclusion, it states that it is important to increase the status of teachers in society.

Gender Equality and Youth Development with regard to SDG5. The paper is located in SDG5 which is on Gender Equality. The paper precisely brings out the lacune in SDG5 as it falls short of tackling the issues on social reproductive labour which leads to gender inequality. The paper argues that household work which is unpaid work and largely burdened on women does not get accounted for in the SDG which is a major flaw as the agenda of Decent Work falls with this exclusion. Some of the challenges and concerns directly impacting the status of women are low child sex ratio, gender gap in higher education, low labour force participation of women, women's poor

reproductive health and issues around them. India's neo mortality rate as well as maternal mortality rate though has come down over the years it yet has a long path to traverse to meet the 2030 timeline. The flawed model of development also gets a mention as the smart and safe cities discriminate the poor as can be seen by the dismissal living conditions in the slums of big city like Mumbai. The paper discusses the relevance of skill development and skill training which particularly remains in the focus especially due to negative impact of COVID -19 which resulted in massive cut in jobs in informal sector. Reflecting on post COVID impact on small businesses run by women, the paper has pinpointed the pain areas wherein it is not enough to just make credit accessible to women, especially when the demand for goods and services will see a downward trend. The small businesses run by women have also been shut down due to additional burden of domestic work during the pandemic wherein they could give little or no time for their small business activities. The paper discusses the precarious situation of women farmers and the urgent need for a greater budget allocation of MGNAREGA and better support systems. The paper reiterates the establishment of Mahila Haats wherein women can sell their produces. The paper also reinforces the basic amenities which are on the priority list of women and girls which is safe water, proper electricity, adequate waste management, safe and affordable public transport facilities. The paper also brings in issues of elderly women and states that elderly women in the community need security in the form of counselling, community based half-way homes and for that the PRI's must provide the adequate data. The paper laments the underutilisation and un-utilisation of budgets and schemes meant for the benefit of women. The paper urges the need to relook at the SHG's role as a more holistic development model with the shift from micro credit and engaging with different stakeholders in the community. The paper stresses that Women Component Plan must be specified especially in development-oriented activities wherein there is high budget allocation. Lastly the paper addresses the issue of low percentage of women in political spaces, and concludes that the youth have a major role to play in increasing the political participation of women both at the state assemblies and parliament.

Violence Against Women and Children. In this paper the authors draw upon the direct interventions brought through the Special Cells for women and children. These special cells are a result of the collaborative efforts of state

and civil society and the experiences and the learnings drawn are put forth so as to enable youth's engagement and response against violence. The paper argues that VAWG is one of the impediments in achieving SDG5 and other development outcomes. It delineates violence into 4 distinct categories and traces how violence operates in the different stages of women's life through the 'Lifetime Spiral' model. Evaluation studies carried on by the special cells have pronounced that the gender based and sexual violence is higher in the age group of (18 – 34) years and the four distinct categories of violence are a) Early and child marriages b) Honour Crimes c) Violence in intimate relationships and d) Domestic violence. The paper also stresses the need to engage with boys and men to end VAWG. Women and girls in the studies conducted have also indicated that they wish the violence to end and would want to reconcile with their partners. This entails the social workers to work closely with the perpetrators of violence and take measures to change the beliefs and attitudes of men. In conclusion all the stakeholders, the state, criminal justice system, civil society organisations are required to work in coordination and provide access to efficient delivery of services that addresses the issues of VAWG.

From Recipients to Change Agents. The core focus of the paper is on participatory approach and the how it has influenced the lives and mainly the health issues of the youth. The paper begins with providing the statistics on the youth population of India, further dwelling into the demographic profile of the youth followed by the adolescent and the youth concerns regarding health. The paper exerts that health of the youth can be understood on the basis of Nutrition, Sexual and Reproductive Health, Mental Health and Substance Abuse. The paper then highlights on the role of the youth in achieving SDG. While technology and innovations are taking quantum jumps, it is also necessary for youth to challenge social structures which run contrary to the rapid change. Youth have a bigger role in bringing in change in the communities by negotiating with the family, peer groups and communities to collaborate and influence change. The paper exalts youth participation as a key to various issues as they have innovative problem-solving capacity. The chapter has drawn from the learnings of Participatory approach of the youth in SNEHA's EHSAS (Empowerment and Health and Sexuality of Adolescents) urban intervention programme wherein the youth agency is valued in code signing the projects while parallelly working with the related stakeholders.

Involving youth in addressing their adolescent issues by taking ownership through training, peer learning, research and by creating safe spaces to express their opinions as well as insecurities, concerns have led to better understanding of gender inequalities. The paper acknowledges that the movement from being a target group to becoming a collaborator is a long process which involves agency building processes and engaging with the entire ecosystem, at the same time it argues that the time taken to initiate action may be less. The paper details on how the youth have addressed and found solutions to the issues of sanitation, adequate water supply as well as issues pertaining to anaemia, early marriage, continuing education and creating safe spaces to discussing sexual and reproductive health concerns. Lastly the paper identifies the complexities and gaps such as inadequate provisioning in facilities, lack of monitoring, inadequacy of resources and unequal power relations in the ecosystem, structural inequalities all of which can impede the health and well-being of the youth. The paper concludes by stating that the health concerns of the youth are interlinked and hence the solution should be interdisciplinary, parents and service providers should also be part of the transformative process to bring in positive difference in the lives of the youth.

Beyond Skilling: Alternative Praxis of Livelihood for Urban Poor Youth.

The paper is located within the SDG 8 which focuses on Decent work and economic growth. The paper argues that while India has been heralded as one the youngest nations in the world, it has scored poorly on the YDI (Youth Development Index) score. The youth of the country is grappling with multiple issues such as poor quality of education, job insecurity, unemployment and lack of training opportunities and serious health issues. The urban youth are caught in the vicious circle of poverty, wherein everyday life is a struggle for basic amenities such as water, sanitation and threat of eviction in informal settlements. Low quality of public education, poor living conditions are some of the reasons for dropping out of the formal education system. Lack of opportunities and low skills push the urban poor youth in informal jobs which have no social security. The paper laments that while the GDP of the country has grown it is a 'Jobless Growth' wherein jobs generated are negligible. The mismatch between skills learned and required for employment also result in youth being unemployable and nothing short of unskilled labourers. The paper argues that just providing skills through

National Skill Development programme is not adequate. Some important arguments and issues put forth are that the skilling programmes are implemented in universities through big organisations, while the youth come from the slums and these structures intimidate, apart from the fact that the travelling cost to and forth these training centres become unaffordable. Lack of confidence, limited exposure, absence of core skills, low paying jobs on completion of training all of it becomes hurdles for the youth to access the skill training programmes. It is in this context that the work of YUVA (Youth for unity and voluntary action) comes into forefront wherein they provide alternative approach to youth development in urban slum communities through fostering youth groups and networks and promoting democratic values. The YUVA model does not look at the question of livelihood in isolation. It rather looks it with the lifecycle approach with multiple interventions. It thus looks at basic health, education and development of vocational skills along with life skills. Equipping the youth with cognitive skills, developing their personal agency and their interpersonal skills become part of the YUVA life modules which form the basis of vocational training model. Through regular sessions and peer-interactions enable the youth to learn and be empowered. Regular screening of films, cultural activities, youth campaigns, workshops further strengthen their critical thinking. In conclusion apart from livelihood training, overall holistic development of the youth through life skills and youth network, localisation of vocational training centres, identification of youth's dreams, anxieties, their daily struggles are equally critical for longer sustenance of youth led development process. These processes should be compounded with adequate creation of job opportunities so that the country can truly harness and benefit from the youth population.

Creating Level Playing field - Participatory Action Research for Gender Equality and Youth Development. This paper is located in SDG4 of Inclusive and Quality Education. The main theme of the paper is about Community based Participatory Action Research and the interventions that bring in change. It focuses on the work done by PUKAR (Partners for Urban Knowledge Action and Research), Mumbai based organisation under its flagship programme of 'Youth Fellowship' which engages with youth from the marginalised communities with the objective of engaging them in participatory research using systematic inquiry and documentation as an

intervention. The paper with its focus on the flagship programme documents the values, thought processes, diverse methodologies wherein the knowledge is coproduced and contextualised better through the voices from within the communities. The paper discusses PUKAR's approach of deconstructing the heterogeneous category of 'youth' and making it inclusive by bringing in the intersectionality of caste, class, gender and ethnicity. The paper also discusses at length the Youth Fellowship programme which is of the duration of 11 months which questions the production of knowledge as well as privileges indigenous knowledge. The programme borrows the feminist pedagogy of using experience as theoretical knowledge and introduces the concept of self-reflexivity in field research. The paper highlights how the fellows of the programme become part of the research group which identifies the problem areas and documents their lived experiences and realities from the lens of a researcher. Intense coursework, training, workshops are provided to the community research participants. The findings are taken back to the community by the fellows which is a technique of intervention used and through their learning and unlearning they create a vision for the youth of the community. The documentation which is lived experiences also help the academicians and policy makers to better understand on ground realities. Over the years the programme, through strategic outreach the youth fellowships have seen a higher women participation and this is important to understand the gender and its location. Women fellows from the minority communities through these research processes have been able to critically understand religion, dress code, mobility and marginalisation better. The paper concludes that documentation helps the researchers to understand gender-based issues, the working of patriarchy, social constructs, which also helps them to challenge, negotiate and understand their own selfhood and agency.

Creating Spaces for Lifelong Learning Skills - Intervention to Generate Sustainable Workforce of the Future. The paper focuses on Lifelong Learning framework and suggests that a fresh approach is necessary to look at youth policies considering the fact that the youth have an important and challenging role to play in the development process. Drawn from the experiences of working with the youth the paper highlights the interventions, education, skills, training so as to make the youth ready for work life. Studies have necessitated the need of soft skills along with employability skills. The

Youth programmes such as NSS, NCC, RSP which is part of the education system help to shape the personality of the young students and inculcate in them leadership and interpersonal skills. The paper argues that India will be able to reap the benefit of its demographic young population if the policies and ecosystems are conducive. Lifelong learning has been part of the rich Indian culture, regrettably it has not been part of the overarching framework of learning, though various training programmes get pushed under the broad category of lifelong learning. The paper stresses how Lifelong learning is crucial for personal and professional development and laments that the education system does not focus on the life skills. The youth of India thus face issues of unemployment as there is a mismatch in education and skills required for job. The paper urges that education, skilling, vocational training, nutrition, capacity building and lifelong learning should be made the core for youth development. The paper concludes that youth need to take leadership roles and a synergy needs to be brought with the civil society and the state to achieve the SDG.

This book will be beneficial to academicians, scholar, policy makers, thinktanks, civic societies as well as social impact organisations which are aligned to make a positive change in the society.

**Patil, Rita (Ed.), *Gandhi for All Times*. Mumbai:
Gandhian Study Centre, Maniben Nanavati Women's
College. Pages: 171, ISBN 978-93-89824-79-7,
price: Rs. 800/-**

- Dr. Lata Pujari

The book is a compilation of academic writing put together in memory and to honour Smt. Maniben Chandulal Nanavati. Also, the book is a contribution to the world on the 150th-year celebration of M.K. Gandhi, the father of our nation. This book is a non-fiction philosophical treatise deals with practising Gandhiji's value and principles in a modern context. The book contains thought-provoking papers of expert scholars from various disciplines of English literature, Economics, Sociology, Food and Nutrition, Commerce etc. It is an indicator, that even in the 21st century, in the so-called 'world of

technology', Gandhiji and his views have influenced the modern academic and social disciplines. In this book, Gandhiji's ideas, values, principles and actions have been discussed and analysed from following major areas – Gandhi and Environment, Gandhi and Women's Empowerment, Gandhi and Health, Gandhi and Community/ Social Philosophy, Gandhi and Education, Gandhi and Literature, Gandhi and Economics. The book consists of fifteen papers that have brought various aspects of Gandhiji's ideas and actions in a contemporary context. For the convenience of understanding, the book has been reviewed under aforesaid themes, with an analysis of the articles that come under the purview of each. However, the first article cum letter from Mr. Harit Mehta (Grandson of Smt. Maniben Chandulal Nanavati) to Maniba deserves independent mention if not analysis.

As mentioned earlier the book begins with Mr. Mehta's monologue with Maniba in the form of a letter. Smt. Maniben Chandulal Nanavati, fondly known as Maniba, was a freedom fighter and a staunch Gandhian. The book carries an authentic source of history, it provides an archival treasure, copies of five handwritten letters correspondence from Gandhiji to Maniba. These letters endorse Maniba's close association and active participation in the Indian freedom movement. After the independence of India, Maniba continued to follow Gandhiji's ideals and philosophy all along with her life. She dedicated her life to the upliftment of women and other marginalized sections of society. Maniba promoted the practice of khadi hence she was known by the epithet "Khadi *Māta*". She helped hundreds of women to get an education and attain economic independence. Mr. Mehta's letter gives a glimpse of Maniba's multiple qualities such as being an action-oriented, caring person, a leader in challenging circumstances, courageous are the few to mention here. Today the country is emphasising the need for women entrepreneurs, but in the case of Maniba, we must admit that she was way ahead of her time. Maniba was an empowered woman, but she also possessed an expert mind in business for she carried her family business without having any formal education. About Maniba's other qualities Mr. Mehta writes, "We learnt from you to allow everyone the freedom of expression, thought, and speech at home and outside it" (p. 29). She encouraged her family members too to participate in India's freedom movement. Mr. Mehta shares that Maniba's daughter, and her siblings being in the *vānarsenā* had created a nuisance for the British. (p. 32) She inculcated the idea of community service

in her own family and practised it throughout her life. Inspired by the thoughts and action of Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Anand, and many others, Maniba enriched many lives affectionately. We indeed meet Maniba through Mr. Mehta's letter. However, the letter to Maniba is not just his remembrance of her but an inspiration to the society. Maniba's views, ideas and constant proactiveness will keep all of us inspiring and make us realise our social responsibility in the long run.

Gandhi and the Environment

Though Gandhiji fought a political war for his people's oppression and countries freedom from the British rule, there was no compromise on his thoughts on '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*'. His idea of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' includes human's responsibility towards mother earth, nature, and harmony. Nature does not have any space or a region, rather it is giving equal care and various resources to all human beings across the globe. Therefore, every individual is accountable for the safety and preservation of the planet. In the article, "Environmentalism: The Gandhian Way", Dr. Rajashri Trivedi discusses the several elements that are important to maintaining a healthy environment on the planet. A century ago, Mahatma Gandhiji had foreseen the present world scenario predicting the world turning into a wasteland, things would be available just by pressing buttons, cars would be waiting for people, varieties of food items, dependency on machinery, humans would be enslaved by temptation and money, etc. (p. 34). However, Dr. Trivedi has rightly pointed out that Gandhiji had opposed destructive machinery and not the simple tools and instruments that would save individuals labour and lighten the burden. While analysing views on Gandhi's environmentalism in the Indian context Dr. Trivedi's writes, "Gandhi's idea of environmentalism was deeply embedded in all his principals – trusteeship, ahimsa, satyagraha, the spirit of swadeshi, khadi, cleanliness, empowerment of women, removal of untouchability, rural industry, *nayi taalim*, and economy and others" (p. 35). Moreover, she has discussed Gandhiji's other prominent idea of 'need of healthy environment for healthy economy'. Along with his powerful weapon of non-violence, Gandhi envisaged cleanliness and hygiene as a national point of concern, and it brought the masses together with enthusiasm. Considering the two crucial points, the author explicitly discusses 21st century India with widening social

issues, concerns and its demand for sanitation at a social, political, environmental, cultural level. Gandhi had foreseen people's increasing greed and endless demand from nature; hence, he says, "There is sufficient in the world for man's need but not for man's greed". It is a time for self-retrospection as we are witnessing the new slogan 'reduce, re-use, recycle' to keep our planet healthy. The author has thoughtfully woven Gandhiji's ideas on a healthy environment, and ongoing new policies, programmes implemented by the government of India.

Gandhi and Women's Empowerment

Gandhiji's idea of non-violence permitted women from every stratum to join the national freedom struggle. The peace process benefitted women to cross the threshold of age-old confinement of four walls. Gandhiji's non-violence later became a stepping stone for women as it encouraged them to take active participation in education, political process, government policies, and various other areas of national development. As women realised their strength, they encouraged other women to join hands and create a chain to bring peace in the world that is surviving under the shadow of unstable social, political, financial, environmental issues. In the paper "Gandhian Influence on Peace Initiatives by Women", Prof. Vibhuti Patel expounds on women's contribution towards harmony and peace in the world. The paper discusses the contribution of women in peacekeeping and peacebuilding in the world. Women have been active representative of peace and non-violence across the world. Their contribution to maintaining peace and harmony in the society has been experienced during the time of local as well as national crises. The author narrates a brief story of a few prominent national-international women activists – Wangari Mutta Mathai (Environment), Aung San Suu Kyi (Politics), Ela Bhatt (Women's Empowerment), Shirin Ebadi (Democracy and Human Rights), Nirmala Deshpande (Communal Harmony) Mother Teresa (Education, and Caring for Dying Destitute), work and their relentless efforts to fight for peace and justice. These women are in different regions, but Gandhiji's philosophy is a unanimous inspiration that has brought these activists on a common platform. Such peacebuilding initiatives make a story and encourage others either to join them or start another venture. Furthermore, the author has also discussed the five core principles of practitioners involved in Conflict Resolution. Customarily, we are witnessing

it in the present world scenario, it is believed that war is the ultimate tool to resolve any conflict and to establish peace. Nevertheless, women practice non-violent techniques such as sports, quiz, songs, debate, theatre etc. to divulge, discuss, resolve conflict issues and to impart harmony into the society. The author in her discussion emphasises that the path of peace-making is not easy for women as their children, family function under the shadow of constant threats and violence. Prof. Patel rightly pointed out, “Despite being victims of violence at times of conflict, the consequence of absence of peace are most felt by them” (p. 57). Dr. Twinkle Sanghavi’s paper “Gandhiji’s Views on Women’s Empowerment” elucidates Gandhiji’s philosophy and a need for women’s empowerment in the present scenario. Dr. Sanghvi states that in Gandhiji’s opinion it was defaming to tag women as the weaker sex. She discusses how the Gandhian era played a crucial role to motivate women, reinstate their own identity, reinvent their self-esteem, status in society etc. Considering challenging contemporary issues faced by women, the author argues that a journey towards women’s empowerment initiated a century ago still has a long way to go to achieve its goal in the true sense of ‘women’s empowerment.

Gandhi and Health

Today, we have varieties of food dishes and menu, there are several restaurants popular for unique dishes, however, people are becoming more and more health cautious than before. Nowadays, people very often are worried about their figure and weight. They either follow a strict diet or head to the gym to burn excess calories or do both. Even this element of man’s life was closely observed and strictly practiced by Gandhiji. In a paper titled “Gandhian Ideology of Nutrition: Relevance to the 21st Century”, Dr. Rita Patil talks about Gandhian principles of nutrition and diet. Dr. Patil has discussed the health issues faced by Gandhiji, despite his belief in allopathy his experiments with naturopathy to cure the problems. As we all are aware Gandhiji campaigned for vegetarianism all his life. The author has discussed Gandhiji’s views on moderation of diet, egg consumption, goat milk, fresh fruits, local grains and farm products, sugar, fried food, etc. He believed that not just food consumption, even physical activity, and fasting is important as they would clean the body and mind. Towards the end of the paper, the author makes a note that simple food that has been the center of Gandhian nutrition

does not exist. However, one needs to consider the crucial aspects of Gandhian food-related literature to maintain a body and mind healthy.

Gandhi and Social Philosophy

Ms Kanyakumarie Padayachee et.al. has contributed a paper titled “Rethinking Social and Community Development in South Africa: A Gandhian Approach”. As the title denotes the paper is a discussion on the need for social welfare and how South Africa adopted it after the democracy in 1994. Social welfare reinforces holistic policies for the betterment and development of a country’s people. How the adopted policy left its impact on youth, human value system, strengthening and professionalising community development, promoting social values, and dignity in society etc. has been discussed and explored through a Gandhian perspective. According to the authors “Gandhian model, should be an integral part of the curriculum of social services professions in South Africa generally and particularly for community development education as one of the first steps towards achieving the goal of developmental social welfare” (p. 87). Another paper titled “The Concept of Sarvodaya Philosophy and Social Empowerment: Gandhian Approach” by Dr. Garishma Khobragade expounds the importance of exercising Gandhiji’s Sarvodaya philosophy for the considerable benefit of society. Dr. Khobragade has discussed the concept of Sarvodaya, its objectives, the decentralisation of power in the economic and political sphere, and the significance of Sarvodaya philosophy in the 21st century. Ms Maitri Dedhia has analysed Indian socio-political condition and has voiced understandings in a paper titled “Gandhiji’s Thoughts on Social-Political Equality and Non-violence”. The author has discussed the idea of equality, complications and impediments of the Indian caste system and justice, hindrances in practicing gender equality, evil practices etc. in the present context.

Gandhi and Education

Concerning this section, I recall Gandhiji’s words, “Be the change you want to see in the world”, and education plays a prime role to shape and bring a change in a person. “Gandhiji’s *Nai Talim* – The Need of the Hour” by Frances Vaidya critically investigates the contemporary education system. He argues that the modern education system does not prepare a pupil to face the

challenges of life, hence education pattern needs to adopt a holistic approach. According to Vaidya Gandhiji's idea of '*Nai-Talim*' – Experimental learning would bring more value to education. The author has extensively discussed the concept of Gandhiji's *Nai-Talim*, its importance, the scope for implementation, its features etc. The idea of *Nai-Talim* was grounded on the 3Hs – Head, Hand and Heart. Therefore, such a type of education pattern will kindle a light of social responsibility in the youth at a young age. The *Nai-Talim* is implemented and continuing in Ananda Niketan and Gandhi Ashram, but it needs a larger reach to bring a substantial change in society. Dr. Ravindra Katyayan broadly discusses the history of the National language – Hindi, its significance, implementation and importance of education in one's language. In this paper, he analyses the role of language/mother-tongue in a country's development process. This critical overview of the language and its application has shed light on some interesting episodes from history.

Gandhi and Literature

The paper titled "Gandhi as Seen by European and American Writers" by Dr. Seema Sharma discusses Gandhian influence on the western writers and writers to be. The author regards Gandhiji as a prophet of 'peace and non-violence. However, it is ironic, the prophet had to witness two world wars and anti-colonial struggles in the countries of Asia and Africa. The paper engages the reader with an interesting discussion between Gandhiji and Tolstoy who never met but influenced each other through their writings. Furthermore, Gandhi and America, John Haynes Holmes who was among the first Americans to get influenced by Gandhiji in the 1920s and many others after 1950 is another gripping section of the paper. The author gives a vivid description of how dialogues with Gandhiji did not cease with his death after 1948. Rather, Gandhiji survived through civil rights and other movements, and leaders who were inspired by his philosophy as well as leadership. Gandhiji's philosophy has provided incessant potency to western leaders writing that provoked people to stand for their rights and identity. Dr. Sharma concludes the paper with a thought-provoking argument, "... apostle of even more relevant in today's world with its conflicted modernity where globalisation instead of creating common bonds of humanity, has deepened rifts based on nationality, race, and class" (p. 108). As Gandhian philosophy

influenced the western world, likewise it also churned the Indian literary arena. Gandhiji's influence on Indian literature and theatre has been discussed by Ms Radhika Rajwani's paper titled "Resonation of the Gandhian Principles in Badal Sircar's Third Theatre Play Procession". The procession was a protest play that had written to invoke people against remorseless British rule. The author has discussed Gandhi and Sircar's attempt to redefine the nature and depiction of protest, by adopting experimental methods i.e., Satyagrah that opposes violence and aggression (p. 111). The paper has vividly turned every aspect of the play concerning significant historical movements, and their impact on society then.

Gandhi and Economics

Although Gandhiji was aware of the need for machinery for rapid development and growth of the economy, his economic philosophy was man-centred and interrelated. In the paper titled "Gandhiji's Vision on Small Cottage Industries", Dr. Rekha Kaklotar discusses Gandhiji's economic thoughts, rural India and cottage industry then and now. The author briefly explains the meaning of small and cottage industry, extensively discusses the economic base that such industries provide to rural development. According to Gandhiji manual labour is important for an individual as well as for the country, therefore the emphasis should be on manual labour for all in the economic development (p. 129). Dr. Kaklotar analyses the need for village empowerment from Gandhiji's perspective. In the view of Gandhiji, economic development could not be achieved without considering villages and their contribution. He said, "...village economy cannot be served without cottage and small industries which will make the villagers self-sufficient" (p. 132). The author illustrates a complete canvas of how this philosophy is relevant in the modern era. Similarly, Ms Rita Chandarana's paper on "Gandhiji's Philosophy on Khadi and its Development" is another important work that expresses thoughts on the textile industry and the Indian economy before and after independence. Gandhiji propagated the use of Khadi in 1920 to make villages self-sufficient (p. 141). The author discusses the Khadi movement after independence, and critically analyses the use of Khadi in recent years. In a similar vein, Maxwell Lopes in his paper on "Gandhi: A causeway between Commerce and Morality" previews the economic support system from stronger section to weaker ones. He put forwards his ideas on

Gandhiji's ethics and morals in Business and its pragmatic application in today's business community. The author reviews the philanthropy act of significant business tycoons from different parts of the world. The present Giving Pledge (commitment to donate half of the wealth in charity) initiative by Gates couple and Warren Buffet is Gandhi's way of Trusteeship that is moving ahead and thriving (p. 157). In conclusion author comment, the unjust economy is the root cause of social evil, hence it needs to bind by business ethics and trusteeship for the groping capitalists.

Each chapter provides comprehensive bibliography for reference and to enrich the value to readers contribution. The copy of Gandhiji's letters to Maniba make this book a source of archival material, and the first chapter of the book brings a woman freedom fighter into the history of India. Scholars who are constant learners and interested in Gandhi, his followers and their contribution to present India, Gandhiji's philosophy, viewing contemporary India from Gandhiji's philosophy, and its relevance, as well as implementation, women's empowerment, economics, sociology, will surely find this worth reading to have a clear understanding and some solutions to deal with ongoing issues that the world is confronting. This book is recommended to all change agents – leaders, activists, philanthropists, scholars, researchers, academicians, writers, and students of Gandhian philosophy.



STATEMENT

ALL INDIA DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Press Statement

Date: August 6, 2021

**AIDWA DEMANDS STERN ACTION AGAINST ACCUSED IN THE
DELHI GANG RAPE**

The All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) expresses its shock at the brutal gang rape of a 9-year-old Dalit girl, followed by her forced cremation by the perpetrators in Purana Nangal village of the Delhi Cantonment area on 1 August 2021. On 4 August, 2021, a delegation led by Brinda Karat, AIDWA Delhi general secretary Asha Sharma and Dalit Shoshan Mukti Manch leader Nathu Prasad, met the family of the girl and expressed support in their struggle for justice.

The girl belongs to a poor, homeless Dalit family and her parents work as rag pickers and sweepers occasionally in order to eke out their survival. The girl was sent by her mother to get water from the cooler at the crematorium. She was trapped there by criminals who gang raped her and then, with the help of the priest, forcibly cremated her so that their heinous crime could be hidden. On hearing of this, the parents of the girl went to the cremation ground with more than a hundred people of the village. The body of the girl was totally burnt and only her feet and ears could be retrieved. What is even more shocking is that the priest claimed that the girl was cremated with her mother's consent. This is a white lie, because the delegation learnt that in that particular village, young girls are buried and not cremated. Further the priest warned the mother not to report the crime and instead propagate the lie that the girl got electrocuted.

The Delhi Police, which is run at the dictates of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, detained the parents of the girl and manhandled her father instead of arresting the accused. Throughout this sordid episode, the police also refused to register an FIR against the four accused, till the villagers put pressure on

them to register an FIR. There are attempts to shield the culprits by the Delhi police, as is usually the case in incidents of violence against women. The latest media reports say that the doctors panel of Deen Dayal Upadhyay hospital has said that it is difficult to ascertain whether the girl was 'sexually assaulted' or not. This cover-up is evident from the statements of local people who have alleged that the accused have been booked under sections that do not include POSCO, SC/ST Act and other serious crimes that have been committed by them. Now, due to public pressure and continuous protests, this investigation has been transferred to the Crime Branch.

The AIDWA denounces the role of the Delhi police in this whole episode and also condemns the deafening silence of the Union Home Minister. It condemns the false and insensitive statement of the BJP and Union I&B Minister that the heinous crime is being 'politicised' and that speedy justice has been provided to the victim's family.

The AIDWA vows to fight for justice for the parents of the latest victim of the rising rape cases under the Modi government. Coming close on the heels of the Hathras and other rape cases, the AIDWA demands that the Union Government take responsibility for the increasing cases of rapes and violence against women.

It demands that:

1. A court monitored impartial investigation must be carried out in this case in a fast track court.
2. The accused must be tried for rape, murder and also be booked under POSCO and the SC/ST Act.
3. The role of Delhi Police must be thoroughly investigated and the police officers be held accountable for their silent complicity.
4. The Delhi government has announced a meagre Rs 10 lakh compensation for the family. It should be substantially increased for their rehabilitation. In addition, the family of the victim must be given protection and provided free legal and other assistance in their fight for justice.

Malini Bhattacharya
President

Mariam Dhawale
General Secretary

To,
The Honorable Chief Minister,
Govt of Maharashtra,
Mumbai
Re: Alleviating the Impact of the Covid 19 Lockdown on Women and Girls

Honorable Sir,

We, women's and civil society organisations, are deeply concerned about the impact of the Covid 19 Lockdown on women and girls. We understand that there is a need for the Lockdown and its continuation as the virus spreads but its impact is deepening pre-existing inequalities, increasing vulnerability and violence against women.

So, whilst we fight the war on corona, we also need to put into place measures and policies which will maintain the human rights of women and girls.

Violence on Women

The UN has called it the Shadow Pandemic, and the world over, we are seeing a surge in domestic violence on women. In India the National Commission for Women has recorded more than a twofold rise in the month of March.

Required Measures:

- A public announcement on gender-based violence from the CM and the Police No 100 and reviving of 181 or the emergency helpline no for women.
- PCR No. 100, or any other Helplines of the Government should telephonically connect any persons calling to report gender-based violence, to existing service providers, FCC and protection officers
- In case of calls regarding gender-based violence received by PCR No. 100, to provide statutory response in severe cases, even though there is pandemic ongoing
- Directive to all cable operators to show slide on Stopping Domestic Violence and helpline numbers

- Advisory to mobile service operators to insert message on stopping domestic violence during lockdown
- Establishing a Women's Cell in every state and municipal hospital for survivors of violence
- Setting up a separate desk with a woman constable in every police station
- Dissemination of a list of women's organisations and counselling centres in social media and press
- Selection of a number of Shelter Homes for extreme cases of violence
- Issuing a Directive to all Protection Officers to attend to domestic violence cases in districts
- Transport facilities and e passes should be provided to govt personnel and survivors to attend to domestic violence cases, to go to courts and police stations and shelters
- Keep courts open to hear cases of domestic and other violence cases
- Police permission for travelling to hospitals for health services and arranging for ambulance to get to hospitals for emergencies like childbirth

The Impact on Health

Data shows that women's health is precarious because of low nutrition, lack of medical attention and repeated pregnancies. The majority of Indian women are anemic. The Lockdown is going to affect them adversely with the unavailability of basic rations and vegetables as well as increased domestic work in the house as they cater to all old and young members. There are specific groups of women and trans people who are vulnerable. Infrastructure like slum dwelling and lack of sanitation adds to the problems.

Required Measures:

- Disseminate a list of all mental health organisations for support of women who need it
- Keep OPDs open so women can access basic health, contraception, abortions and pregnancy check ups
- Make a public announcement of sharing of housework between men and women in the home

- Make rations available to people below poverty line
- Food Kitchens should be established in each Ward so the poor can avail of free food
- Make special effort through Self Help Groups of identifying single women, women headed households, trans, elderly, beggars, homeless for making direct cash transfers to them
- Midday meals should be delivered to the family of children or at some pick up point so they do not suffer from starvation.
- Mobile toilets and existing toilets in slum and other communities for women which are sanitized twice a day
- Availability of water for longer hours in community taps or provision of tanker water to slum communities

Impact on Paid and Unpaid Work

Women workers are by and large part of the Informal Sector and earn low and insecure wages. In the Lockdown, their daily wages have stopped and they are in dire needs especially those running their own households. Besides, women also form the frontline in the health sector and as community workers. They need protection. Women do most of the housework or unpaid work in the home which requires amenities like water and cooking gas

Required Measures:

- Give Self Help Groups jobs of making homemade masks for sale for use by govt personnel
- Direct cash transfers to poor women who have lost their livelihood
- Supply of masks and protective gear for all health and community workers
- Reopening of MNREGA scheme for landless women labourers
- Preference given to women hawkers of essential supplies like vegetable and fish sellers

Specific Groups

There are specific groups like the homeless, disabled, women in prison, beggars, women in state institutions who are virtually incarcerated and need to be given attention as they are living in dormitories and cells in groups.

Required Measures:

- The homeless should be provided shelter in organised camps for the period of the Lockdown
- All women in institutions have to be given room for social distancing and maintaining personal hygiene

The Lockdown has reversed some of the gains made by the women's movement for the freedoms and rights of women. We need measures and policies to cushion this impact and build a plan for the post Lockdown phase when there will be a re-construction of the lives and work of our citizens.

The signatories of this Petition are from different parts of Maharashtra and would like you to take the necessary steps for reducing the dire impact of the Lockdown on women and girls.

Signatories,

Name of Individual or Organisations - Location [city, town, village]

- 1) Akshara - Mumbai
- 2) Nari Atyachar Virodhi Manch - Mumbai
- 3) MASUM - Pune
- 4) Stree Mukti Sanghatana - Mumbai and Navi Mumbai

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PRESS RELEASE

OVER 10,000 FEMINISTS, FEMINIST GROUPS AND CONCERNED CITIZENS condemn the brutal gangrape and murder of a young Dalit woman from Hathras. **DEMAND** action against the guilty, as well as responsible officials!

04 OCTOBER 2020

We condemn the horrific rape and murder of a young Dalit woman from Hathras, UP.

We stand with the family in their sorrow. Extend support, solidarity and rage.

We demand immediate action against the state officials responsible for mishandling the case, destroying key evidence, and further traumatising the family and community.

**SHAME ON THE STATE THAT STANDS WITH THE GUILTY.
SHAME ON THE STATE THAT INCREASES THE IMPUNITY WITH
WHICH UPPER CASTE FORCES COMMIT VIOLENCE AND HATE
CRIMES.**

Today, over 10,000 people from all walks of life, cutting across caste, religion, gender, occupation and community came together from almost every state in India and more than a dozen countries across the world such as US, UK, Canada, Australia, UAE, Hong Kong, Japan, Nepal, Netherlands, Sweden, Slovenia etc to demand justice for the heinous rape, brutalising attack and murder of a young Dalit woman from Hathras.

In a sharp statement condemning the incident, they got together to say that *“despite a continuing saga of countless other cases of brutal sexual assault and murders especially of young Dalit women the conscience of this nation does not seem to be shaken enough to do anything serious to stop the systematic targeting of women, Dalits and the poor.”*

While there is a historicity to these incidents, but under CM Yogi’s rule, Uttar Pradesh has only gone from bad to worse. Crimes against women and Dalits have increased, and police have been given unlimited powers without any

accountability. Today UP tops the charts for atrocities against Dalits, it also tops the charts for crimes against women.

Even as the tragic news of the death of the victim from Hathras was coming in, more cases of sexual violence on Dalit women have come up from Balrampur, Bulandshahar, Azamgarh, all in UP. The growing support base for Thakurs, the fact that no official visited the girl's family even once after her death, tells us the facts as they are, nobody cares and caste solidarity remains one of the ugliest and strongest kinship performances of the modern Indian State and one that must be challenged and broken. The actions of the state will only further strengthen those who continue to commit such crimes without any fear of punishment.

While the caste atrocities gain public attention only when they manifest themselves as sexual violence, suicide or murders, we also need to understand the ways in which caste manifests itself in our daily lives. The Hathras case is a blatant case of upper caste power and patriarchy operating through both, socially sanctioned violence and through state agencies.

WE, AS MEMBERS OF SOCIETY AND WOMEN'S AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS AFFIRM OUR RESOLVE to address the issue of caste-based discrimination, violence and atrocities, until its complete annihilation.

We believe that a proper course of justice, fair investigation, holding the guilty persons and police and other state officials responsible are the only way forward. It is only fear of certain justice and accountability that can stop privileged men from committing such crimes. The state must not, we repeat **NOT**, push a rhetoric of death penalty for rape – for we have seen time and again that that is not the answer to stopping crimes, sexual or otherwise, anywhere in the world! After all, in our own country, it is barely 6 months since the hanging of those held guilty of the December 2012 gang rape and murder in Delhi. Has it stopped the guilty of Hathras, or Balramur, or Bulandshahr or Azamgarh... or anywhere else?

IN THEIR DEMANDS, THE SIGNATORIES SOUGHT strict action against both, those guilty of the crimes of gangrape and murder, as well as officials who manhandled the case, exposed the identity of the victim and wilfully destroyed crucial forensic evidence.

The signatories included teachers, activists, journalists, homemakers, corporate sector executives, designers, cultural groups and artists, writers, poets, school teachers, students, retired private and public officials, film societies, medical students and faculty, IT professionals, and numerous others. Prominent among them are:

Well known progressive voices like Dr Syeda Hamid, Aruna Roy, Maimoona Mollah, Annie Raja, Beena Pallical, Cynthia Stephens, Rose Dzuwichu, Masooma Ranalvi, Roshmi Goswami, Anjali Bharadwaj, Kavita Krishnan, Dr Ajita Rao, Kalyani Menon Sen, Chayanika Shah, Rituparna, Bittu, Shampa Sengupta, Ranjana Padhi, Elina Horo, Sabina Martins Jarjum Ete, Kiran Deshmukh, Rita Manchanda, Meera Sangamitra, Feroze Mithiborwala and others

Retired public officials such as Jawahar Sircar (Former Culture Secretary, GoI and ex CEO, Prasar Bharati), Jerusha Rai, Kavita Singh, Police Office_(Jaipur), Latha Reddy (retd IFS) and others

Legal luminaries like Indira Jaising, Flavia Agnes, Poonam Kaushik, Shalini Gera

Individuals and groups from the worlds of culture such as Aparna Sen, Maya Krishna Rao, Anju Mahendru, Adhuna, Anjali Montiero, Mallika Taneja, Vani Subramanian and others, as well as Progressive Writers Association, Artists United, IPTA, Banjara Theatre, Samudaya Theater group, Jazba Theatre Group, Jana Natya Manch, Peoples' Theatre Group

Senior journalists such as Ankita Anand, Pamela Phillipose, Kavin Malar, Rajshri Dasgupta, Antara Dev Sen, Sujata Madhok, Francesca Mascarenhas.

Eminent Academics like Mary John, Nivedita Menon, Janaki Nair, Sadhna Arya, Meena Gopal, Lata Singh, and others.

And hundreds of rights groups including Saheli, Women Against Sexual Violence and State Repression, Dalit Sthree Sakthi, NFIW, AIDWA, AIPWA, Forum Against Oppression of Women, Dr. Ambedkar Medicos Association, NWMI, Haatemalo, Human Rights Forum of India, National Alliance of Peoples' Movements, Majlis, HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, Dalit Arthik Adhikar Andolan, Dalit Women Fight, Dalit Intellectual Collective, Dalit

Ekta, Dalit Women Fight Delhi University Women's Association, Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, AUD Queer Collective, PUCL, Mahila Dakshita Samiti, Orinam Indian Social Institute, ANHAD, Bebaak Collective, Asmita Collective, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, National Domestic Workers Movement, Naga Mothers Association, Gramya Resource Centre for Women, Alternative Law Forum, Community Awareness for Rural Development, Forum for Justice and Peace, Lawyer's Collective, Women's Forum, LABIA – A queer feminist LBT Collective, Vidrohi Mahila Manch, South Asians for Human Rights, Xommonoy (a queer collective), Satark Nagrik Sangathan, Sachetana, Progressive Democratic Students Union, Vanchit Bal Adhikaar manch, All India Union of Forest Working People, Bhim army, Queerala, Bharat Bachao Andolan, YWCA, WeSpeakOut, Streebal, Maati, Sahiyar, Sampada Garmin Mahila Sanstha, SANGRAM, Sangli, , Women and Transgender JAC, SAATHI, Democratic Youth Federation of India, SAMA, Adivasi Women's Network, All India Students Federation, Gamana Mahila Samuha, Free Speech Collective, VAMP Sangli, KSSP, National Alliance of Women, Haatemalo Collective, Nagaland Deaf Association, Delhi Science Forum, Feminist Learning Partnerships, South Asia Forum for Human Rights etc.

आज पूरे भारत तथा यूनाइटेड स्टेट्स, यूनाइटेड किंगडम, कनाडा, ऑस्ट्रेलिया, यूनाइटेड अरब अमीरात, होनग कोंग, जापान, नेपाल, नेदरलैंड्स, स्वीडन, स्लोवेनिया, जैसे अन्य देशों के सभी जाति, धर्म, लिंग, व्यवसाय और समुदाय से जुड़े 10,000 से अधिक लोगों ने एक साथ मिलकर हाथरस की युवती के साथ हुए इस जघन्य बलात्कार, नृशंस हमले और हत्या के संदर्भ में न्याय की माँग की है।

हम उत्तर प्रदेश के हाथरस में एक दलित युवती के जघन्य बलात्कार और हत्या की निंदा करते हैं।

हम इस दुख की घड़ी में पीड़ित परिवार के साथ खड़े हैं। हम अपना समर्थन, एकजुटता और रोष व्यक्त करते हैं।

इस मामले को गलत तरीके से पेश करने, अहम सबूतों को नष्ट करने और परिवार और समुदाय को डराने-धमकाने के लिए ज़िम्मेदार राज्य अधिकारियों के खिलाफ तत्काल कार्रवाई की माँग करते हैं।

सरकार को शर्म आनी चाहिए जो दोषियों के साथ खड़ी है। राज्य सरकार को शर्म आनी चाहिए कि वह सवर्ण जातियों को बचा रही है, जिससे उनको और ज़्यादा हिंसा तथा अपराध करने की छूट मिल जाएगी। आज पूरे भारत तथा अन्य देशों के सभी जाति, धर्म, लिंग, व्यवसाय और समुदाय से जुड़े 10,000 से अधिक लोगों ने एक साथ मिलकर हाथरस की युवती के साथ हुए इस जघन्य बलात्कार, नृशंस हमले और हत्या के संदर्भ में न्याय की माँग की है।

इस घटना की निंदा करते हुए एक कड़ा बयान जारी करते हुए उन लोगों ने कहा है: *खैरलांजी के भयावह मामले के 14 साल बाद। दिसंबर 2012 में हुए जघन्य मामले के 8 साल बाद। कथुआ मामले के लगभग 3 साल बाद। और ऐसे ही अनगिनत मामलों विशेष रूप से जिनमें दलित युवतियों को क्रूर यौन हमले और हत्याओं का शिकार बनाया गया उसके बा*

वजूद राष्ट्र की अंतरात्मा को किसी तरह का धक्का नहीं लगा ताकि महिलाओं, दलितों और गरीबों पर होने वाले हमलों को रोकने के लिए ठोस क़दम उठाया जाए।

हालाँकि इस तरह की घटनाएँ लगातार होती रही हैं, लेकिन मुख्यमंत्री योगी के शासन में उत्तर प्रदेश की हालत बद से बदतर होती चली गई है। महिलाओं और दलितों के खिलाफ़ अपराध बढ़े हैं, और पुलिस को बिना किसी जवाबदेही के असीमित अधिकार दिए गए हैं। जब हाथरस से पीड़िता की मौत की दुखद खबर आ रही थी, उसी दौरान उत्तर प्रदेश के बलरामपुर, बुलंदशहर, आजमगढ़ से दलित महिलाओं पर यौन हिंसा के और भी कई मामले सामने आए हैं। ठाकुरों के प्रति बढ़ते समर्थन का पता साफ़ तौर पर इस बात से चलता है कि पीड़िता की मृत्यु के बाद भी उसके परिवार से कोई मिलने नहीं गया, इससे ज़ाहिर है कि उनकी किसी को कोई परवाह नहीं है और जाति की एकजुटता आधुनिक भारतीय राज्य की सबसे ख़राब और मज़बूत गठजोड़ है, जिसे चुनौती देने होगी और तोड़ना होगा। राज्य की कार्रवाई केवल उन लोगों को और मज़बूत करेगी जो बिना किसी डर के ऐसे अपराधों को अन्जाम देते हैं।

हालाँकि जातिगत अत्याचार की ओर सार्वजनिक रूप से हमारा ध्यान तभी जाता है जब वह यौन हिंसा, आत्महत्या या हत्याओं के रूप में समाने आता है, हमें उन तरीकों को भी समझने की ज़रूरत है, जिनमें जाति हमारे दैनिक जीवन में भिन्न रूपों में सामने आता है। हाथरस का मामला उच्च जाति के वर्चस्व और पितृसत्ता का मामला है, जो सामाजिक रूप से स्वीकृत हिंसा और राज्य एजेंसियों के माध्यम से संचालित है। हम, समाज के सदस्य तथा महिला और नारीवादी आंदोलन के सदस्य के रूप में जाति आधारित भेदभाव, हिंसा और अत्याचार के मुद्दे को पूरी तरह ख़त्म करने के लिए दृढ़ संकल्पित हैं।

हमारा मानना है कि उचित न्यायिक प्रक्रिया, निष्पक्ष जाँच, दोषी व्यक्तियों को पकड़ना तथा इसके लिए ज़िम्मेदार पुलिस और राज्य के अधिकारियों को सज़ा देना ही एक मात्र रास्ता है। यह केवल न्याय और जवाबदेही का ही थोड़ा बहुत डर है जो विशेषाधिकार प्राप्त पुरुषों को ऐसे अपराध करने से रोक सकता है। हम इस बात को फिर से कहते हैं कि राज्य को बलात्कार के लिए मौत की सज़ा देने का जुमला नहीं दोहराना चाहिए - क्योंकि हमने बार-बार देखा है कि दुनिया भर में कहीं भी यह यौन अपराधों तथा अन्य क्रिमिन्स के अपराधों को रोकने का जवाब नहीं है! आख़िरकार, हमारे ही देश में, दिल्ली में दिसंबर 2012 के सामूहिक बलात्कार और हत्या के दोषी लोगों को फाँसी की सज़ा दिए हुए मुश्किल से 6 महीने हुए हैं। क्या इसने हाथरस, या बलरामपुर, या बुलंदशहर या आजमगढ़ ... या कहीं और के दोषियों को रोका है?

अपनी माँगों में, हस्ताक्षरकर्ताओं ने सामूहिक बलात्कार और हत्या के अपराध के दोषियों के खिलाफ़ कड़ी कार्रवाई करने के साथ-

साथ उन अधिकारियों के खिलाफ़ भी कड़ी कार्रवाई का माँग की है जिन्होंने मामले की ग़लत तरीक़े से जाँच की, पीड़िता की पहचान उजागर की और महत्वपूर्ण फ़ॉरेंसिक सबूत नष्ट कर दिए।

जानी मानी प्रगतिशील आवाज़ें: डॉ सईदा हामिद, अरुणा रॉय, मैमूना मोल्लाह, एनी राजा, बीना पल्लीकल, सिंथिया स्टी फेंस, रोज़ दज़ुविचू, मासूमा रानाल्वी, रश्मि गोस्वामी, अंजलि भरद्वाज, कविता कृष्णन, डॉ अजिता राव, चयनिका शाह, ऋतुपर्णा, शायमा सेनगुप्ता, रंजना पाढ़ी, एलीना होरो, जारजुम एते, किरण देशमुख, रीता मनचंदा, मीरा संगमित्रा, फ़ीरोज़े मिथिबोरवाला

सेवानिवृत्त सार्वजनिक अधिकारी : जवाहर सरकार (पूर्व संस्कृति सचिव, भारत सरकार और ex CEO, प्रसार भारती), जेरूशा राय, कविता सिंह (पूर्व पुलिस अधिकारी, जयपुर), लता रेड्डी (पूर्व इंडियन फ़ॉरैन सर्विस) और आदि

कानूनी विशेषज्ञ : इंदिरा जैसिंग, फ्लेविआ अग्रस, पूनम कौशिक, शालिनी गेरा

सांस्कृतिक दुनिया के व्यक्ति और समूह: अपर्णा सेन, माया कृष्णा राव, अंजू महेन्द्रू, अधुना, अंजलि मोटेरो, मल्लिका तने जा, वाणी सुब्रमनियन और प्रोग्रेसिव राइटर एसोसिएशन, आर्टिस्ट्स यूनाइटेड, IPTA, बंजारा थिएटर,

Joint Press Statement from National Women's Organisations

Date: January 7, 2021

**Women condemn Badaun rape and murder, demand
immediate arrest of main culprit**

Women's organisations strongly condemn the 3rd January incident of gang-rape, torture and murder of an anganwadi worker by a mahant and his henchmen in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh. The woman sometimes used to visit the temple presided over by the main culprit and when she did not return, her family started looking for her. The mangled body of the woman was brought back in a car and left in front of her home. In a repeat of the callousness evidenced in the Hathras case, the police ignored the pleas of the family to lodge the FIR. They turned up only the next morning and after the post mortem revealed severe injuries including injuries in the private parts of the victim's body. The main culprit has absconded although his two associates have been arrested. The SSP, Badaun has stated that the Thana IC has been temporarily relieved of his duties, but keeping earlier such cases in mind we very much suspect that there will be efforts to side-line the rape and murder and to subvert justice to cover up the atrocious records of the Jogi Government. It is shameful that such horrendous crimes against women are being committed at a time when the UP government is preventing women by police force from holding peaceful demonstrations with their just demands for food and work. It is doubly shameful that in a regime that boasts of religiosity, temples are becoming sites of crimes and mahants are becoming perpetrators. We demand immediate apprehension of the main culprit, protection for the family and proper police and administrative action to ensure speedy justice. We also call upon all our activists in the states to campaign strongly on the issue to expose the dangers that women face under BJP regime.

ALL INDIA DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (AIDWA)
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDIAN WOMEN (NFIW)
ALL INDIA PROGRESSIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (AIPWA)
PRAGATISHEEL MAHILA SANGHATAN (PMS)
ALL INDIA MAHILA SANSKRITIK SANGHATAN (AIMSS)
ALL INDIA AGRAGAMI MAHILA SAMITI (AIAMS)



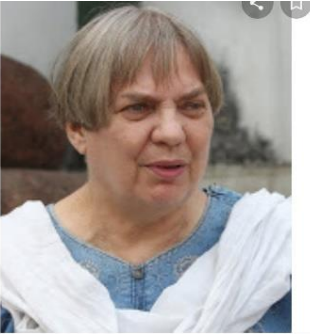
- Vanessa Pinto,
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OBITUARY

Dr. Gail Omvedt (1941 to 2021)

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel,
Vice President,
Indian Association for Women's Studies



Dr. Gail Omvedt, committed and courageous, prolific writer and powerful social scientists who brought to the fore Phule-Ambedkar legacy in the context of rising social movements in the post emergency period is no more. She passed on 25 August 2021 at the age of 80. Gail's close association with grass-roots movements of rural women- farmers, forest dwellers and women headed households and her involvement in the newly formed women's rights movement during late 1970s

were captured in her engaging and outstanding first-person account in her book, *We Shall Smash this Prison* published in 1978. She was a prolific writer and popularly known as a political theorist who pioneered non-Brahminical Marxism. Memorial meetings organised by rural groups, Dalit organisations, academic institutions, activists of grass roots movements, farmers organisations and Bahujan Groups bears witness to the fact that Gail had made a permanent Mark among the progressive thinkers and practitioners.

Bridged the Gap between Theory and Action

Gail actively participated in all meetings of the united front of women's liberation movement in Maharashtra. During 1970s, 1980s and 1990s we worked together in several campaigns, padayatras, rallies, dharanas, workshops, national conferences, gatherings in rural, tribal and urban locations, travelled together long-distance in unreserved train compartments to attend conferences in Nandurbar in 1981 and preparatory meetings for the Patna Conference on Perspective for Women's Liberation Movement in 1988,

shared rooms in seminars and workshops which gave us opportunity to engage in lively discussions on political economy of caste-class-ethnic issues determining women's predicaments, caste question in mode of production and relations of production in the rural economies, entitlements of forest dwellers, gender-water-caste and land, property rights of tribal and rural women, need for rural-urban solidarity and support. During early 1970s, she visited India for the field work of her Ph.D. dissertation on *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahmin Movement in Maharashtra*.

She made a major impact as Dr. Ambedkar Chair Professor at NISWASS in Orissa, as a Professor of Sociology at the University of Pune, as Asian Guest Professor at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen and as a Senior Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. She was a visiting Professor and Coordinator, School of Social Justice, University of Pune, visiting faculty at Centre for Social Studies, Surat and a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. Gail Omvedt was a former Chair Professor for the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Chair of Social Change and Development at IGNOU.

Gail believed in Feminist Principle of 'Personal is Political'

Gail married a politically active doctor, Com Bharat Patankar in 1978 and settled down with her mother-in-law and husband in Kasegaon village, Maharashtra, she attended and spoke in (her own style of) Marathi all meetings of the united front of women's liberation movement in Maharashtra along with her mother-in-law, veteran feminist Com. Indutai Patankar. She actively supported renaming of Marathwada University as Babasaheb Ambedkar University in 1978 and reached out to Dalit survivors of cattiest riots after the legislative assembly of Maharashtra unanimously passed a resolution for the renaming. At that time, even her pregnancy did not deter her from joining *padayatras* in solidarity with the Dalit victims of riots in Marathwada. She had a caring mother-in-law, renowned feminist in her own right, Comrade Indutai Patankar. As fellow feminists, they were always together in all public events of the social movements till Indutai passed on. Her home in Kasegaon was always open for social activists, researchers and young scholars in Kasegaon. Her freedom-fighter and feminist mother-in-law, Indutai Patankar was an idol for the movement of Single Women that began in the mid-1980s. Gail and Indutai enjoyed unique camaraderie. They lead by

their personal examples. She encouraged, inspired and mentored 1000s of Dalit, Adivasi, Bahujan men and women to dedicate their lives for social transformatory processes.

Inclusive Public Intellectual

Gail was actively involved in social movements of Dalits, Adivasis, workers, rural women and expressed her solidarity with anti-caste movements, environmental movements, farmers' movements. She was active in Shramik Mukti Dal, Stri Mukti Sangarsh Chalval which works on issues of abandoned women in Sangli and Satara districts of southern Maharashtra, and the Shetkari Mahila Aghadi, which works on issues of women's land rights and political power. She was a huge inspiration to so many of us. I was fortunate to have a long association with Indutai and with her also Gail and Bharat when I became part of the Stree Mukti Sangharsh Chalwal from the mid 90's. After Indutai passed away four years ago my visits to Kasegaon never happened so I met Gail only a few times when she came to Pune. Her work will continue to inspire generations to come for the struggle against caste patriarchy and for a better world

Gail as a champion of Women's Rights Movement

Gail was an active participant of the workshops and group discussions of early feminist discourses on paid and unpaid work of women, agrarian relations and rural women's survival struggles, livelihood strategies of women headed households of widows, deserted, divorced and single women. She put her ideas upfront, she always attended meeting with her types notes and discussion points that conveyed that she had done considerable homework for the meaningful and result oriented discussions. She contributed to the women's liberation movement in Maharashtra immensely. She not only translated Marathi and Bhilori feminist songs into English but also extensively quoted verses of these songs in her theoretically dense research papers and monographs. She generously shared rare literature on the student's movements against racism and against anti-Vietnam war and the international women's liberation movement during the early 1970s. Her in-depth understanding on Satya Shodhak Movement of Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule contributed towards historical sense to the emerging feminist consciousness in India. She enthusiastically took part in the Stree Mukti

Sangharsh Parishad in Pune during the emergency Rule. Gail was an ardent supporter of Stree Mukti Sanghatana in Mumbai and Pune. Gail represented rural and tribal women's concerns in the state level network organisation Stree Mukti Sampark Samiti. After the nation-wide anti-rape movement, when the newly formed women's groups spread all over the country expressed the need for a National Conference and Forum Against Oppression of Women took the lead to host the 1st National Conference on Perspective for Women's Liberation Movement in India in December 1980, Gail was active in the preparatory Committee. During the conference, she prepared minutes for the sub-group on Women and Work. Gail always fulfilled her promise, whether it was an organisational work or an intellectual work. In 1981, we attended Asian Conference against Sexual Violence organised by Prof. Upendra Baxi in Surat and from there we went to attend the Convention of tribal women in Nandurbar in an unreserved over-crowded railway compartment by narrow gauge train with coal engine in company of goats and chickens and their owners. In 1988, We worked together for a massive mobilisation of rural and tribal women in a National Conference in Patna.

Pathbreaking Legacy of Intersectional Feminist Writing

Gail's highly acclaimed writings brought out her deep theoretical insights that came from local experiences and connected with the global perspective. Gail's intellectual honesty gained her an unconditional acceptance even among those who did not completely agree with her. Her views on support to *Shetkari Sanathana* movement lead by rich farmers in 1990 and policy of liberalisation and globalisation in 1991 were not acceptable to many activists working with the urban and rural poor. Still, she enjoyed trust of social movements of Dalits-Adivasis-Bahujan who respected Gail for her following path-breaking contributions over 3 decades.

- *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Maharashtra* (Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976)
- *We Shall Smash This Prison: Indian Women in Struggle* (1979)
- "We Will Smash This Prison! Indian Women in Struggle " (Zed, 1980)
- "Violence Against Women: New Movements and New Theories in India" (Kali for Women, 1991)

- *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements in India* (M.E. Sharpe, 1993)
- *Gender and Technology: Emerging Asian Visions* (1994)
- *Dalits And The Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar And The Dalit Movement In Colonial India* (Sage India, 1994)
- *Dalit Visions: the Anti-caste movement and Indian Cultural Identity* (Orient Longman, 1995)
- *Growing Up Untouchable: A Dalit Autobiography* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000)
- *Buddhism in India : Challenging Brahmanism and Caste* (Sage India, 2003)
- *Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India* (Delhi: Critical Quest, 2004)
- "Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India " (Penguin, 2005)
- *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anti-caste Intellectuals* (New Delhi, Navayana, 2009)
- "Understanding Caste: From Buddha To Ambedkar And Beyond" (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011)
- *Songs of Tukoba with Bharat Patankar she has published (translations)* (Manohar, 2012)

Our heartfelt condolences to Gail's caring companion Comrade Dr. Bharat Patankar and affectionate daughter, Prachi Patankar. Gail lives with us through her writings. We salute Gail Omvedt for her revolutionary spirit, passion for social change and caste-less society, commitment for women's rights, intersectional feminist analysis and revolutionary praxis.

SONAL SHUKLA
(12.7.1941 to 9.9.2021)

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

A veteran feminist activist and the public intellectual, Sonal Shukla passed away on 9-9-2021. This has created an irreparable loss to the women's rights movement. She was a powerful writer, orator and debater who consistently championed the causes of women's rights and dignity and examined an unfolding reality with the gender lens. Sonal Shukla was a champion of feminist activism and always vociferous about women's rights. Through her writings and oratory, she consistently highlighted the burning issues of women at workplace, in the homes, in the political spheres, she was humble and humorous, witty and warm. She had a zest for life and was actively involved in the solidarity work for local as well as global efforts of the women's rights movement.



First time, I met Sonal Shukla in 1977 as our meeting of newsletter, Feminist Network in English and Stree Sangharsh in Gujarati used to take place from her home. Since then, we have been in the women's movement together for a long time. We worked together for anti-rape campaign (1980), solidarity for textile workers (1982), Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Presentation (1982), campaign through Music ballet and Yatra on Women's Movement in India - Chipko, Anti Price Rise, Anti Rape, Anti Dowry, Anti Sati (1984-87), campaign against dowry - Manjushree Sarda & Vibha Shukla murder, campaign against religious bigotry after Bhivandi riots (1984), National Conferences on Perspectives for Women's Liberation Movement in India (1980-Mumbai, 1985- Mumbai, 1988- Patna, 1990- Calicut).

Personal Charm

Sonalben was highly creative, full of humour and wit, warm and caring, hospitable for the colleagues from underserved communities. From the wide range of feminists that I have known, what set Sonal apart from others in the feminist movement was her open-door policy and readiness to help at the time of crisis. Other feminists were politically correct and articulate but are not accessible to "common" women, at the most they showed paternalistic concern or curiosity in the lives of 'women with problems', but they carefully guarded their own privacy. On the other hand, Sonalben was friend in need and accessible to fellow feminists, colleagues and friends at the time of their difficult circumstances. She always balanced advocacy work with relief operations in terms of food, clothes, medical aid, teaching, counselling and capacity building.

Creation of Feminist Cultural Alternatives

Right from the post emergency period, Sonal had been active in the autonomous women's groups and housed the first feminist newsletter (1978-1980), cultural subcommittee of Forum Against Oppression of Women (1981-82) for campaign building, Women's Centre (1982- 1984) to provide institutional support to women survivors of violence, Vacha Study Circle (1986-1990) to discuss feminist writings. Sonal registered VACHA in 1990 as a trust. Sonalben's unique contribution to the women's movement has been to integrate alternate cultural activities in the women's movement and through her action she has conveyed feminist ethics of sharing material, financial, emotional and intellectual resources generously with anyone who touched our lives.

Commitment to Secular Humanism

Death, destruction and devastation during communal riots in 1992-93 shook Sonal and she got involved in the relief operations. After Bombay Riots got over, she decided to devote her life to strive for creation of young minds with secular humanism. In this effort, Sonal was actively supported by several professionally competent women as volunteers. Prof. Dineshwari Thonse, Mrs. Kumud Shanbaug, Prof. Nina Haeems and Prof. Vrijendra, media personality Nischint Hora and theatre artist Utkarsh Majumdar, Sonal's

brother Uday Majumdar (Music Director) and sister Meenal Patel (actress) whole-heartedly supported VACHA in creation of cultural resources such as documentary films, audio cassette of feminist songs in Gujarati and Hindi. Under Sonal's visionary leadership, VACHA channelised collective energy in empowerment of poorest of the poor adolescent girls in 18 bustees (communities) in Mumbai through education, skill training and exposure programmes along with focus on livelihood issues. VACHA's personality development programmes were marked by message of empowerment, self-care, recreation and importance of education. While counselling women survivors of violence, girls facing constraints and housewives facing restrictions, she would always share her experiences and convince them not only to set high goals but also achieve those goals with the support of feminist sisters. In this heroic journey, her co-travellers were feminists Swatija Manorama, Anju Jani, Darshana Joshi, Medhavinee Nanjoshi and Amrita De.

Reaching Out

Sonal Shukla's best quality was her sense of humour, sharp wit, magnificent and enchanting personality and command over languages- Gujarati, Hindi and English. She was a brilliant and erudite orator. Her caustic remarks at times brought sharp reaction, but it also brought transformative changes in the mindset. She was well-known among social activists as a comrade in need and always very hospitable. She shared her intellectual and material resources with utmost generosity. She lived for others- her friends, her students and members of the organisations with which she was associated. Wherever she went, she made everyone laugh with her unique sense of humour based on her immediate observations, anecdotes with cross section of people, choice of the most effective words-terminologies and phrases, naughtiness and spirited laughter even in the midst of difficult circumstances

Vision of VACHA as an Institution to Voice the Rights of Adolescent Girls Sonal visualised Vacha as a women's group involved in social research and action. Vacha started with a women's library and since has developed several community-based programmes dealing with research, documentation and training, a children's centre, and a cultural centre. The VACHA library maintained a collection of serious books, fictions and documents on women's issues. Since most available written material on women's issues is in English,

Vacha also collects, creates, and disseminates cultural resources such as songs, skits, audio and video material concerning women's rights. Vacha collective is composed of a group of women with varied backgrounds such as social activism, community work, media, research, management, law, writing, finance, teaching and training.

Just a week before her demise, Sonalben visited us at our home and spent 3 hours taking optimistically about VACHA girls, she said, “The adolescent girls are surpassing earlier milestones in the area of education, vocation, sports and cultural activities by displaying tremendous grit and hard work. They are setting new benchmarks in their success stories in spite of socio-economic and cultural hurdles. Now the state and civil society need to remove the institutional and cultural constraints so that the adolescent girls can realise their dreams. Providing good and healthy role models for adolescent girls is very important. Let the Girls Bloom. They are the future of this planet.” She was full of praise of the current leadership of VACHA directed by Dineshwari Thonse, Yagna Parma, Steffi Fernando and Rupali Pethkar.

Mother of hundreds of daughters

Sonal was a great giver and lived for others. On March 8, 2021, Sonal was awarded ‘An icon of the Women’s movement in India and across the globe!’ under the banner of Gender Icon Award instituted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), India. On the same day, Graphic Novel, penned by veteran feminist journalist Jyoti Punwani and illustrated by Sharad Sharma, capturing milestones of Sonal’s life was released in social media for free downloads. Currently this FES publication has gone viral.

Sonal has left a glorious legacy by mentoring hundreds of young girls who are working with honesty of purpose and feminist vision even in the midst of COVID19 pandemic. Till the end Sonal was continuously in touch with the VACHA team to guide its education programme and relief operations such as distribution of ration kits, sanitary material, computers for online education under the lock down. Sonal’s quest for participatory democracy was crystalised in VACHA’s motto, Nothing about us, without us and nothing about girls without girls.

References:

Sonal Shukla (2021) An icon of the Women's movement in India and across the globe!

[https://india.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Gender Icons - individual - India.pdf](https://india.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Gender_Icons_-_individual_-_India.pdf)

Books, pamphlets, Newsletters, songs, films by VACHA:

<https://vacha.org.in/resources>

**KAMLA BHASIN
(1946 to 2021)**

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel



Kamla Bhasin has left us. Her passing has caused an irreparable loss to the feminist movement and One Billion Rising Movement in Asia. *Kamladi*, as she was popularly known, lives in her songs, verses, stories, speeches, publications in multiple languages and the most importantly in our hearts and minds. Thousands of scholars, activists, young adults with non-English background (ridiculed by their elite peers as VERNACs) got their understanding of feminism by studying Kamla Bhasin's booklets of Feminism, Patriarchy, Gender-based violence so on and so forth. Kamla made discourses on

women's rights accessible to the first-generation learners. Kamala became their window/door/pathway for the feminist worldview.

Kamla Bhasin was a founder member of Jagori , Pacific and Asia Forum (1985-1995), South Asia Women Network, Aurat Foundation and played pivotal role in forging solidarity among the feminist movements across the South Asian Countries. She actively supported Indian Association for Women's Studies right from its inception, was also the General Secretary of IAWS for Jaipur Conference and attended all IAWS National Conferences. In the last Conference at National Law University, Delhi Kamala's speech

brought to the fore heroism of the women's rights movement and raised slogans for protecting the Constitution of India and of course, her most popular slogan of AZADI raised in her spirited style echoed the conference hall and lifted everybody's spirit. In the month of May, 2021, we had invited her as a chief Guest to address the International Conference but due to her medical investigation she could not join us. We had a long conversation on the telephone.

On a personal note: My mother was a great fan of Kamla. She was so enchanted by Kamla's deconstruction of the concept of PATRIACHY in a palatable manner in TV series '*Satyamev Jayate*' that she discussed it with all her peers endlessly!!

Women's movement in India has lost three veteran and visionary feminists within one month, Gail Omvedt on 25-8-2021, Sonal Shukla on 9-9-2021 and Kamla Bhasin on 25-9-2021.

Women's movement in India will miss your live performances- electrifying singing, energetic dancing and forceful speeches for assertion of women's rights and secular humanism.

In sisterhood and solidarity with all fellow feminists of Jagori- SANGAT-Equity Foundation and many more, friends and family members of Kamla Bhasin.



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GUIDELINES TO THE CONTRIBUTORS

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