

Urdhva Mula



ਭਰਵ ਮੂਲ:

(Roots Upwards)



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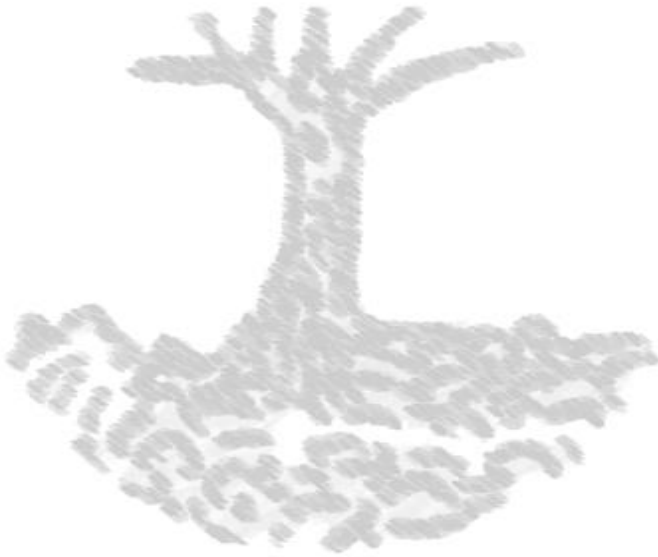
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Urdhva Mula
(Roots Upwards)

An Interdisciplinary Women's Studies Journal



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

(From *The Bhagavad Gita*)

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EDITORIAL

We express our feminist solidarity to the sisters from Afghanistan, Iran and Ukraine who have suffered massive human miseries during this year.

Dear friends,

We are meeting once again in the post-pandemic period with new insights and newer challenges. We express our feminist solidarity to the sisters from Afghanistan, Iran and Ukraine who have suffered massive human miseries during this year.

This issue of *Urdhva Mula* is trying to capture the pulse of current times.

Primary research based article entitled, “Is reservation for Women in India contributing to the process of Women Empowerment? - A reality check” by Eyogavee and Uma Gengaiyah provides specific policy prescriptions to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions and deepen democracy by showcasing case study of Tamil Nādu.

Dr. Sunita Dhal’s article on “Gender and Ecological Knowledge: Exploring its inter-linkage from a Feminist Political Ecological Position” is important for intersectional perspective building on gender, environment and climate change. She convincingly argues that rural women are the ‘knowledge bearers’ in domains like agriculture and health care however, men can be seen as practitioners of specific kind of local knowledge and disseminate to the wider community.

“Locating Bangladeshi women in West Bengal” by Dr. Mrinalini Subba profiles multifaceted challenges and vulnerabilities faced by women survivors of cross-country migration.

Dr. Kapil Tamang’s article titled, “Colonial to Globalised Tea Plantation: Women tea workers and their negotiations” brings to the fore a nuanced historical understanding of changing contours of precarity of women workers in the tea plantations.

“Challenges Faced by Women Domestic Workers During Pandemic - A Case Study of Lucknow City” by Dr. Anupma Srivastava and Ms. Naina Kumar

captures the woes of domestic workers in the urban context in the midst of national level healthy emergency experienced during 2020-21.

Dr. Vimla Ramchandran's poem, *The Year That was* vividly portrays the pain of pandemic triggered human miseries during the pandemic and *Moment of Silence before I start this* by Emmanuel Ortiz pays homage to silent sufferers and active fighters against dictatorship, terrorism and xenophobia.

Reports and statements on contemporary activities are hope generating and serve as candles in the dark.

Urdhva Mula has offered tribute to veteran women's studies luminary of the North East India, Dr. Temsula Ao (1942-2022) for her lifelong commitment to Naga culture, human dignity, and women's rights.

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

Prof. Vibhuti Patel

Dr. (Sr.) Ananda Amritmahal

ARTICLE

Is reservation for Women in India contributing to the process of Women Empowerment - A reality check?

- Eyogavee

- Uma Gengaiyah

Abstract

The present study is conducted to know the training requirement of young Elected Women Panchayat Presidents in Tamil Nadu. It was conducted through the virtual mode. The study is part of the six-month training programme organized by the Institute of Grassroots Governance (IGG). The Institute of Grassroots Governance (IGG) is a registered Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) working to strengthen grassroots democracy. The institute (IGG) was perceived by the Department of Local Governance and Development alumni from Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development. The purpose of the study was to provide specific policy prescriptions to the government of Tamil Nadu to strengthen Panchayati raj institutions and deepen democracy. There were certain limitations in the present study, including a virtual mode of conducting study due to the COVID 19 pandemic and the limitation in the selected sample, which is only from the State of Tamil Nadu.

Introduction

The percentage of women participating in politics has been more or less constant in parliament and State assemblies since independence in India. At the same time, women's participation in local governments has increased many folds in India due to the passage of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (CAAs). Thus, Affirmative action, like the reservation for women in politics, plays a significant role in increasing women's participation at various levels in politics. After looking at the success of women in politics in local governments, sub-national and national levels in India and Nordic countries, the need for increasing women's reservation in politics to bring gender-sensitive policies and programs has gained momentum. The government of

India introduced 108 Constitutional Amendment bills in the Parliament to provide reservations for women.

The upper house (Rajya Sabha) of the Parliament passed the bill for providing reservations for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. The bill is still pending with the Lower House (Lok Sabha) from 2010 for providing 1/3rd reservation of seats for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies (<https://prsindia.org/billtrack/womens-reservation-bill-the-constitution-108th-amendment-bill-2008-45>). The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) came in to force in 1993. The State Assemblies of India passed a bill providing reservations to women in Local Bodies (Both urban and rural) according to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. The State Assembly of Tamil Nadu passed Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act 1994 (https://tnrd.gov.in/pract/tnpa_index_new.html) following 73rd and 74th CAAs with 33 percent reservation which later increased to 50 percent (tnrd.gov.in). Women in local governments have been at the helm of affairs for 25 years. The academicians are responsible for studying the impact of the 73rd and 74th CAA on women and marginalized sections of society. Various factors related to the 73rd CAA need to be studied to make more meaningful acts further for formulating gender-sensitive policies and programmes to make society gender-just. We assume that the 73rd CAA has positively impacted young and adult women in Tamil Nadu to aspire to become politicians after looking at data related to local body elections. With this assumption, the research was carried out by the Institute of Grassroots Governance (IGG) with the following objectives.

- To empower the young women panchayat leaders by providing training virtually on need-based issues.
- To involve the young girl graduates in empowering young women panchayat leaders.
- To understand the field reality and mindset of the newly elected young women representatives.

The present paper is based on the Institute of Grassroots Governance (IGG) research. The first author is part of the implementation of the six-month project. The second author facilitated field-based IGG representatives on gender issues.

Rationale and Background- Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions

The opportunities created to involve women in Governance in Panchayati raj institutions slowly and surely impact grassroots governance (Chattopadhyay, Raghabendra and Esther Duflo, 2004). We can tell that the foundations have been laid to extend this social revolution to all levels of decision-making. India has 12.6 percent of the elected representatives in its Parliament (ipu.org). The 73rd and 74th CAA enactment has facilitated many women in rural and urban local governments. Local governments are perceived to be close to people, and they could bring positive changes in the lives and livelihoods of the people. Local governments have existed before the 73rd CAA in rural areas. However, it has existed with the support of State governments in India. The elections are held for Panchayats only if State governments are sensitive enough to realize the significance of Local Governments before enacting the 73rd CAA. There was no reservation for women and marginalized communities before the 73rd CAA.

Nevertheless, the 73rd CAA gave constitutional status to the panchayats with the following significance. As the Panchayati Raj System (Local Governments in the rural areas), a Uniform three-tier system was created with district Panchayats/ Zilla Parishad, Block level (Panchayat Samiti) and Village level (Gram Panchayats). The Act has also created opportunities to establish a finance commission and election commission to conduct elections regularly and allocate necessary finances to address the needs of the local people.

Gram Panchayat needs to conduct *gram sabha* meetings a minimum of two times a year to discuss the overall development of the panchayats in all aspects. The constitutional guarantee to conduct regular elections also helped the panchayats to fill the vacant seats within six months if the seats became vacant.

It was 33.3 per cent of seats reserved for initial years for women, and later it was extended to 50 per cent for women. Reservation of seats for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) is according to the proportion of their populations. State Government transferred certain functions and functionaries to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. There are 2, 53,268 gram Panchayats in India. In that, 12, 92,203 were elected as women representatives in Gram Panchayats.

Here, we are raising pertinent questions through this research. One is whether the reservation for women has brought intended results to empower women? Can they exercise their agency to decide to contest elections and manage panchayats independently? The 73rd CAA was the most significant step in independent India to empower women politically and increase their representation in political institutions. The existing studies (Palanithurai G, M.A. Thirunavukarasu and G Uma, 2008, Siva Ram P et al., 2016) showed that they could lead the panchayat independently to take collective decisions to make local body institutions meaningful for deepening democracy. However, we can witness the various issues and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) faced by women in the day-to-day affairs of panchayats. This paper was specifically written based on the Institute of Grassroots Governance (IGG) study to know the reality of reservation and the role of women in addressing the same.

Methodology

The present paper is based on the study conducted by the Institute of Grassroots Governance (IGG), a Non-governmental organization (NGO) working at the grassroots. The first author of this paper was part of the project, and she collected the data. The second author conducted sessions for volunteers on gender issues to collect the data from feminist perspectives and conduct training online in a gender-sensitive manner. As per the local body election conducted in 2019 in Tamil Nadu, 50% of the representatives in the local governments are women. More than 20% (166) were young and educated. The present study was designed to know the training requirement among young

elected representatives in the local governments. The first author took contact numbers of young women elected presidents of gram panchayats from the website of the election commission of Tamil Nadu and contacted them over the phone. The data about the women representatives, like contact numbers, were retrieved from the Election Commission of India website within a month after elections through their uploaded nomination forms. We have created a WhatsApp group of young women panchayat leaders, and we constantly interact with them to know their status and position in the gram panchayats.

The study was conducted virtually by creating rapport with the presidents through phone calls. The total number of districts selected for the study was 25 from the districts namely, Namakkal, Thiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, Thiruvanamalai, Nagapattinam, Karur, Theni, Dindigul, Pudukottai, Virudhunagar, Sivagangai, Madurai, Coimbatore, Tirupur, Salem, Erode, Ramanathapuram, Thoothukudi, Perambalur, Cuddalore, Thiruvarur, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Ariyalur and Thiruvallur. Few online sessions were conducted through Google meet for the researchers of IGG to collect the data in a gender-sensitive manner to know the requirement of women representatives and provide specific policy recommendations. The present study was conducted virtually due to the COVID 19 pandemic. The following steps were undertaken to conduct the study online. As per the data, 119 young women panchayat presidents got elected in the 2019 rural local body election in Tamil Nadu. Six young female interns from different institutions like Madras University, Madras Christian College, and development practitioners from NGOs were recruited as Volunteering Associates for the study to communicate with the presidents and to involve them in the training process.

IGG assigned 17 to 20 presidents for each associate to work with. The associates became responsible for creating a rapport with presidents and collecting necessary data for the study. We conducted an orientation programme on Sept 01, 2020, with ten volunteering associates, IGG team members, and IGG mentors. The associates were trained to know the significance of the 73rd CAA and how to create a rapport with young women

panchayat presidents to collect the data related to training requirements. Associates were provided with existing literature related to articles and documents of local governments, 73rd CAA, and the significance of performing the role of women Panchayat leaders in a gender-sensitive manner. The documents and research articles had been provided to the associates to make them aware of the concepts before talking to the women panchayat presidents. They were provided a week to read and analyse the documents. They shared their experience after reviewing the existing literature.

All discussions were conducted through Google meet. The associates were given proper communication training before building a rapport with the presidents. There were ten associates, and we divided them into teams. Each team had two members. They shared their day-to-day experiences among themselves, and they helped each other based on field reality. The role play was conducted to sensitize the associates to know the communication process to communicate with women gram panchayat presidents. The weekend discussion was organized to unwind from the week's activities and learn from each other. It took three weeks to build trust among presidents through the virtual model. After building a rapport with panchayat presidents, the associates were told to identify the needs of the presidents. Everyone had been assigned to a separate google sheet where they documented the day-to-day activities. The associates also noted the panchayat president's willingness to attend the training program in the excel sheet. The facilitators' availability on WhatsApp and google meet were also noted and informed among panchayat presidents.

Need for reservation of seats for women in Politics

Gender and development (GAD) discourse has shed considerable light on the concept of empowerment and has addressed several important questions like what constitutes empowerment? Who empowers whom? In empowerment, building leadership qualities among women is a significant component. The reservation of seats for women and other marginalized sections of society in political institutions has gained momentum to make women politically

empowered. The necessary legislation was passed by assuming that the critical mass of women panchayat presidents are expected to perform critical functions like addressing Gender-Based Violence, accessing and controlling common properties, and ensuring women's participation in all bodies at the gram panchayat level to improve the lives and livelihoods of women and marginalized sections of society in their constituency. The present research paper was based on a study conducted in Tamil Nadu, India. Tamil Nadu, one of the states in India, had two women Chief Ministers. Tamil Nadu politics has significance in Indian politics from the perspective of social transformation due to the impact of the Dravidian Movement. In the Dravidian Movement, under the leadership of E.V. Ramasamy Naicker (Periyar), women's emancipation was an important area of political action that trained the leaders to internalize the concept of women's liberation and empowerment of women (K Veeramani, 1994).

Women's issues captured the central stage after Dravidian political parties came into electoral politics and assumed power. Both Dravidian political parties (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) have enacted a series of legislations to address issues of women and marginalized sections of the society. The Dravidian movement and subsequent political power among Dravidian parties have positively impacted the process of social transformation in Tamil Nadu. However, it could not address the deep-rooted patriarchy in Tamil society. Thus, the status and position of women in Tamil Nadu have improved at a certain level, especially there was an improvement in women's education, and women could begin to access political institutions. At the same time, they could not control the political institutions. It did not transform the existing gender relations to bring equity and equality. It just means that the position of women in Tamil Nadu, compared with that of other Indian states, maybe better (G Palanithurai and V Raghupathy, 2003). Nevertheless, the statistics tell a different story. As per the human development index, the vast majority of the women in Tamil Nadu are illiterate, in poor health, invisible in national

accounts and suffer legal, political, economic and social discrimination (G Palanithurai and V Raghupathy,2003).

The 1999 Report on Human Development in South Asia advocated that if Governance promotes human development, it must go beyond pro-people or people-centred. It has to be owned by the people. Women account for half the population of South Asia, yet they remain mostly invisible in all governing institutions. Women hold the top positions in major political parties of the region, yet these powerful positions have not translated into positive outcomes for most South Asian women. Most political parties do not even maintain data on their women membership; few women are granted party tickets for elections. In some countries, women are more visible in local governance structures than in any other governing institution. Most gains have been made in India, where one-third of the seats in Panchayats are reserved for women. However, gender bias pervades all levels of Governance in South Asia, which may be one of the reasons for the region's governance crisis.

In this regard, one of the significant goals set out by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1998 in Beijing was adequate representation of women in all decision-making bodies. It was suggested that in any representative body, there should be a logical balance of men and women to voice the concerns of the society en masse (Inshrat Shamin, Ranjani Kumari, 2002). Good Governance is the exercise of this authority, with active participation, interest, and livelihood as the driving force. The exercise of political authority largely influences decisions, and the political participation of men and women occupy a prominent position in Governance (Palanithurai G and Vanishree J. 2002).

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment and the subsequent Tamil Nadu Panchayati Raj Act 1994 have brought many women into politics at the grassroots level. This reservation in Panchayats has sparked the erosion of the traditional gender, caste, class, roles and hierarchy, but it is a long and challenging process. Women have to fight for their right to be more than proxy

members and break the barriers of gender division of labour, illiteracy, low level of mobility, seclusion, and lack of training and information, which will continue to exist without enough support from the power structure. Women's low self-esteem at the household level and their new role in local bodies where they are now expected to function as leaders create a contradiction between women's roles at home and local government institutions (Inshrat Shamin, Ranjani Kumari, 2002).

Issues identified based on the study.

The present study was able to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The same was presented below. The present study was conducted based on the 2019 elections for local governments. Based on the research output, over 50% of women were elected as Panchayat representatives, and more than 20% are young (14 to 20) women Panchayat Presidents. We further collected both quantitative and qualitative data online. Based on the data collected online during online training, we learned that the mobile numbers of male family members are provided in the nomination papers. Those mobile numbers either belong to fathers or husbands. Male members of the family (either husband or father) attended the call when the first author contacted the young elected women Panchayat presidents for the first time for the present study. Male family members acted as Presidents of the gram panchayats even though they were not elected, and women who filed the nomination for the position got elected. Still, they were mute spectators in panchayat functioning. Husbands or fathers run the office of the gram panchayats on their behalf, and women members sign wherever their signature is sought. The major issues we have identified were proxy. Males are unwilling to give the phone to women, and the proxy says that "she does not know anything and you need to kindly talk to me" (male family member of women Gram panchayat President).

The next issue is a lack of awareness of the significance of reservation. Most women were compelled to contest the election by their family members only in the name of reservation. When we had the opportunity to talk with the women, one of the respondents said, "I do not know anything. You can talk

with my husband or father", and the worst scenario researcher faced was that we were not able to talk to around 10% of the women presidents. Their husbands or father would not allow us to talk to them. At the end of the research, only 2 to 3 presidents among 166 actively took part in the panchayat as president of the gram panchayat; others are Presidents in the official record only. Someone else is running the panchayat in the name of women presidents. The present paper brought the reality of reservation. The number of women assumed as presidents of gram panchayats is more than 50%. The existing patriarchy and gender roles did not allow women representatives to function as independent leaders even though they could do the same. They were not allowed to empower themselves politically and take a leadership position. They have succumbed to male domination. They acted as presidents in the name of the proxy. Women presidents lacked awareness within themselves and were unwilling to take measures on their own to come out from the clutches of patriarchy.

The Panchayat President has to follow many rules and regulations to administer office as per the 73rd CAA and Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1994. Many women Panchayat Presidents were unaware of the existing constitutional roles and responsibilities. The present study contacted only young first-time elected panchayat president/representatives who were new to the field. They needed awareness about reservation, its significance, laws related to affirmative action and gender training. Tamil Nadu government has conducted training through the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) to train women leaders on their behalf. Our second objective of the present study was to identify their training needs. Training Institutes can conduct training based on the results of our study later. It is significant to empower young women leaders to make them change-makers. The existing research highlighted the importance of training and capacity building to empower women politically. The trained, empowered women leaders can act as facilitators for others. In Tamil Nadu, the Local governments are not functioning up to the mark compared to states like Kerala and Sikkim. We can conclude about the

functioning of gram panchayats due to our interactions with women panchayat presidents on their awareness of the importance of local government in bringing social and gender justice. Some panchayat presidents undertook the innovative initiative and were able to improve their gram panchayats to socio-economic factors. Most gram panchayat presidents work as State and Central governments' subordinates. The main reason behind such issues was that there was no proper awareness of their powers, rules and regulations. Only very few Panchayat elected representatives/ presidents knew the significance of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. The present study was conducted to know how the existing patriarchy operates at various levels in women's lives. We consider that gram panchayats are the place for vibrant and inclusive democracy. Thus, the Institute of Grassroots Governance (IGG) focused on young educated women Panchayat presidents in 'Strengthening Young Women Village Panchayat Presidents of Tamil Nadu'. Focusing on young women leaders was to know the significance of deepening democracy. They must know the reasons behind formulating certain schemes and programmes by the State and Central governments. The same programme and policies needed to be implemented to bring a social and gender-just society. It is the responsibility of the panchayats to improve the socio-economic conditions of the poor, vulnerable and economically backward in their constituency. The training and capacity building might make them transformative leaders. The performance of gender-sensitive, young women leaders may influence future generations to contest elections. More women may come forward and wish to stand in the elections independently. The entire process itself strengthens women leaders as well as their Village Panchayats. Mrs Sumathi Athigathur, former gram Panchayat President, shared her experience and challenges as a woman panchayat president in one session online. Each session was reviewed, and the subsequent sessions were planned accordingly. So far, IGG has conducted two training programmes based on our study. IGG also invited other friendly organizations to attend the online training programmes. The present study and subsequent trainings were conducted through virtual mode. It was quite challenging for the associates to build a rapport with the presidents. It took

nearly 3 to 4 weeks to build the trust. Many Panchayat Presidents were not using smartphones, so we could not involve them frequently in training. The main issue identified by the present study was the proxy issues. We assumed that since more than fifty per cent of women presidents in gram panchayats, they can act as a critical mass to bring critical change. In reality, the entire situation in the field was different. More than half of the elected women panchayat presidents have faced proxy issues. The male members in the family have been performing the roles of the women panchayat presidents. The contact numbers of a considerable percentage of women panchayat presidents were with their husbands or fathers. They were doing panchayat work instead of their daughters and wives. Associates contacted them. In some cases, the proxies did not give the women the phone to talk. In other cases, even if the woman attended the call, she said that she was unaware of anything and asked associates to contact her husband or father. Even for training sessions, husbands started participating. We were in a situation where we did not want to lose contact with women leaders by developing trust issues. Thus, we have informed them to participate together in training. There were 46 panchayat presidents in the WhatsApp group, but they did not participate in the training. To identify the cause, we contacted the presidents; some were afraid and shy to participate, and some were unwilling as it is in virtual mode. Four were removed from the project for non-responsive and personal reasons among ten volunteering associates. The rest of the associates shared the contacts equally among themselves. The present paper is based on a 6-month virtual project. There were 46 women panchayat presidents in the WhatsApp group. Even though there was less participation among the presidents, they remained in the group and responded to their questions. Some presidents called and clarified their doubts on financial issues in their panchayat. At the end of the project, six volunteering associates had improved their communication skills and learned about the importance of local Governance and women empowerment in local governments. We have visited Kilseeshamangalam Village, Thiruvanamalai District and discussed with Panchayat President Ms. Sumalatha during the study. It was planned to initiate a pilot study in one

district. We have chosen Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu. IGG has decided to continue to impart training among women in the other districts in collaboration with local organizations. After completing the study and knowing the training requirements of young women panchayat presidents, IGG has planned to provide training virtually. The further training based on data collected through this study was given virtually through young girl volunteers. The list of training requirements was identified after the need analysis and listed below.

1) Experience sharing by a successful women panchayat leaders 2) Finance, 3) Roles and Responsibilities of panchayat presidents 4) Documentation and accounting procedures 5) Rules, regulations and strategies to mobilize women and the marginalized for the meetings (Grama Sabha, Panchayat Council meeting) 6) Roles and significance of Committees 7) Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) 8) Women Empowerment, and 9) E-Governance.

Conclusion and Policy Prescription

The present study was carried out specifically to provide specific policy prescriptions. We found that it is essential to conduct more field-based research studies to identify the issues of women panchayat presidents and their difficulties of being women. Secondly, it is significant to know how gender operates in the case of reservation fields in South Asian countries and how patriarchy operates in male-dominated politics. To make local body institutions truly gender-sensitive, it is pertinent to provide gender training to all aspirant candidates well before election dates. The training should be given to both male and female and other gender aspirants. Female, male and other genders are unaware of the rules and 73rd CAA. These were the major issues identified in the field. If these have been taken care at the field, the opportunity for women at the grassroots level would be adequately utilized. It would be the starting step for actual women's empowerment. During this study, we identified the gaps in women's empowerment in the local governments. Some presidents want to change their panchayat but face many issues like proxies, administration pressure, and caste. To solve these issues, organizations like

IGG would like to create a virtual forum in every district of Tamil Nadu for Women Panchayat Presidents. Other field-based organizations may follow the same to empower women politically. This will undoubtedly build leadership qualities among women and also empower them.

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The Year That Was

2021 was a year like no other
We hoped the virus would weaken
Or that we would have the ability
To overcome its deadly sting
But that was not to be...

Heart wrenching it was
for many of us
lost friends and family members,
witnessed the nightmare of
losing jobs, losing livelihoods,
the cloud of fading hope...
yes, many lost hope
wondering what was in store for us.

Tragic and painful of all,
the closure of schools
children stuck at home
some fortunate ones learnt online
most rural and urban children
had no devices, could not connect
or navigate a medium that was unreliable

Our children did not “learn” the school curriculum
But most of them learnt
so much about life,
about how unfair the world is
about poverty
about inequality

Many older children
went back to work, if they could,
got married, in virtual ceremonies/celebrations,
or looked for work
to lighten their parents’ burden.

Women experienced more violence
navigating their lives
within the four walls of home
Regardless of its size or of social status
many more women saw the ugly side of cloistered living—
verbal and physical abuse
Working from home may seem a luxury
Ask teachers how they managed home and school/ college work,
How professionals juggled computer, kitchen, children,
and demanding people around them.

Men and women of all ages
lost their jobs or their one source of livelihood,
Eating—may be once a day,
clutching their hearts as they
told their children there is no food
They have so much to tell us
But did we listen?

Our media was busy
showing us graphs of Covid cases and deaths
Or election related news
But not showing
What was really happening
To us in India...

We are wounded as a nation
As a community
Polarized
Pained
Seeing optimism and hope
fading away....

Yet, all is not gone or dead
There is still hope
We are gradually seeing
Eyes lighting up...

When someone here and someone there
Decided to say—enough is enough
We will stand up and be counted
We will seize the narrative

The prolonged struggle of our farmers
through summer, monsoon and winter
resonated with so many people
across the length and breadth of our beloved country
The withdrawal of the three farm laws
And the steadfast commitment of women and men
Was a silver lining framing dark clouds

Will 2022 bring joy to children
as they run back to school?
Optimism as more people
get back jobs or find work?
Hope as the economy recovers
And the political narrative changes?

This is not asking much
Hope, optimism, some joy
And the shrill and happy voices
of children as they reclaim
their rightful place
in school.

Let's all usher in 2022
With a twinkle of hope in our eyes

- Dr. Vimla Ramchandran



Gender and Ecological Knowledge: Exploring its inter-linkage from a Feminist Political Ecological Position

- Sunita Dhal

Abstract

Social Institutions along with inherent patriarchies is set of factors affecting gender inequality in the Third world. These factors simultaneously produce segregated gender roles for women and men across different spheres of life. The gendered division of roles is also visible or apparent in spheres of ecology where women's access to certain forms of subsistence knowledge gains recognition in the realm of agriculture and the same knowledge may be underplayed or completely ignored in the realm of alternative healing practices. While studying the process of knowledge construction and dissemination in the field, the researcher observed women as the linchpin between the practice of ecological knowledge and surviving such knowledge for future. I argue that rural women are the 'knowledge bearers' in domains like agriculture and health care however, men can be seen as practitioners of a specific kind of local knowledge and disseminate that to the wider community.

Background

Social Institutions along with inherent patriarchies is a set of factors affecting gender inequality in the Third world. These factors simultaneously produce segregated gender roles for women and men across different spheres of life. The gendered division of roles is also visible or apparent in spheres of ecology where women's access to certain forms of subsistence knowledge gains recognition in the realm of agriculture and the same knowledge may be underplayed or completely ignored in the realm of alternative healing practices. There has been a wide range of literature focussing on gendered segregation that exists in the domain of institutionalised knowledge forms. However, this form of gender division continues to operate even in the realm of local knowledge system among its practitioners.

In the context of ecological knowledge and sustainability debates, women are primarily recognised as potential means of knowledge bearers (Shiva,

1988). But the questions which remained unaddressed at the grass root level include: is the domain of ecological knowledge system gendered in nature? Is there any gender politics that relates to the division of tasks within this domain? and how gender roles and relations are shaped by patriarchy are still an under researched area in the sphere of ecological knowledge? With this background, the current paper intends to uncover the gender politics that inherently govern the local knowledge systems pertaining to traditional agriculture and health care. The paper uses feminist political ecology as an analytical framework to analyse a set of case studies that were collected from rural Odisha. It is an exploratory research which entails to analyse traditional practices of seed preservation and alternative healing practices from a gender perspective. The paper argues that gender identity plays a vital role even in the informal domain of knowledge formation. Central to the idea of this paper is the concept of feminist political ecology to argue that understanding of gender equality and ecological sustainability has to be mapped through the experiences of the local which is shaped by power relations and patriarchy.

In recent years, emphasis on agriculture and environment has been on studying local knowledge and utilizing it in the development of new technology. Perhaps, fairly insufficient attention has been paid to the nature of knowledge formation and its operation at the community level. Further, the politics of knowledge use is a recurring theme in feminist literature (Hawthorne, 2008: 38). The politics of knowledge use as a concept encompasses discussions on marginal knowledge forms; issues of decision-making; and the survival of local knowledge system amidst globalization and increasing uniformity across different sectors. These discussions can be understood broadly from two perspectives such as: feminist environmentalism and feminist political ecological framework. Further, the feminist political ecological framework draws attention towards the nature of gendered knowledge while emphasizing on the notion of access and control of these knowledge systems from a gender lens.

The literature on feminism and ecology justifies women's central role in agriculture, conservation and biodiversity management. Eco-feminist scholars argue that women's engagement with ecology is closely connected to their process of social formation; therefore in the network of society and sustainability, women are primarily seen as potential actors. On the one hand, tenets of sustainable paradigm recognize women as bearers of local knowledge, simultaneously women and their embodied practices still own marginal positions in academic disciplines and when local or traditional knowledge is not valued by the market forces. To cite Hawthorne (2008), "appropriation is the first step in the globalization process, and relies on making invisible the knowledge of the diversity of matrix, denying its existence and then remaking it in a form which suits the needs of the dominant group" (p.91). Hawthorne explains appropriation of local knowledge in the context of the market force by which market will gain access to private space which will eventually lead to "cultural homogenization" by appropriating the local knowledge and practices (2008: 92). The structure of both western and local knowledge systems is different across cultures. Within the system of community knowledge, certain local practices are marginalised perhaps considered to be a feminized and/or invisible practice within the community.

The literature community-based initiatives has captured the gendered differences in resource management however it needs to map out the politics that shape the understanding of local knowledge management. Arguably, the domain of alternative healing is primarily managed by the menfolk within the community vis-a-vis the field of agriculture or the practice of seed management is shaped by the experiences of women. This study locates the construction of local knowledge very much within a rigid gender structure, process and interaction. It explored that the areas of subsistence agriculture and alternative healing practices embody different gender roles which informs about the gendered nature of knowledge building and management at the grass-roots. The study reflected that various community-led practices have gendered

segregated roles which simultaneously marginalizes and prioritizes women's knowledge within the community.

Feminist political ecology (FPE) as an analytical framework provides a significant insight into the analysis of local knowledge from a gender perspective. It argues that gender in relation to other social instructions like class, race and ethnicity shapes access to and control over natural resources (Sandburg: 1) It further argues that how a particular form of knowledge is constructed and legitimised within a particular community. Feminist political ecologists such as Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangari (1996) in their work identified gendered ecological knowledge and practices as significant areas of research within ecology. To further this argument, the current paper seeks to explore how gender inequalities exist in different forms even in the realm of ecological knowledge system. To cite Sandburg, "since many women around the world labour in social spheres that historically have been excluded from analysis, addressing the particularities of their knowledge and practices requires asking questions about what scales of political ecological life count as relevant. The scale of the everyday is where social reproduction takes place, where subject identities and social orders are brought into being and contested" (page). She asserts, FPE draws attention to capture the everyday experiences of women and men along with the household micro-politics that shapes their engagement with ecology. Further, in the context of survival of ecological knowledge and its dissemination, earlier academic literature have priorities women's role in the process of knowledge construction (Hawthorne; Krishna 2009; Mies & Shiva, 2014).

Methodology

This is an exploratory study to find out how gender as an axis of social structure shapes the construction of local knowledge system among the tribal and rural communities of Odisha. The field study was undertaken in Kandhmal and Mayurbhanja districts of Odisha. Data was collected through unstructured interviews and focus group discussions with the practitioners of local

knowledge system. Research participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods. To understand the survival and dissemination of indigenous knowledge system from a gender perspective, the research engages with the community of knowledge practitioners in areas of agriculture and healing. Therefore, purposive sampling method was used to select the actual sample. Research participant's engagement with knowledge construction and dissemination became the starting point of conversation during interview sessions. Therefore, case notes collected from the field are reflective of certain practices including indigenous seed preservation and the practice of traditional healing to understand the survival of knowledge system from a gender lens.

Analysis

In the practice of seed preservation, women in Kandhmal are seen to be the knowledge bearers. Inferring from the field note, one could make a distinction between knowledge bearers and knowledge practitioners. Kondh women within the family, take responsibility of preserving the seeds and these responsibilities are widely recognized by their men folk of the community. The Kondh men firmly believe that women observe the seeds in each stage of its preservation. It involves actions such as: identifying the healthy fruit, observing these fruits on everyday account, collecting those crops, purifying it, putting on sun for drying, weaving the container to placing the container on an auspicious place. The community identifies seeds to be sacred and the preservation practice involves some kind of on-farm and off-farm rituals, and constitutes an integral domain of women's knowledge system.

Family being the elementary/primary unit of social structure plays a significant role in the functioning and dissemination of the indigenous agricultural practices. Women being the essential of the private realm, play immensely crucial role in internalization of traditional seed preservation practices within the family and community at large. The younger peasants both male and female (within the age group of 25-35 years) attribute, mother or "Maa" as the primary contributor for preserving the local knowledge forms in agriculture. Similarly, for the older generation of farmers, knowing the

knowledge and practices can occur through their accumulated experience and tradition. They defined indigenous seed preservation practices as accumulated experience of our *kondh* peasants, where they see women peasants as the bearer of a specific kind of knowledge.

Case Note 1: For example, the practice of seed preservation in Kandhamal is completely resting on the womenfolk of the region. The use of a container made of bamboo, locally named variously as *Bhoogi*, *Bhogly*, *Bhooga* and *Dooli* is a general practice observed for preserving paddy seeds in the villages. The women members of the family weave the container during their leisure. Often, the weaving of the container is done by a particular Hindu sub-caste group of the region, i.e., *Gujura Jati*. Peasants also purchase the container meant for preserving seeds from the niche market, (locally named, *Hata*). The bamboo containers normally have a tumbler shape with an average height of 3-4 feet. Preservation of the initially harvested paddy is stored for future cultivation, where it would not be infected by pests and diseases. Hence, the first crop of the cultivation (rice) is normally selected as ‘the seed’, as it is nurtured with utmost care and is healthy and pest free. Women peasants always remain vigilant in the case of the first paddy from, its initial growth till harvesting (Field data).

Case Note 2: A mechanical method of paddy seed preservation, in which straws are used extensively to provide a protective shield to the seeds. Seeds are put in a middle-sized metallic bowl, locally termed *Kansa* (with a texture of Aluminum and Hindalium). The metal pot containing paddy seeds is encumbered with straws. The upper and lower portion of the straw is tied with ropes (made up of jute or coconut tree bark) giving shape like a bag and the bag is hanged from the roof. Normally the container is hung in a shady room or preferably in the kitchen. This practice is seen among the peasants belonging to the non-tribal community of the region. A small amount of a few local varieties of rice seeds are preserved in this way. Peasants also preserve

the paddy seeds in pot like gunny bags made up of bundles of straws (Field data).

The practice of preserving indigenous seed starts with the careful selection of seeds followed by their cleaning and drying. Women peasants put the seeds for drying in the sun for two to three days. In certain conditions, women peasants dry the seeds for about six days. The place for drying the seed is generally the backyard, which is mopped with a semi-solid paste prepared from cow dung and mud mixture. After drying, the grains are considered to be ready for preservation as seeds. Before putting the seeds in the preservation container, the peasants insulate the container protecting it from pests and insects. They continue to use the bamboo container for several years until it is broken or destroyed by rats. In case of middle and big peasants, or peasants living in joint households, the container is replaced with a new one every third or fourth year. The container is not meant only for containing rice seeds, but also for the storage of various types of food grains. The bamboo containers are refurbished every year before harvesting. The peasants usually refurbish the container in the month of October. The container is cleaned from all sides. Further, the basket is mopped with a semi-solid mixture of cow dung and mud. The mud used for preparing the semi-solid concentration is usually taken from the cultivable fields or from the area adjacent to the well. The sticky nature of the mud makes the application of the paste uniform, and also helps in blocking the gaps. The rich colour of the container is in itself a fascinating feature. Kondh women give an attractive colour to the container. Then the container is placed in the sun for two to three days for proper drying. After drying, the outer surface of the container is painted with folk local art by the women. The art portrays symbols of the gods and goddesses, and animals, reflecting the women's traditional artistry and manifestation of Kondh religiosity at large.

FDG 1: *Vaidya* (men folk who practice local medicine) at Thakurmunda, Mayurbhanja district shared:

I have been treating illnesses such as back pain, nerve related problems, infertility and pre-menstrual symptoms among women in rural areas with the help of traditional knowledge system. In a group discussion, one *vaidya* narrated ,

“I have been practicing local medicine from past 16 years. Because of my interest, I interacted with local people and acquired knowledge about various traditional medicine. My wife and daughter have been helping me to develop this knowledge skill and also have been supporting me to treat patients. I am a teacher by profession, but this is a kind of social service that I render to the society free of cost. It has never been taken as a profession, since the modern medicine doesn't acknowledge *vaidyas* (local medicinal practitioners) as a form of standardised knowledge and there is no certification to recognise this knowledge system in our local area.

Sources of this knowledge: He further explained that old texts (*Purana/Pothi*) have been the primary sources of this medicinal knowledge. These texts used to be kept with local king of the district or with village priests. Over a period of time, knowledge has been preserved by the head of community (*Dubapal*) who offers prayers on behalf of the community for the wellbeing of the members. My interaction with the local community helps me to procure such significant texts which have helped me to know about different healing practices.

I use forest resources for preparing the medicines. The forest has many plant varieties which have been categorised by the tribal community in their local dialect. While interacting with the community, I got to know about different plant names and started using these local plants to treat people. Since, I have been practising traditional healing for the past 15-16 years the practice has enabled me to recognise different plant varieties and roots (*cheramuli*) in the forest. So far, I have been treating people for the diseases which are

prevalent in our local area. I have been seeing patients who suffer from *bata* (a kind of neurological disorder accompanied with fever) which is common among the found to be existing in the region. Apart from this , illnesses including infertility among women, white discharge, bone treatment, joint pain and pregnancy related pain are generally being treated through local medicine”.

From the field it was inferred that local healing practitioners are treating people for free and in some cases patients are charged nominally for purchasing some ingredients such as sugar or butter from the market. Among local practitioners, there is a sense of belongingness to the community because they stated that this knowledge belongs to the community therefore, it needs to be used for the people. During the fieldwork, it was observed that the household labour is used to prepare different medicines and is primarily contributed by the womenfolk of the household. Even though, women have access to knowledge forms but they have limited role in treating patients. For instance, one respondent shared:

“the ingredients we use in the local medicine are collected from the forest, which belongs to the community. Hence, it is considered as a form of service to the people of that area. Both women and men from the family go to the forest to collect wild roots and plant varieties. This knowledge form doesn’t get disseminated across women members of the family or community for practicing it. This knowledge is only practiced within the *Vaidya* community.

The above narratives reinforced the boundary of gender roles which shapes the community healing practices in which men tend to operate in the mainstream. Women on the other hand continue to operate in the private sphere and support in the survival of this knowledge form within the community. It can be argued that in the realm of local medicinal knowledge, there has been an invisibility of women’s labour which facilitates this knowledge to exist within the local community.

FDG 2: Respondent from the *Vaidya Sangha* at Thakurmunda shared:

“The knowledge exists and spreads through the oral tradition however the actual treatment procedure is passed on to male folk of the community or family. It has never been practiced by the women members. The process of treatment involves identification and collection of roots/plants/leaves/flower from the forest.

“We go to the forest in the morning to collect different roots, plants and flower for preparing medicines and often women collect these plants from forest”. We collect plants/or roots such as: *Satbari, Gwahari, Amla, Harida, Bela, Indrajava, Gajapipali, Basanga, Begunia, Ashoka and so on* from the forest. Women also collect herbs/plants/roots from the forest to prepare the local medicine.

The above narrative depicts clear gender roles between women as recipients of this knowledge form and men as practitioners of local medicinal knowledge. It can be argued that the idea of power is inherently institutionalised within the community to disseminate a particular knowledge form. The purpose of healing is to empower the community however the group or individual who possess the knowledge has the power of decision-making on the behalf of the community or household to practice this knowledge.

Conclusion:

The primary data exhibits the fact that the sphere of traditional knowledge is governed by subtle gender norms. There is complete inclusion of women in the traditional farming practices, and at the same time there has been exclusion of women and their knowledge system for traditional healing practices. Women play an immense role in both practices - local seed preservation and alternative healing however, the nature of their engagement with the traditional knowledge system is governed through community and intra-household norms. In seed preservation practices, women are associated with the work of collection of crop seeds after harvesting, weaving and cleaning of seed storage

containers, mopping of the bamboo container, collection of local leaves for preserving pulses seeds, making packets of local leaves, extracting oil used for preserving seeds, collection of local flowers and different seeds from the forest, preserving the seeds in different kinds of container, and drying up the seeds also constitute the work domain of the women.

Their labour is defined along gender lines irrespective of caste and class of the practitioners of traditional knowledge system. The gender division of role within the women peasant group is recognised within the farming community on the other hand, among the healthcare practitioners an implicit relationship exists between the nature of women's work and the reproductive sphere. In rural and self-sustaining societies, the engagement of women in subsistence agriculture is socially accepted within the community due to the trend towards feminization of agriculture across rural societies. On the one hand, most women are excluded from the process of healing through application of local knowledge on the other hand, women contribute visibly to the management of healing practices at the community level. However, women have limited involvement in the decision-making process reiterating gendered nature of knowledge system. In this context, social spaces like household or community simply have not realized that women are indispensable component of sustaining these practices rooted in "social-ecological knowledge systems" (Ostrom 2007, cited in Clement et al., 2019: 4). Further, women peasants' engagement with specific aspects of traditional seed preservation practices becomes a useful means to recognize them as knowledge bearers within the indigenous communities. Scholars of FPE try to understand power as operating both vertically and horizontally in the realm of human-environment connections. The gendered power relations operate horizontally and are shaped by everyday interaction of people with their environment (Clement et.al. 2019). The primary data captures the diverse experiences and responsibilities of community with nature which vary across gender, class, culture and place. This human-nature engagement reiterates the intimate connections between power, knowledge and everyday practices of women and men within the

household and community. While studying the process of knowledge construction and dissemination in the field, the researcher observed women as the linchpin between the practice of ecological knowledge and surviving such knowledge for future. I argue that rural women are the ‘knowledge bearers’ in domains like agriculture and health care however, men can be seen as practitioners of specific kind of local knowledge and disseminate to the wider community.

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Locating Bangladeshi women in West Bengal

- Mrinalini Subba

Abstract

As of the 2020 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) Report, out of 272 million international migrants, almost half were women. Migration has traditionally been observed as a male phenomenon just like all other economic endeavours. Women who migrate were seen as companions to their male counterparts whose migration was primarily for economic reasons. But with time, new feminist scholarship emerged focussing on women's migration and their pattern mostly in Latin America, South Asian countries, and the Middle East. Most of the research on female migration highlights the socio-cultural and economic aspects of migration by redefining migration of women and understanding the emerging patterns in a new globalised society where denationalisation and nationalisation are occurring simultaneously. This paper aims to focus on one such prominent migration in South Asia, the Indo-Bangladesh migration, and the loss of nationality during it.

Introduction

Every year hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi women cross the border to enter India looking for ways of sustenance. Bangladesh has huge outmigration of its young demography to neighbouring countries but the number in the case of women migrants are usually under-documented. The underreporting of women migration is not unique to this case and is rather a global occurrence for varied reasons. Women who migrate with their families especially with their husbands, do not find it necessary to document their migration individually. Another important reason for the under documentation depends on the kind of jobs the migrants engage in and the general perception regarding migration in the society. It may also be due to different taboos and religious sanctions against women's migration. According to a 2021 report furnished by International Labour Organisation on Bangladeshi migration, in the five Bangladeshi unions surveyed, women were found to represent 15.7 percent of the migrant workers, the range spreading from 27.5 per cent in Arpanghashia

(Barguna) to 5.1 per cent in Majlishpur (Brahmanbaria). While the overall findings are close to the national average, the differences between were significant.¹ Sayestanagar that reported a higher percentage of women migrants at 7.9 percent of the overall population, revealed that women started migrating before men in mid-1970s to the Middle-East. These women sent money, helped build homes thereby transforming the local economy of the village and were never criticised. However, the same report sheds light on the fact that these families in the villages after finding social security choose to send their sons abroad rather than their daughters even when it did not necessarily mean economic advantage. Families see depending on the income of daughters as something to be ashamed of. Hence, women's migration is usually driven by abysmal poverty unlike men's migration which need not always be motivated by dire circumstances and can be a more suitable job opportunity.

More men migrate because their migration is better facilitated. The decision to migrate is a household decision guided by normatively prescribed kinship and/or gender roles within hierarchy of power within households (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991). Members of the family get together to arrange for money to send a male member abroad. This endeavour is accompanied with a sense of pride that the person is leaving home for family and to fulfil household responsibilities. Female migration, however, is not seen in the same light. It usually comes with stigma and judgements. Either a woman who migrates is seen as morally corrupt especially if she's young and unmarried, or her family is seen as desperate and shameless. Apart from the societal constructs and restraints, female migration appears more difficult as there is a narrow window set for the age qualification of female migrants compared to male migrants. The sending country tends to set an older age limit to qualify as a woman who can migrate whereas the receiving countries usually prefer younger women. For example, until 2007 Bangladesh had set the minimum age for women who wished to migrate at 35 years which was then changed to 25 years. Meanwhile in 2018, Lebanon set the age limit for the women who

had migrated to the country between 25 to 38 years. Similarly, in 2015, the UAE, a major destination of female migrants declared that migrants should be between 25 to 45 years of age. Men usually do not face such restrictions.²

Documented migrations are typically those that are legal whereas illegal migration largely goes unnoticed by the state and the surveys. Bangladeshi illegal migrants form a huge workforce in India facilitating cheap informal labour. Men engage in low paying jobs such as construction workers, rickshaw pullers etc and women work as domestic workers, rag pickers, sex workers and so on. The migrants often come via the supply chain set up by contractors in villages. These migrants while working in cities in construction projects seldom have direct transaction with the employer. There is always a middleman who negotiates the process and takes a cut from the daily wages of these workers.³ This not only facilitates the supply of cheap labour but also frees the employers from any responsibility towards them. Women are usually found as marginal workers in this scenario where they are paid lesser than the male workers and the conditions are more deplorable. Similarly, women working as domestic help are mostly hired through agencies that take monthly commission from their salaries. The illegal migrants don't have much of a bargaining power due to the illicit nature of their migration and hence continue to work even when the conditions and wages are terrible.

The security of the job is very low and the migrants often shift from one job to another. The fact that the migrants keep getting jobs despite the absence of security and rights show that capitalist nations depend on the labour performed by the migrants. However, these migrants that help to hold up society in a highly visible yet unexplored manner are often looked at as a source of threat. The separation of non-citizen from citizens is purely marked by the rules of exclusivity, where the external is marked as a threat. This threat manifests itself in internal sites through low paying menial workers, new minorities, drug peddlers, thereby creating an external within the internal.⁴

From outside to inside

The movement between India and Bangladesh is historical dating back to colonial British era where labourers were recruited in tea gardens and agricultural farms in Assam and middle-class men were appointed as office clerk or babus from then undivided Bengal. After partition in 1947, the movement of people continued between India and East Pakistan. One of the early migrations from East Pakistan to India were from the land cultivators. As agrarian production expanded and cultivable lands reached a saturation point, the farmers started seasonal migration towards cultivable lands in Assam, Bengal, Arakan (now Myanmar), Tripura etc (Schendel,2009). Another flow of migrants was during the Noakhali Riots and Barisal Riots when huge number of Hindu migrants flocked to West Bengal.⁵ At this point, 27 percent of population in Kolkata were East Pakistan refugees (Chakravarty,2007). Another major wave of migration happened when persecuted Hindu Bangladeshis fled the state during Liberation war of 1971. Following the end of the 1971 war and birth of Bangladesh, the Chakmas found themselves stateless.⁶ The exodus of Chittagong hill tract residents, Chakmas to NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency), presently the state of Arunachal Pradesh marks one of the earliest examples of mass displacement in South Asia.

The historicity of Indo-Bangladesh migration is undeniable and ubiquitous and the illegality of it reinforces the fact that borders are permeable and porous. Border is a site for nation building, where the state exercises its power thereby creating a hard outside and soft inside (Samaddar,1999). For movements as historical and important as between India and Bangladesh, one must keep in mind that border merely creates an impression of territorial separation which has failed in the nationalist projects of nation-state imagination. However, this is not to imply that the border serves no purpose towards its primary aims. The India-Bangladesh border is one of the most violent international borders in the world.⁷ According to a report by Human Rights Watch in 2010, the Border Security Force of India had killed nearly 1000 people trying to cross the border. Odhikar, another human rights organisation in Bangladesh reported at least 41 Bangladeshis were killed in 2019 alone.⁸ Similarly, at least 11

Bangladeshis were killed by the Border Security Force between January to October 2021 based on a report by Ain O Salish Kendra.⁹

All this border violence has not deterred the illegal movement of people across the border in any way. Districts such as Murshidabad, Malda, Nadia and 24 South Parganas in West Bengal see heavy migration as these areas share border with Bangladesh. Every so often, the Bangladeshi crossers further move to cities such as Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai etc. These migrants often change their Muslim names to a Hindu majoritarian name to avoid drawing any unwanted attention towards themselves. They have helped in industrialisation of the border areas by supplying cheap labour (Shamshad, 2017). For example, the riverine border areas in West Bengal have numerous brick kilns where Bangladeshis provide seasonal labour during the monsoons. In the cities, Bangladeshi men and women perform cheap menial jobs that the locals refuse to engage in. Ranabir Samaddar (1999) stated that the making of an immigrant niche is not difficult in cities like Kolkata mostly because the jobs that migrants perform and those locals perform are distinctively different. Their dwelling place is also segregated, along the outskirts of the city in slums. These slums are inhabited by both domestic and international migrants. They live in temporary shacks and the local authorities let them live there if they do not construct *pucca* (permanent) houses. These migrants live at the mercy of local authorities and political party goons that often take money from them in exchange for the space to live. This only further proves that the local authorities not only know that illegal migrants are present in the city but also benefit from their precarity.

Although the situation of these migrants is poor and precarious, their labour is in high demand. Part of the reason why they are preferred is that they come with low bargaining position and more work flexibility. Bangladeshi women work as domestic workers, in garment factories, as rag pickers and as sex workers.¹⁰ Saskia Sassen has highlighted in her work, the contribution of immigrant women in a capitalist society especially by those in subsistence sector. The professional household that plays a crucial role in the globalised

sector today, rests on the shoulders of invisible minority immigrant women who work as domestic workers that take care of the domestic sphere fully hence giving the time and opportunity for female members of the household to engage in professional work (Sassen,1996). The domestic workers usually do not gain rights or protection and even the wages are rarely regulated as they are limited to the private and because most of the times, domestic work is not seen as a form of employment.

Migrants help boost home and host economies both directly and indirectly through remittances and revenues. The city depends on this indispensable section of the society that lives in the slums. There is no shying away from the fact that both locals and the state are fully aware of the presence of illegal migrants and can separate an internal migrant from an international from their language dialects. Identifying a Bangladeshi migrant in cities such as Delhi, Bangalore or Mumbai by their appearance is not difficult but since the people of West Bengal and Bangladesh share an ethno-linguistic and cultural similarity, the major marker for separation can be dialect. Many Bangladeshi migrants, perhaps, can strategically speak without their accent and can be taken as a local. However, there has not been such desperate need in West Bengal so far because the hostility against the Bangladeshi has not been as intense as in other states till date since West Bengal has not witnessed any strong anti-Bangladeshi movement.

The anxiety arises during the time of crisis when the blame shifts to the migrants and non-citizens. Non-citizens are seen as threats to the sovereignty to the state. But contrary to the common understanding that citizenship is a two-party relationship between the state and an individual, Margaret Somers has said that much depends on the shifting institutional and discursive relationship and struggles for power among the state, market and civil society, hence blurring division of labour and grafting the patterns of exclusion and exteriority onto internal sites (Somers,2008). The exclusionary politics depend on how the migrants are perceived in the market, unskilled or semi-skilled

workers are deemed as unproductive. Unproductive means undesirable but the political decisions leading to that gets depoliticized and beyond the scope of political debate (Squire,2009). To assume that only the locals are benefitting from the service of the migrants would be incorrect because the state too depends on this workforce.

Women crossers

Women migrants encounter more difficulty than men while crossing the border illegally. They are constantly at the risk of getting exploited physically, sexually or monetarily during the transit. Getting arrested or killed by border forces is another hazard that lies ahead in their journey. Female migration must be understood against women's socio-economic and political standing in their home and nation. Nira Yuval Davis has shown in her work how women have a fractured national identity and are imagined as passive subjects in the nation building process. There are few ways in which women can find themselves placed in the nation-state imagination (Davis,1998). To study her movement simply on the economic lines would be short-sightedness. Her transgression of the political border must be studied along with her transgression of the social boundaries. Women who migrate often aspire to more than monetary goals. They also aspire to escape the patriarchal regime of the house and be free in other ways too. Pedraza has discussed in her work how Dominican and Cuban migrant women in North America have dreams beyond supporting their family and being a good family member. Their aspirations of belonging to the middle class or gaining financial agency also forms part of the decision to migrate, and these women deploy strategies according to their individual motivations (Pedraza,1991). Bangladeshi women are not very different from these women who choose to migrate to achieve the otherwise unavailable autonomy. Though the migration is primarily motivated by poor economic conditions, the desire sometimes extends onto personal freedom as well.

However, Bangladeshi female migration is often bracketed with trafficking. This is not to imply in any way imply that trafficking is vastly

imagined. Human trafficking remains one of the top forms of criminal offenses in India but to assume that every single migrating woman is trafficked would be foolish. However, the number of trafficked women from Bangladesh to Kolkata maybe overly exaggerated. Almost all the women working as commercial sex workers in the red-light district areas of Kolkata have consented to the work and are not coerced into the profession.¹¹ The presumption that every single woman that is migrating is trafficked stems from the thought that women lack the capacity to manoeuvre their lives. The infantilization of women suggests that women are naive victims even when they have full agency over their decision and movement. Women who cross the border maybe aware of the perils of illegal immigration and yet they decide to embark upon it sometimes putting all their savings into the journey. Many women are trafficked along during the transit however, there is no denying the fact that more women are very well aware of the work they will engage in. The idea that a woman is selling her “chastity” is enough to enrage the society that believes female sexuality needs to be protected more than her life. Many a times, women who are rescued from the brothels or those who are arrested, return to working as sex worker in the course of time primarily because it offers them a better financial autonomy than other jobs.

Women put their life savings into their crossing. Getting a passport would sometimes cost less but agents who smuggle people convince them that crossing the border illegally is an easier option. Some take the illegal route because they don’t want to engage in the bureaucratic process of getting a passport and a visa. Perhaps, they are afraid that they will not be able to qualify for the legal documents due to their financial status. Apart from the hassles of bureaucracy, the women cross the border illegally because they don’t fully understand the legalities surrounding the border. Many people who cross the border are the residents of the border area, where migrating to West Bengal is an easier option for them than migrating to any major city in Bangladesh. Similarly, there are many Indians living in the border area who migrate to Bangladesh for work. As mentioned previously, in the paper, the migration

between India and Bangladesh is historical. The faulty demarcation of the border has not helped the people in comprehending what the borders are and where they are.¹² Many migrants have their extended family settled in India who facilitate job hunting for them. These women stay in the city, get married, go back to Bangladesh, again return to India to work and so on. They don't intend on settling down in India, it is just a seasonal migration for them during financial troubles. There is an ambiguous understanding of the legalities and the criminalities of crossing the border even when they know it is illegal. And even if they can understand the criminality of it, crossing the border seems like the only option left to alleviate their troubles.

Bangladeshi Inmates/ Indian Jails

Many Bangladeshi women are apprehended while crossing the border, in the city or sometimes while returning to Bangladesh. Sometimes they are arrested in groups along with children. The type of violence that these women face at the border is a different story of its own. Rapes, attempt of rapes by the border state officials, torture, extra judicial killings, illegal detention are some of the things that the migrants and people living in the border must endure. Often the arrested women are trafficking victims, some cross the border to seek medical treatment, which is not available in their village, some get arrested while they are going to visit their family in Bangladesh and some of these people who are apprehended and tortured are Indian citizens mistaken for being a Bangladeshi. There are women arrested with their family, with their children and sometimes these women who are travelling for personal reasons are pregnant during the time of arrest. Most of these arrests occur at North 24 Parganas, Cooch Behar and Murshidabad districts of Kolkata.¹³

Arrests can be based on suspicion; the onus of proof lies on the accused. Prisons in West Bengal are filled with foreign national prisoners mostly Bangladeshi. Based on the 2020 Annual Report, a total of 4,926 foreign nationals were jailed in India as of 31st Dec 2020 of which 1982 were in West Bengal alone. Of these 429 inmates were foreign national female prisoners.¹⁴ As of 1st Jan 2022, West Bengal had 1481 Bangladeshi nationals in its prisons

of which 1152 were undertrials and 329 were convicts.¹⁵ The fact that the number of undertrial¹⁶ far exceeds that of convicts throws light on the situation of these prisoners. The Bangladeshi inmates sometimes go on without any sort of legal aid for over a year, due to lack of awareness, information and/or money to hire a lawyer. Most of these cases are taken up by volunteers who offer legal aid pro bono. If the accused fails to produce evidence of innocence and plead guilty, then they are charged under Foreigner's Act 1946¹⁷ and sentenced a term according to the nature of their offence.

Bangladeshi women face different challenges during the court trials. Pleading guilty does not come naturally to some especially if they are married to a local. Taking a case from Dum Dum Correctional Home, Kolkata: Mithu (*name changed*) had come from Bangladesh and lived with her brother in Orissa. From Orissa she travelled to Tamil Nadu where she worked in a bar and married a local boy who used to live off her earnings. On realising this she decided to leave her husband and return to Bangladesh during which she was arrested. She refuses to accept being a Bangladeshi and claims that her family lives in Orissa and she is an Indian. However, the authorities couldn't find any person by her brother's name, nor could they locate the phone number, or the address given by her. Mithu's trial has not proceeded for over a year because her testimonies have changed several times over the course of her imprisonment.¹⁸

Under the Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act, women who worked as sex workers are exempted from punishment unless they weren't involved in facilitating the running of the brothels or trafficking. Women deny being sex workers even though that would mean no imprisonment for them. The fear of stigma remains even in the toughest of circumstances for these women. Opening up to the legal volunteers comes very late since they are afraid that they'll be judged for their predicament. Perhaps, there are inferences made about these women each time they come in contact with the state. On being asked about how the police find out if the accused is an illegal migrant or not, a higher police official in Kolkata, said that differentiation is done during

interrogation when observances are made and analysed. The constant surveillance makes the women wary of sharing details with the state even if doing so would only help their situation.

After the completion of their sentence, foreign national prisoners must undergo the bureaucratic process of repatriation. Only then they will be sent back home. Until their nationality is confirmed, they are practically stateless persons in foreign prisons waiting to return to their country. These people are called *Jaankhalash*. Rimple Mehta (2018:87) states that:

The Bangladeshi women said that *jaankhalash* meant they were living in the prison like “free public”; but ironically, *jaankhalash* means “the end of life”. It could signify that their life as a prisoner has ended. At another level, it could imply that so far, by virtue of being in prison, they had a definitive status of being a Bangladeshi, but the moment when they finish serving their sentence, their identity become ambiguous. They are neither Bangladeshi nor Indian.

The process of repatriation goes through many state agencies and takes a lot of time, especially verifying the person’s identity as Bangladeshi. Often the details shared by the inmates don’t match with the state, they cannot locate the address or authenticate the details. At this point, the process gets stalled. There are many levels of the process and sometimes the repatriation process takes almost two years. According to a 2019 CHRI (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative) Report called ‘Strangers to Justice’, 3908 foreign nationals were held in Indian prisons of which 871 were those who had completed their sentence and were waiting for repatriation. 522 of these foreign nationals belonged to the category of ‘persons whose nationality is not provided and the remaining belonged to 58 countries. West Bengal alone held 55 percent of the total number of foreign nationals waiting for repatriation at 433.¹⁹ As of 1st

January 2022, a total of 410 Jaankhalash were present in the state of West Bengal.²⁰

Conclusion

Generational migration between the people of West Bengal and Bangladesh is a touchy subject for a lot of locals and a tricky one for the state officials who do not want to delve into the matter. The first thing that arises while enquiring about Bangladeshi women entering India is either they are trafficked or have committed a crime. The dichotomy of victim and criminal must be abandoned if we are to critically investigate the question of women's migration in Indo-Bangladesh context. The economic and professional standing of these women needs to be studied against the backdrop of the situations which create the potential criminality of their migration. Without it, these women will only be mere crossers breaking the law and posing a threat to the sovereignty of the nation. Incarcerations render them vulnerable especially because they are stripped of a nationality, a right which is only restored once the repatriation process is cleared and they are deported. For example, the Jaankhalash are technically stateless people, imprisoned even after they have served their sentence. The current global geo-politics and the ongoing climate change should also be paid attention while dealing with migration between India and Bangladesh. Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to climate change which has accelerated the economic degradation of its coastlines creating new patterns of displacement.²¹ Furthermore, the exodus of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar to Bangladesh is seen as one of the world's largest refugee emergencies and has created serious economic and ecological challenges for a dense country such as Bangladesh which is already grappling with the brunt of climate change.²²

The border operations and incarcerations of these people for crossing a porous and ambiguous border seems like a desperate attempt by the state to create an impression of being in control. The migrations have not stopped, the trade and labour relations which could benefit both the parties are ignored and also for every one Bangladeshi arrested, there are a hundred more crossing the

border. Since the cities benefit from the cheap labour provided by migrants, rather than criminalising it an effort to regulate it would appear sounder and less taxing for both the state and the migrants. The discourse around border operations has to be reevaluated and reconstructed as to be more human friendly and less human rights violation.

Endnotes

¹ Migration and gender in Bangladesh: An Irregular Landscape (2021),26 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_832493.pdf

² Ibid,28.

³ Samaddar, R. (2016). Migrant and the Neo-Liberal City: An Introduction. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51, 52-54.

⁴ Ranabir Samaddar (1999). *The Marginal Nation*. Sage. (17-23)

⁵ Noakhali riots and Barisal riots took place in East Pakistan in 1950 when Non-Muslim Bangladeshis largely Hindus were massacred in Barisal district and adjoining areas which led to huge exodus of Hindu refugees to Assam, Tripura and West Bengal. A massive number of Bengali Hindu refugees entered West Bengal after Kalshira massacre.

⁶ Between 1959-1963, Kaptai Dam hydroelectric project was built on Karnafulli river by the then Pakistani government sponsored by United States Agency for International Development. This project flooded the Chittagong Hill Tracts and displaced around 100,000 Chakmas making it one of the earliest examples of mass displacement in South Asia. The Chakmas migrated in large number to earlier NEFA, presently the state of Arunachal Pradesh in India. In 1970s after the war ended, the Chakmas of CHT asked Mujibar Rahman government to grant them autonomy, which was deftly rejected. After the constitution was framed, Chakmas were not even acknowledged as the people of Bangladesh. The Chakmas who were East Pakistanis before the war were now rendered stateless.

⁷ The World's Most Dangerous Borders (2011) <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/24/the-worlds-most-dangerous-borders/>

⁸ www.odhikar.org

⁹ www.askbd.org

¹⁰ Sex work can be full time work or part time work for those with other jobs that do not pay enough to survive.

¹¹ Based on an interview of a senior NGO worker in Kolkata.

¹² On July 1947, Boundary Commission, a committee was formed by the then Viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten. The committee chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliff was given the task to make a report by the coming August on how the colony was to be divided. Due to various geographical feasibility issues of the proposed border and the ambiguity of the instructions from the British Government, the committee failed to arrive at a decision on how to draw the border. Finally, Sir Cyril Radcliff took matters in his own hands and drew the border making it a creation a single individual who had never visited the border himself.

¹³ Based on the findings of the human rights organisation, MASUM (Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha) and the author's interaction with members of the group. www.masum.org.in

¹⁴ Prison Statistics of West Bengal (2020)
<http://wbcorrectionalservices.gov.in/pdf/ncrb-2020.pdf>

¹⁵ Prison Statistics of West Bengal (2021)
<http://wbcorrectionalservices.gov.in/profile.html>

¹⁶ Undertrials are those prisoners who are not yet convicted. They are kept in judicial custodies (prisons) while they wait for legal aid or for the court proceedings to complete.

¹⁷ The Foreigners Act, 1946. According to the Foreigner's Act 1946, any person who is not a citizen of India and hence a foreigner will be allowed to enter, leave or stay in India only at such times or by such routes or from such place that are prescribed by the authority and subjected to observance failing which they can be confined, detained or departed. Those who remain in India for a period exceeding that granted by the visa or violates the conditions of the visa are also liable to be punished.

¹⁸ Information gathered from legal aid volunteers.

¹⁹ Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, *Strangers to Justice: A Report on Foreigners in Indian Prisons*, 20 (January 11, 2019). (19-24)

²⁰ Prison Statistics of West Bengal (2021)
<http://wbcorrectionalservices.gov.in/profile.html>

²¹ McDonnell, T. (2019, Jan 24). Climate Change creates a new migration crisis for Bangladesh. *National Geographic*.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/climate-change-drives-migration-crisis-in-bangladesh-from-dhaka-sundabans>

²² Sharma, V.S. (2021, Mar 26) The Rest of the World Must Acknowledge the Impact of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh. *The Wire*. <https://thewire.in/south-asia/bangladesh-rohingya-refugees-impact>

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A Moment of Silence, Before I Start this Poem

Before I start this poem,
I'd like to ask you to join me in a moment of silence
in honour of those who died in the World Trade Center
and the Pentagon last September 11th.

I would also like to ask you to offer up a moment of silence
for all of those who have been harassed, imprisoned,
disappeared, tortured, raped, or killed in retaliation for those strikes,
for the victims in both Afghanistan and the U.S.

And if I could just add one more thing...

A full day of silence for the tens of thousands of Palestinians
who have died at the hands of U.S.-backed Israeli forces
over decades of occupation.
Six months of silence for the million and-a-half Iraqi people,
mostly children, who have died of malnourishment or starvation
as a result of an 11-year U.S. embargo against the country.

Before I begin this poem: two months of silence
for the Blacks under Apartheid in South Africa,
where homeland security made them aliens
in their own country.
Nine months of silence for the dead in Hiroshima and Nagasaki,
where death rained down and peeled back

every layer of concrete, steel, earth and skin
and the survivors went on as if alive.

A year of silence for the millions of dead in Viet Nam -
a people, not a war - for those who know a thing or two
about the scent of burning fuel,
their relatives' bones buried in it,
their babies born of it.

A year of silence for the dead in Cambodia and Laos,
victims of a secret war ... sssshhhhhh Say nothing ...
we don't want them to learn that they are dead.

Two months of silence for the decades of dead in Colombia,
whose names, like the corpses they once represented,
have piled up and slipped off our tongues.

Before I begin this poem,

An hour of silence for El Salvador ... An afternoon
of silence for Nicaragua ...

Two days of silence for the Guetmaltecos ... None of whom
ever knew a moment of peace in their living years.

45 seconds of silence for the 45 dead at Acteal, Chiapas

25 years of silence for the hundred million Africans
who found their graves far deeper in the ocean
than any building could poke into the sky.

There will be no DNA testing or dental records to identify their remains.

And for those who were strung and swung
from the heights of sycamore trees

in the south, the north, the east, and the west...

100 years of silence...

For the hundreds of millions of indigenous peoples from this half of
right here, Whose land and lives were stolen,

In postcard-perfect plots like Pine Ridge, Wounded Knee, Sand Creek,
Fallen Timbers, or the Trail of Tears. Names now reduced to innocuous
magnetic poetry on the refrigerator of our consciousness ...

So you want a moment of silence?

And we are all left speechless
Our tongues snatched from our mouths
Our eyes stapled shut
A moment of silence
And the poets have all been laid to rest
The drums disintegrating into dust

Before I begin this poem,
You want a moment of silence

You mourn now as if the world will never be the same
And the rest of us hope to hell it won't be.
Not like it always has been

Because this is not a 9-1-1 poem
This is a 9/10 poem,
It is a 9/9 poem,
A 9/8 poem,
A 9/7 poem
This is a 1492 poem.

This is a poem about what causes poems like this to be written And if
this is a 9/11 poem, then

This is a September 11th poem for Chile, 1971
This is a September 12th poem for Steven Biko in South Africa, 1977
This is a September 13th poem for the brothers at Attica Prison, New
York, 1971.
This is a September 14th poem for Somalia, 1992.
This is a poem for every date that falls to the ground in ashes
This is a poem for the 110 stories that were never told
The 110 stories that history chose not to write in textbooks
The 110 stories that CNN, BBC, The New York Times, and Newsweek
ignored
This is a poem for interrupting this program.

And still you want a moment of silence for your dead?
We could give you lifetimes of empty:

The unmarked graves
The lost languages
The uprooted trees and histories
The dead stares on the faces of nameless children
Before I start this poem
We could be silent forever
Or just long enough to hunger,
For the dust to bury us

And you would still ask us
For more of our silence.

If you want a moment of silence

Then stop the oil pumps
Turn off the engines and the televisions
Sink the cruise ships
Crash the stock markets
Unplug the marquee lights,
Delete the instant messages,
Derail the trains, the light rail transit

If you want a moment of silence, put a brick through the window of
Taco Bell,
And pay the workers for wages lost

Tear down the liquor stores,
The townhouses, the White Houses, the jailhouses, the Penthouses and
the Playboys. If you want a moment of silence,

Then take it

On Super Bowl Sunday,

The Fourth of July
During Dayton's 13 hour sale
Or the next time your white guilt
fills the room where my beautiful
people have gathered

You want a moment of silence
Then take it
Now,

Before this poem begins.
Here, in the echo of my voice,
In the pause between gosesteps of the second hand
In the space
between bodies in embrace,
Here is your silence.

Take it.

But take it all
Don't cut in line.
Let your silence begin at the beginning of crime.
But we,
Tonight we will keep right on singing
For our dead.

- Emmanuel Ortiz



Colonial to Globalised Tea Plantation: Women tea workers and their negotiations

- Kapil Tamang

Abstract

The tea industry in India has the largest workforce among the agro-based plantation industries. Around 1.1 million permanent workers and another million and more casual workers are engaged in the tea industry. More than 50 per cent of the workforce consists of women workers. The agro-based, low mechanised tea industry accepts the women workforce easily. The higher participation in the employment of women labourers is the result of the gendered task of picking tea leaves and maintaining the social reproduction of labour (Rasaily, 2014). The change in the economic policies of the country post-1990 and the introduction of globalisation has changed the economy of the tea industry and its business, which has not only impacted the functioning and structure of the tea industry but has also impacted the socio-economic life of tea workers especially the women tea workers who are located at the bottom of the hierarchy. The paper tries to explore the social, economic and political negotiations of women tea workers from the colonial inception to a globalised transformation of the tea plantation industry.

Introduction

The plantation industry has a colonial connection all over the world. The tea industry in India was also established during the British colonial period. The large cultivable land, located in remote areas required for plantation needed a large workforce. As the selected areas for cultivation were scarcely populated, the labour shortage was fulfilled by migrated indentured labourers known as ‘coolies’.¹ The bonded labourers were compelled to work on the tea plantation at a low wage and under poor living conditions. The physical and economic exploitation of the colonised folks along with exhausted and ill-paid physical labour included a large number of women labourers. The large labour force was indentured, migrated, depersonalised and organised by squads or gangs of workers. They were captive labourers and women migrants as reproducers of

such labour force add up to the essential factors of their reckoning. (Bhadra, 2004).

The participation of women workers on a plantation was generally high. The recruitment of the labour force in the tea plantation industry was mainly from central India and different parts of Nepal (Behal, 2010; Besky, 2007).² Since the plantation industry is agro-based, adjusting to a new working environment was not particularly difficult for the migrating tribal women. Also, the limited mechanisation and the low-skilled job were convenient for women labourers. The idea behind the recruitment of family members of the migrant labourers was to develop a family-based occupation that would run for the generation to come. Women immigrant and migrant labourers became advantageous for their subservient nature and a long-term benefit of a self-reproducing and stable workforce. The social arrangements needed for the production established a social system on the plantation. The plantation system has a rigid social stratification. The economies of the plantation define and perpetuate the social dispositions, that abet the production process and retain capital accumulation. Hence, they enforce certain lifestyles typically associated with the plantations (Jain, 1995). Female labourers have been doubly exploited because of the economic system which uses cheap labour and social relations usually dominated by a male counterpart. Women have always been subjugated to disadvantaged positions throughout history. Division of labour in the tea plantation devalued the labour of women perpetuating the same disadvantageous position.

The paternalistic character of women tea workers has been defined as “nimble-fingered”, disciplined and compliant (Griffith, 1967). Historically women are underpaid more than their male counterparts. The factory work is mostly dominated by male workers while the fieldwork is mostly done by female workers. The difference in the mode of wage payment for male and female workers can be related to their tasks. For men, the wage is time-rated in which they have to work for certain hours (8-9 hours a day) to receive full payment. While for women it is a task-based, piece-rate wage payment where

they have to fulfil a certain amount of task (mostly stipulated plucking of tea leaves in kgs)³ to receive full payment. This difference in the task and wage payment mode creates more discrepancies between male and female tea workers. The male workers are more likely to get promoted to higher positions with higher wage levels but women tea pluckers mostly remain within the sub-standard piece-rated work and low payment with no scope for promotion.

The management, in an attempt to cut the cost of production, reduce the permanent workforce mainly from the field engagement and increase casualisation that explicitly affects women tea workers who then face more challenges in their social life (Sankrityayana, 2018).

Throughout history, women workers have participated exuberantly in different political and trade union-related movements but only a few have been in leadership positions. They are always treated as foot soldiers. Illiteracy compounded with gender factors limits women to participate in trade unionism and also limits their occupational mobility. The membership of women workers in affiliated unions is mostly influenced by male relatives. They hardly get any opinion or choice in that regard. There have been few women leaders in jute mills or textile mills. It was a women tea worker Maili Chettri, who started the union movement and workers' rights movement in the Dooars region in 1946 (Chattopadhyay, 1995; Rasaily, 2018). Women have the potential for leadership that has to be developed from within (Bhowmik and Sarkar, 1998). The Munnar tea workers movement of 2015 also known as the Jasmine revolution gives us a clear picture that women are neither subservient nor reluctant to take the baton of leadership from male counterparts (Rasaily, 2018).

The trade liberalisation and advent of globalisation in the Indian economy after 1990 changed the production relation of the tea industry. The rise of small tea growers and bought leaf factories⁴ increased the production of tea exponentially but the trade liberalisation invited competitive countries like Sri Lanka, Kenya, Vietnam etc within the foreign and domestic tea market. The

economic liberalisation led to a series of mergers and acquisitions and consolidation of market control by Multi-National Companies (MNCs) on a global scale. After globalisation, the tea business oriented towards marketing and retailing, losing its interest and focus on the production process, which led to a financial crisis and a series of closures and abandonment of tea estates mainly in the states of West Bengal and Kerala, post-2000. The over-production and cut-throat competition in the international as well as domestic markets led to the fall of tea price, fall of the demand in the international market and increased cost of production making the producers leave the tea estates. The crisis left the tea workers helpless with crores of liabilities to be paid to them. This impacted their lives, especially the women tea workers who are located at the bottom position of the workforce. Many cases of starvation death, human trafficking, and disappearance became common on the tea plantation. The state has little to no intervention, hence, many such tea gardens are closed to this date.⁵

The paper will try to explore the women tea workers' negotiation with the different institutions and agencies in the social, political and economic spheres of the tea plantation. The paper is divided into three main parts. The first section deals with the social aspect of the women tea workers where I would explore the social dynamics and negotiation that a woman tea worker has to go through, the social dispositions and gender roles within the tea plantation to sustain livelihood. The second part deals with the economic aspect of the women tea workers where I would try to look into the gendered discrimination and restriction of women in occupational mobility as well as their economic negotiation in everyday living. The third part will deal with the political aspect of the women tea workers where I would discuss their political aspirations and limitations.

Social aspect

The social system in the tea plantation was established to fulfil the necessary labour force and to sustain and preserve the army of labour for the future. The poor, illiterate, famished tribes who lived in the closet community became the

easy target for the planters to lure them into plantation labour (Tinker, 1974; Jain, 1988). The indentured labours were bought on the plantation with a political-legal mechanism with force concealed and overt rather than a market-driven process (Dasgupta, 1992).

Historically, the recruitment cost of labour was expensive so women were employed by the planters to ‘contain the male labour force’ and to reproduce a steady flow of cheap labour. The migrated men would contain themselves within the plantation in presence of his family members which also prevented him to return to his homeland. The permanency of migratory resettlement proved it right (Chatterjee, 1995; Sen, 1999). Also, the women labourers easily adjusted to the new system and adapted themselves to the tedious and prolonged labour of tea picking which was not so different from what they did in their homeland (Chatterjee, 2003). Although both male and female workers were engaged in the field plucking of tea leaves, the quantity and quality of a female plucker were always better (Bhadra, 1992). Hence, the feminized labour force of the plantation economy became imperative (Atkin, 1957; Sengupta, 1960; Varma, 2011).

The family system of recruitment policy came with the pre-condition that the employed women would stay under a family structure. Which subjugated women tea workers’ labour and sexuality under patriarchal control (Sarkar, 2020). The condition of control of women’s sexuality and reproduction fettered them within the plantation thus securing the future generation of the labour force. This resulted in more inclusion of women maintaining the production-reproduction continuum (Dasgupta, 1986; Jain, 1988; Sen, 1999; Chatterjee, 2001). The policy not only allowed men and women but also children to work in the tea gardens with their parents for minimum wage. The recruitment was done with coercion, regulation, force, and deception to fulfil the demand and cover the huge labour shortage in the tea plantation. This kind of recruitment helped planters with a sustainable and self-reproducing workforce for the plantation for the generation to come. The indentured labour contract which the tribal communities agreed upon gave them an exclusive

work status and provided ration, shelter, medical care and employment to all physically abled family members including children. However, the emphasis on recruitment was given to young married women which indicates the gendered labour structure in the tea plantation (Sarkar, 2020).

After independence, the condition of the tea workers improved a little. The newly established Indian State facilitate pro-workers acts like The Plantation Labour Act, Industrial Dispute Act, Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, etc. to secure the jobs of industrial workers. There was an improvement in the communication, so, workers started organising themselves. The plantation workers benefited from the struggles of the workers of other industries as well. The indentured labourers became citizens with rights yet in the tea industry, their status hardly improved. The tea workers do not have land rights, they have been detached from their history, their place of origin, and their cultural identity, they lack alternative occupational opportunities or occupational mobility and they live in a surveillance authoritative management system of fear and coercion, always in fear of losing their job and their home, which became more prominent after the crisis phase of tea industry post-2000 which is still prevailing. So, the tea workers are free labours yet are indentured in disguise.

The reproductive work does not only mean giving birth to children, it also includes feeding family members, and nurturing them who go to work daily in the tea gardens. They also reproduce cultural practices and the docility and subservient work ethics, which is necessary for the labour force of future generations. By default, the responsibility of household work is exclusive to women. But in the tea plantation female roles are not limited to household work. Like men, their life is also a perpetual cycle of work and weekly payment^(ibid). Hence, they could not imagine a life beyond the plantation.

The argument for sexual equality within the tribal community in the plantation sector has been highlighted by many scholars (Mintz, 1956; Jayawardan, 1963; Jain, 1988). However, the nuances of the gender equation

must be looked at with more careful eyes. The burden of care and domestic work, plantation work and economic contribution falls to the female member of the family because of her inability to negotiate with the male member of the family. Along with that, the collection of firewood, ration etc is also fully endowed on women as they are responsible for the dwelling. There are no boundaries of work for women on tea plantations from paid to unpaid work from household to tea garden sometime intermingle. The absence of child care facilities leads the elder daughter to drop out of school to take care of younger siblings and give hand in household chores and eventually become a tea worker. Not only that, women are engaged in the economic support of their family and ensuring the security of employment for their sons by negotiating within and outside the domestic threshold (Rasaily, 2014). Illiteracy, early marriage, pregnancy and undertaking of both paid and unpaid work are the general narrative of women on the tea plantation. The women's labour and hardship within the tea plantation must not be viewed only as subservient, adaptive, flexible or docile workers. It must look through their inferior social indicators including caste, ethnicity and literacy level which marginalise them.

Economic aspect

The social system within the plantation is determined by its economic aspect. All the factors which aid the production process and retain capital accumulation are encouraged while those which do not favour the capital gain become obsolete. These values and norms are further perpetuated thus becoming a lifestyle exclusive to the plantation.

The family-based labour practice was prevalent in the plantation from its inception which standardised the model of wage fixation that transcended even after the independence of India. The daily wage of the tea workers is the lowest among the organised industries. The wage determination is done in a tripartite meeting⁶ and the wage is determined considering the two working spouses within a household that will collectively provide for four members of the family.⁷ Thus, each member will contribute one and a half units. This becomes problematic for widowed or single-parent families whose earnings

would not fulfil the economic support for the family. Non-wage benefits like subsidised ration, medical support, creches, primary educational facilities etc are available from token level to non-existence as there is no vigilance or monitoring system for its implementation. Also, all these non-wage benefits are not available to casual/ bigha workers.

Plantation work has two main seasons. The plucking season starts from March to September which can extend up to October and the pruning season starts from November to February. The workers in the plucking season are engaged in plucking green leaves and it is the most profitable season for both management and the workers as the high-grade production happens during this season. Most of the casual/bigha workers are also engaged during this time. The workers are engaged in the field and factory for long hours as overtime to earn extra cash. The daily rate for permanent workers is Rs 202 per day⁸ and get Rs 5-10 per kg as extra leaf⁹ price which also depends on the quality of tea leaves if the stipulated task/thikka¹⁰ is fulfilled. The earlier tradition of *bakshish* or tips is now given a new name of incentive.

The family-based employment in the tea plantation led employment of women, adolescents and child workers. They were a cheap labour pool for the estate. After the implementation of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976¹¹ and the Child Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act, 1986¹² the employment of children was stopped and the equal wage payment of the field workers was provided. The Plantation Labour Act, 1951, however, had a provision for a new category of ‘outside’ workers which gave the management scope for employment of a cheap labour force in the form of casual workers. They quickly became the low-cost option for the tea plantation. The permanent workers can avail employment on a daily wage basis throughout the year but the casual workers are employed only during the plucking season and are unemployed during the pruning and winter work on the plantation. The temporary and casual workers have become a floating labour reserve which can be easily hired and fired without any obligations (Sankrityayana, 2018). But

the casualisation of the workforce was not prominent until the introduction of neo-liberal economic policies.

After trade liberalisation, MNCs came into the big picture of the tea business. They started to bifurcate the production and marketing governance. The profit skyrocketed and accumulated in the tea market but the production was left with disappearing investments and uneven profit distribution. The strong cartel of the large traders controlled the auction system lowering the price of the tea at the auction. As a result, the cost of production became a burden to the management of the production unit. To cut the cost of production, the management started to increase the process of casualisation in the tea sector, especially among the field workers. The major tea-producing areas of Assam and West Bengal showed a significant rise in the number of casual workers in the tea plantation. The proportion of casual workers increased from 12 per cent to almost 89 per cent in West Bengal and from 22 per cent to 85 per cent in Assam between 1985-2004 (Sankrityayana, 2018).

The fall of tea prices at the auction centres, the capturing of the tea market by big multi-National companies and the increasing cost of production led to a series of closures and abandonment of tea estates mainly in the states of West Bengal and Kerala since the early 2000.¹³ During the crisis phase, the employment of women workers increased by 25.33 per cent in West Bengal while the overall daily employment of workers dropped by 25-14 per cent between 1998-2004 (Labour Bureau, 2012: 140). Women workers were preferred over male workers as they lacked active union participation and are ready to negotiate with docile nature and no bargaining power hence, they are exploited with the lowest, irregular wages. This economic situation became imperative for women's agency of labour. Women are flexible workers concerned more about their families than their employers (Sen, 2008). This alone shows the gendered work culture within the tea plantation industry.

One of the significant impacts of the crisis is male migration from the tea plantation. They migrated to urban centres searching for alternative avenues of

employment. MGNREGA programmes came with the employment opportunity within the tea garden but with limited work and low payments and the rising cost of living pushed them to migrate for work. However, most of the women workers stay on the plantation to take care of the family also they do not possess the skills or knowledge or educational qualifications to work outside of the plantation. Hence, the workload in the field mostly fell on the hands of women tea workers. Even if they manage to migrate then their morality is questioned as many get trafficked for sex work or bonded domestic work. Women going missing without any information about their whereabouts are another common calamity of migration for these women.

The desperate attempt to survive within the tea plantation (closed or open) lead these women workers to a continuous process of negotiation and changing positions from permanent daily wagger to casual worker to low and discriminatory work with more workload and low payment, breaking down to lower position than before. They are always in debt, mostly to local money lenders. Sometimes they come up with their money lending methods like Ghumauri or Bandhan.¹⁴ Post closure, with minimum to no income, without provision of ration, electricity, water supply, or medical facilities, these tea workers are subjected to the extreme poverty of the underclass. Many cases of starvation death, malnourishment, trafficking, alcohol, abuse etc came into highlight indicating the grim situation of the tea gardens.

Political aspect

A woman worker has the same class position as that of her father or her husband a worker. The work status concerning their class structure is the same among male and female workers. Yet, gender plays a significant and complicated role to establish and perpetuate the social and ideological structure which positions women in the lower category within the patriarchal system. In the tea plantation, patriarchy is not limited to the sphere of reproduction but also the production. The control of her body and her labour leads to the double exploitation of women on the tea plantation. The various forces which operate

in the domain of her domestic space and work identity place a woman at the bottom of a hierarchical position conducive to more exploitation.

The employment status and social life of a woman worker are dictated by the political dominance and complaisance that operates within the plantation. Sexual exploitation and hierarchies of power underline the subservience of women workers. A political connection, trade union or otherwise might provide a safeguard to her employment unlike those who lost their regular employment because they ask for their rights. The demands of female workers do not matter, the management suppresses them with their own needs.

The rate of membership of women workers in trade unions is usually high in the tea industry but their memberships are mostly done with the influence of their male relatives like their father, husband, brother, uncle, or son. The trade unions are involved in the negotiations with the management or the conciliation process with the Assistant Labour Commissioner or meeting within the plantation and the involvement in these activities determines the involvement of workers in the trade unions. Women workers are mostly absent in these kinds of activities, they participate occasionally mostly during workers' movements. There are many reasons for their non-participation, their social status, low level of literacy, and their inferior status at work where they rarely get promoted to sub-staff level (Sarkar & Bhowmik, 1998). The participation in the trade union with no leadership or token representation, physical and sexual violence, and male dominance factors are inherent in the employment and survival of the women workers. Hence, their voices are unheard, their representation is undermined and their issues are side-lined.

Women in tea plantations not only locate themselves at the bottom in social and economic positioning but also find themselves at the lowest axis of the power structure in a gendered way and hence remain disadvantaged. This makes them vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of the powerful who would take advantage of their lower position and manipulate them to keep them at the

bottom permanently within and outside the plantation which is dominated by males.

The tribal communities working on the tea plantation do not have land rights. Lack of entitlements, education and vulnerable ethnic and class identity has pushed them further into marginalisation and exclusion. These tribal tea workers whose major representation is women add more complexity to the changing economic scenario of the plantation economy (Sarkar, 2020). These marginal positions and identities become a tool of exploitation for women tea workers who live in the reality of oppression, marginalisation and social exclusion. The multiple identities of gender, class, ethnicity and caste carried by the women tea workers become a disadvantage and are exploited by the management lobby to lay them off the job or exploit them further. The failure or success of their action is exhibited through their position and marginalisation yet they negotiate for survival.

Conclusion

Work for the lower-class uneducated women is not economic emancipation but rather a form of enslavement. They work to survive and sustain a livelihood for their children. Despite the absence of upward job mobility women workers remain on the plantation as the working environment is compatible with their socio-cultural life. They enjoy the same work status as men under the same class yet gender plays an important role in their further subjugation. The limited equality is inadequate to avoid exploitative relations across class, caste, gender and ethnicity.

The tea workers were displaced from their roots by colonial planters and bought to the tea enclaves by coercive forces which kept them under an authoritative and institutionalised system. They became the victim of their caste and ethnic identity and their life situation. These workers were socially marginalised, and ridden with poverty and illiteracy. They were given fake promises of good life and employment. The exclusive work status provided a social system with family-based employment, regulated wage, housing, ration

and medical facilities but these very factors kept them secluded and isolated from the mainstream economic market and opportunities. For centuries these tribal communities who lacked outside exposure depended solely on a tea plantation and were vulnerable to all forms of exploitation.

Post-liberalisation, the tea industry went into crisis as tea gardens suffered sickness and closure. The Plantation Labour Act 1951 was not enough to protect the interest of the workers, especially women workers who comprise more than 50 per cent of the workforce. The liabilities of Provident Funds and wages reached lakhs of rupees and no other job opportunities. The limited participation in the trade union process and no visible representation failed to address the plights of women tea workers. The state played a minimum role to help the tea labourers who suffered poverty, starvation, displacement and exploitation.

The closure and sickness of tea gardens lead to the emergence of a new form of a contractor and short-term management and owners whose main intention is to acquire maximum profit. Fear of no work and no other alternative job opportunities lead the subservient women, tea workers, to work at even low wages than before and more exploited. Uncertain future, starvation and death, forced them to migrate and being trafficked with no hope has become a regular traumatic experience for this working class. These situations and economic conditions have formed a class lowest at the position of the working class, an “underclass” (Standing, 2011; Sarkar, 2020). This class are ridden with poverty, illiteracy, displacement, uncertain employment and carries marginalised identities of class, caste, ethnicity and gender.

The advent of globalisation has changed the capital-labour relationship. In the tea industry post globalisation, big Multi-National Companies took the control of the business disturbing the profit distribution and increasing capital accumulation. On the other side, the working class is further fractured into classes, the precariat underclass. The capital and production relation and relations like family system, production-reproduction role, gender and work

relation in the plantation system, all these factors are responsible for the formation of the underclass. A class which is not only characterised by its economic factor but also by its ethnic, caste and gender identity, its marginalisation and social exclusion, its vulnerabilities and standard of living all of these which links with its colonial roots of exploitation and patriarchal hierarchy of operating system and which has transformed to a global capital-labour relation.

Notes

1. Coolie was the bureaucratic term used by the Colonial British to describe indentured Labourers Refer <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/11/25/247166284/a-history-of-indentured-labour-gives-coolie-its-sting>
2. The tribal communities as indentured labourers were brought from central India in the plantation of Assam and plain part of North Bengal while hill tribes as labourers from Nepal were settled in the hilly region of North Bengal (Darjeeling). In case of South India majorly in Kerala plantation, Tamil-speaking Dalits were recruited as tea labourers.
3. Productivity linked wage commonly known as “*thikka*”, introduced in 2005. During the plucking season the field workers mostly women, are given the task to pluck stipulated amount of tea leaves per day in order to fulfil their duty and earn their wage. Generally, 24-26 kgs, is the stipulated task but it may vary from time to time and from tea garden to tea garden. It may also depend upon the quality of tea. Premium tea leaves are plucked in small quantities
4. Small tea growers (STGs) are someone who own up to 25 acres of land for tea cultivation and Bought leaf factories (BLFs) are independent factories which process the tea leaves bought from different places be it from small or large tea gardens. Currently, in India almost 50 percent of the total tea production is contributed by STGS.
5. Currently, 15 tea gardens are closed and around 18 per cent of the total tea estates in India are not functioning properly and they have been considered as sick tea gardens.

6. The wage fixation in the tea industry is done via tripartite meeting where representatives of owners/management, trade unions as representative of tea workers and the state representative who act as mediator/arbitrator, determine the wage through the process of collective bargaining. The decided wage increment has a tenure of three years. The Minimum Wage Act, 1948 is not implemented in the tea plantations of Assam and West Bengal, hence the process of wage fixation has no scientific basis, it is solely done through bargaining capacity.
7. The 15th session of the Indian Labour Conference in 1957 decided that the formula for fixing of wage for an adult-workers should be based on the costs of three units of consumption. However, for tea plantations labours a historical injustice has been done by the Central Wage Board for tea plantation Industry in 1966. They decided to take 1.5 units of consumption to the need-based minimum wage instead of 3 units. The family-based employment in tea plantation involve two adults hence, 1:3 ratio was too high rather 1.5 consumption should be taken into accounting while fixing the minimum wage.
8. The daily wage varies in different states. Tea plantation in Assam and West Bengal has the lowest wage. While writing this paper, in West Bengal tea plantation, daily wage rate is Rs.202.
9. Extra leaf price, is related to productivity linked wage. The workers who fail to fulfil the daily quota will get a disincentive wage while if they pick up extra leaves beyond their daily quota, they get incentive in the form of Extra leaf price (ELP).
10. Thikka is the colloquial term for daily quota to be fulfilled by the labourers.
11. Equal Remuneration Act, 1976: An Act to provide for the payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers and for the prevention of discrimination, on the ground of sex, against women in the matter of employment and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. Refer www.indiacode.nic.in
12. Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 aims to eradicate any kind of child abuse in the form of employment and prohibit the engagement of children in any kind of hazardous employment, who have not completed 14 years of age. Refer: http://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/act_3.pdf
13. CEC Working Paper, “Behind Closed and Abandoned Tea Gardens- Status report of India” 2007.

14. Ghumaure: is an organic cooperative network of money lending, where a group of women would collect certain amount of money contributing equally in certain interval of time (weekly, monthly etc). The collected money is given to a member who needs the money and the next collection is given to another and so on and so forth. In this way they fulfil their necessary needs for which they do not have to pay the interest unlike banks or money lenders.

Bandhan: is a micro finance scheme to empower women by providing micro loan with small interest rate to generate income.

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Challenges Faced by Women Domestic Workers during Pandemic - A Case Study of Lucknow City

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Abstract

Women domestic workers have been one specific category that has been severely impacted by the economic crisis brought on by the worldwide pandemic, particularly in the unorganized sector. The majority of domestic workers in India's wealthy urban metropolises are women, who face the danger of increased exploitation and resentment from the higher-income urban homes. Numerous sociologists have long been aware of the intersubjectivity issue as a component of the problematic modern connection between the upper and lower classes, which existed before the epidemic. The COVID-19 economic crisis and the government's reaction to it are predicted to further plunge about 40 crore informal workers into absolute poverty, according to the ILO study from April (2020). More than 200 million women who work as domestic servants are included in this estimate. In this article, we'll talk about how COVID-19 has affected female domestic workers and despite their important contribution to the economy, their work is not recognized by our Census authorities. We will also talk about the actions the government has done to assist domestic female employees. We'll undertake a microstudy on the difficulties experienced by female domestic workers in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, during the epidemic. Additionally, we will offer suggestions for the continuity plan for the rights of domestic workers after COVID-19.

Introduction

Domestic work is an important work which is largely performed by women (Gothoskar, 2013). When domestic labour is considered to be the exclusive realm of female members of society, people who engage in it, whether on a full- or part-time basis, are referred to as domestic workers. Household chores are traditionally seen as a woman's responsibility. But during the past several decades, the number of women working in offices has increased, raising the middle class's income. The situation has changed, and so has the demand for

domestic help. In large cities, young couples and lone professionals are more likely to rely on maids, or "*didis*," as they are sometimes called. Data show that domestic employees have increased by 120% in Indian households in the ten years since liberalisation. The number climbed from 7, 40,000 in 1991 to 16,6 lakhs in 2001. A family's reliance on a maid is now accepted practice.

In India, there are approximately five crore domestic workers, the most of them are women, according to figures published by the Delhi Labour Organization. Residents of slum dwellings have discovered themselves without job since the lockdown started. Numerous people lost their jobs as a result of the closure of stores and other companies. Their daily bread was jeopardized. As a result, women now carry a stigma associated with providing for their families, particularly those who continue to work as housemaids. Women have been compelled to choose different means of support because of the current scenario. They have been able to defy stereotypes and explore novel options, including as visiting marketplaces to acquire goods they can resell. Traditionally, only males would do this. Instances of women being subjected to domestic abuse by their spouses have also increased. During lockdown, many men don't have any source of income of their own, and now women might not be able to offer them money anytime they need it. These males have become more aggressive as a result of the closing of booze and toddy stores. The safety of the women in these conditions was in grave danger, not only for everyday survival. However, the number of women participating in the work market has increased recently. But women are expected to manage household work along with office work. Even though spouses help out around the house, women are still primarily responsible. There are a relatively small number of families that have supported domestic employees by paying their salary. Most women still lack employment and income.

This adds to their already heavy load because their spouses receive a daily pay. Millions of employees in India's informal sector have been pushed to the edge of destitution by COVID-19. They lost their employment without any safeguards to fall back on. Their weakness has been exposed by COVID-19,

and their families have been forced on the verge of hunger and destitution. Even though husbands help out around the house, women are still largely responsible. There are a relatively small number of families that have supported domestic employees by paying their salary. Most women still lack employment and income.

Domestic workers can thoroughly be divided into two groups:

- Workers who work and live at the employers' house
- Part-time workers who live in their own homes.

We have traversed domestic labour relations in general, but our specific focus is on two groups of workers.

- The first group are the maids, who often work in many homes each day and are responsible for cleaning floors and washing dishes. They live in their own homes.
- The second group consists of live-in workers who perform all kinds of tasks, and live with the employer with varying degree of liberty or isolation.

Scope

This study aims to draw the attention of the government and respected dignitaries to the major problems that they currently face, including the lack of fair pay, decent working conditions, and set work hours, workplace violence, abuse, and sexual harassment, victimisation by human traffickers or placement agencies, forced migration, a lack of welfare programmes, and a lack of opportunities for skill development. In both the cases, the market value of the 'work' done by them is low or there are certain challenges attached to domestic work which makes it difficult to assign market value to it though its 'use value' is quite high. The other problem is what 'productivity' means in the case of domestic work.

This study aims to highlight socio-economic background of Domestic Workers in Lucknow city which is the capital of Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India. According to the Report of THE STATE OF

EMPLOYMENT IN UTTAR PRADESH “Unleashing the Potential for Inclusive Growth”, In urban Uttar Pradesh, about 60 per cent of casual labour households and 40 per cent of self-employed households remained poor in 2011-12 due to the lack of social programmes, the challenge of poverty reduction in the state still remains formidable, and SC/STs are severely affected due to this neglect.

With a population of 199.58 million in 2011, Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state of the Indian union, accounting for 16.5 per cent population of the country. Women constitute about 47.6 per cent of population in the state. As compared to their male counterparts, the life expectancy of females in Uttar Pradesh is lower by one year (59.3) — unlike the national average pattern. One of the implications of the lower life expectancy of females in the state is their lower participation in the workforce. With regards to the overall structure of employment, 62.2 per cent of the workforce in Uttar Pradesh was self-employed in various economic activities in 2011-12. Over one-fourth workers were engaged in casual wage work while the remaining were working in regular salaried jobs. How does this structure of employment differ between males and females? The highest share of working women was self-employed, followed by those engaged in casual wage labour, while the least number were engaged in regular salaried employment.

However, the proportion of women working as self-employed was substantially higher as compared to men – 78 per cent for women as against 58 per cent for men – in Uttar Pradesh. This study aims to highlight the problems faced by women domestic workers in their daily lives.

Objectives

- To highlight the problems faced by domestic women workers in India.
- To get the attention of government on how domestic women workers suffered in hardtimes of Lockdown and Post COVID-19.
- To know about the socio-economic background of women domestic workers.

- To know about the nature of employment of female domestic workers during lockdown and after Post COVID-19.
- To know about the migrant status of female domestic workers, how they are struggling during lockdown for houses.
- To know about the mental and health related issues faced by domestic women workers during lockdown.
- To highlight the issues of increasing domestic violence cases during lockdown.
- To see whether the same problems still affect the female workers.
- To assess the degree of communication between domestic employees and employers.

Literature Review

The role of this sector as an employment provider cannot be neglected. According to India's Commission of Justice Development and Peace a domestic worker is “an individual employed to do household chores on a temporary, permanent, part time or full-time basis” (Srujana 2002). Already in colonial times domestic work was the main growing employment sector for working class women (Banerjee 1996) 1 Domestic service accounted for over 70 % of women workers in modern services, and for 12 % of all occupations in the late 19th century Calcutta (Banerjee), as there were few employment opportunities for them in the old colonial industries (de Haan 2003, 201).¹ Today, domestic workers, in all their diversity, are one the largest workers' groups in the informal sector. Whereas both unemployment and underemployment have been on the increase in other sectors (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000, 91), the category of ‘private households with employed persons’ has been growing (Parliwala & Neetha, 2006, 21). According to Indian National Sample Survey (NSS) data, there were 2,0 million female workers and 0,3 million male workers in 2001 as compared to 1,2 million female and 0,3 male workers in 1983, showing a substantial increase in the number of female workers (Mehrotra 2008, 2).

Social Alert (2000, 19), on the basis of information from several Indian civil society organisations, estimates that there are around 20 million domestic

workers in India. Of them about 20 % are estimated to be aged under fourteen, and 20–25 % fifteen to twenty. While domestic workers in most countries are mainly women and girls, in India there are relatively large numbers of male workers. Despite this, domestic work is increasingly feminised in India (Ray 2000b), around 90 % of these workers being female (Social Alert, 2000). This makes it one of the few sectors which has a female majority (Raghuram 2005, 5), and one of the largest employment providers for women and girls in India. the discrimination against daughters and widows in inheritance; a persistent gender disparity in literacy levels¹⁹; violence against women and girls; and at higher than local levels²⁰, a very low percentage of women in public decision-making both in the lower and upper seats of Parliament and in managerial positions in administration (Agarwal 2000, 37; Bhan 2001, 14–15). The need to organise domestic workers has been recognised around Asia, but very few trade unions have systematically supported this (Lindsay 2007, 72). In the US, there was a difference in how unionised and non-unionised domestic workers perceived their position: the union members had an occupational identity and felt they had some control over their work whereas the non-union members considered the work as merely a means to an end, expressing powerless resignation (Coley quoted in Romero 2002, 171). Lack of organisation among women applies to the informal sector more generally and relates to the extremely precarious financial situation of poor working women. For them, missing one day's work may be critical, undermining their bargaining power. Moreover, there is a history of obstruction and harassment of self-employed women's organisations in India, which adds to women's initial reluctance to participate in organised activities (Baruah 2004, 607, 623). Oh, finding a good worker is so hard” I was told by various employers, in almost identical words, when we discussed the recruitment of new workers. What they meant is that in principle finding a worker is easy, but it is more difficult to find a worker with the right combination of social attributes. “They treat us well. They give us respect; they do not yell. But they do not give us leave or higher wages. Around the world, typical problems of live-in workers such as excessive working hours, no rest days, no overtime

compensation, low wages, inadequate health insurance coverage, exposure to physical and sexual harassment, violence and abuse, and restricted movement beyond the employer's home have been well documented (Demaret 2004, 1). The workers I met in Jaipur lacked basic workers' rights such as right to leave, right to a minimum wage and right to the regulation of working hours. Some of these problems are specific to paid domestic work, some apply to much of the informal work in India.

An article written by Jagriti Chandra on Rights of domestic workers in focus post- lockdown showed that the denial of salaries and loss of employment faced by domestic workers as well as harassment by employers and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) meted out to them following the nationwide lockdown has brought into focus the need for safeguarding their rights. They have now brought out a manifesto demanding universal registration of employers and domestic workers and national comprehensive legislation.

The hypothesis of the Study

- This study assumes that UN Report (2013) stated that Millions of Women domestic workers around the world are not protected under general labour laws and are highly vulnerable to exploitation which calls on countries to extend social protection to them.
- This study assumes that During COVID-19, domestic women suffered a lot not only for livelihood, but also for the employment.
- This study assumes that Due to Lockdown, violence against domestic women workers have increased in their houses itself.
- This study assumes that some women domestic workers are migrant workers, during lockdown they have faced hard times in wandering here and there.

Methodology

- Given that Lucknow is the subject of our article, we made an effort to learn more about the issues domestic workers there encountered both during the lockdown and after things returned to normal.

- Both secondary and primary data were analysed to test the various hypotheses relating to the above-mentioned objectives of the study. While the information available in published sources was obtained and used wherever necessary, the major part of the data required for the study was generated through a sample survey. According to the Census of 2011 it was found that the total population of Lucknow city was 35.9 Lakh. The sources of Primary data collection are the women domestic workers who live in Lucknow especially, the household women who hired women domestic workers. The sources of secondary data collection are Journals, newspapers, like The Economics Times, India Today, and different reports published by ILO, DLO etc.
- Secondary data have also been gathered regarding the situation of female domestic workers in U.P.
- Data had to be produced using the random purposive sampling approach, which involved interviewing 100 respondents in the chosen neighbourhoods of Lucknow.

Data collection and Analysis

The sample population of Lucknow City is near about 35.9 lakhs. The population is 35.9 lakhs but the individual sample size of this research study is 100 because we had a constrained of lack of financial support as well as time. Keeping in mind the target of data collection, the data have been collected through the face-to-face research method, telephonic survey and random purposive sampling. As we all know that in the present scenario, field survey is not possible for collecting the data. For analysing the descriptive data Series Weightage method is used. In which the content of responses has been analysed and the data has been divided. The purpose of dividing data into two aspects was that it would dichotomize the data. With the help of tally marks, the data has been sorted, responses were converted into numeric form, with the help of excel the data has been entered into columns and multiplied by their respective weights and at last the data has been converted into pie charts. A Major Key finding of the survey has shown in this study.

Key Findings of the Study

- **ACCESS TO BASIC FOOD AND AMENITIES** - A survey conducted in Lucknow city among 100 domestic workers during the first two weeks of October showed that 39% of the women domestic workers are facing problem of food as the stocks in the nearby outlets are limited. Though not all but some also mentioned that they are facing problem in getting ration provided by the government and if it is provided free of cost just now, what will happen after the abolition of free ration schemes of the government. 29% of them told that they don't have enough money and this is the biggest challenge as they don't know how to access schemes for public food distribution.
- **NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT** – 80% of the respondents showed the fear of for their temporary nature of work and during Covid, emergency situations like lockdown, increased medical expenses. There was no assurance of their jobs during that period.
Due to the absence of a contract or job security, part-time workers, who make up the majority of their living were affected at 74%, as they were more susceptible to temporary boycotts. Casual workers experienced a more pronounced effect, at around 20%, and full-time employees experienced a much smaller effect, at about 6%.
- **RELATION WITH EMPLOYER** - The relationship between the employer and employee is not open and constant because of the transitory form of employment. Due to financial constraints or the nature of the work, women employees may leave or change jobs. Therefore, the relationship with the employer is ultimately not official.
- **LEVEL OF INCOME** - 78% domestic workers mentioned that their employers are not paying for the lockdown period while 22% are being paid. During Covid times the general price level was high but the income was low which affected their living and even the education of their children.
- **AWARENESS** - Only 31% of the domestic workers were aware about the government schemes and legal provisions being provided. So due to lack of awareness and less knowledge about the legal provisions it became impossible for them to avail the benefits for the same.
- **LEVEL OF SECURITY** - Most domestic workers were aware of the procedures which were to be taken to protect themselves against COVID-19, but they usually hesitate to diagnose the virus even in cases of high

fever, cough, and cold.

- **MODE OF PAYMENT** - Near about 80% women domestic worker receive their income in cash which was lowered post COVID as the level of prices were high, and the propensity to consume food by workers was more which led to lesser savings, poor health conditions, etc.
- **MIGRATION AFFECTING NORMAL LIFE ROUTINE** - In this section, it is obvious and natural that people are depressed and frustrated by a variety of issues, such as being unable to go to work, running out of food and necessities, and being paid either not at all or partially for the lockdown period. Domestic women workers were on the verge of a breakdown and were in the position to give up and return back to their homes, a survey has found.
- **FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FACED BY THE WORKERS** - We see that the majority is impacted with the issues relating to the home, and this is accurately given that many individuals lost their employment; many had mental health issues, and nearly all age groups experienced feelings of frustration or depression at the start of the lockdown and it continued for long.

TESTIMONIALS – Through our survey we found out few stories and would share one of them. Story of a respondent, twenty-five-year-old lady, came to Lucknow from Bihar recently with her two children in search of her husband, who had left for Lucknow only after a year of their marriage. He was working as a guard in a factory and used to visit the village every six months initially. He also used to call his wife regularly. But, suddenly, his behaviour towards her changed. She has not received any calls from him for the last year. She was finding it increasingly impossible to manage the expenses for her children. Then her sister, who was already working in Lucknow as a domestic worker, asked her to come to Lucknow and promised to help her find her husband.

After arriving in Lucknow, she made all the efforts to locate her husband but didn't get any success. So, to meet her daily expenses, she also started working as a domestic helper in the same housing society where her sister was

working. She lived with her sister for some time and then shifted to a separate one-room house in a slum nearby. She is also familiar with the COVID-19. Her employer had shared all the do's and don'ts related to the disease. She is among the very few domestic workers who are still going to work. She didn't get any leave, as she works for an elderly couple, and her absence will make the situation difficult for them. She hopes that somebody from their family will come to take care of them so that she can take leave and be with her children in this difficult time. There are many such tales of lockdown misery, not just one or two. Nearly one-third of all women domestic workers have experienced lockdown issues at some point in their workings.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- The positive aspect of the study is that now the responsibility involving the care economy has shifted from the women of the family to the hired domestic maid servants, which has enabled these women to go out and earn for the family.
- The government is considering a national domestic worker policy. This needs to be taken into account by the government in pandemic situations and even post pandemic as well.
- The government should restructure its institutions of governance, NGOs, women's welfare organisations, and various programmes launched by commissions like the National Commission on Women and implement provisions requiring that they all work toward a same objective.
- Through education, understanding of their fundamental rights, and empowerment, women should become strong and powerful. This is only achievable when all public and private groups work together to achieve a common objective. Here, one question arises? How many unions, government bodies, NGO's, private organizations are currently working for the welfare and rights of domestic women workers?
- All employees in need must have access to these resources so they may learn about their rights, services, rules, and assistance programmes.
- Academic institutions may have a significant role in it. They may provide youngsters with chances so that they can take full benefit of

their original ideas, critical thinking, and creative solutions, which can then be suggested to government dignitaries for the aforementioned issues as well as any other issues.

- To solve their issues and get benefits, domestic women workers need a National Level Legislative provision that may be put into place.
- Because domestic employees work in the informal segment of the labour market, they have never been able to organise a "formal" union to negotiate for their rights.

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“Dandelion, A Mother in My Orchard”

There was a dandelion in my orchard.
Humanity never harmonized with what she gave extending her arms,
suspending her honour, nourishing their barren farms.
Mondo Spruce and brawny Norfolk kept her shattering,
Leviathans who thrived to break her to smithereens.
Still, she stays, wielding her roots tight, carrying the neophyte,
cushioning her dandy from every venom, marooning, a life of her own.
Inexorably, she was lonesome in the canopy, haggard without sunshine,
nevermore she wanted dandy to suffer alike.
Apparently, she came here as blowball,
dandy will also leave her after this fall.
Breezes blew in azure sky.
She was antsy about dandy's shelter, in the world of vultures.
She didn't yawn till the dawn.
Fields of Ohio will be dandy's abode beyond the bounds of this town.
Cherub blossomed in aurora.
Her eyes filled with glistening
diamonds, gleaming effulgence of
endurance.
Momentarily, I sat sobbing beneath the scarlet sky;
this was nothing but the reflection of a mother's sight.

- Surabhi Mishra,
TYBA, 2022-2023

Sophia College (Autonomous), Mumbai
(This poem was recited at *Genderlogue* 2021-22, Sophia College, Mumbai)

BOOK REVIEW

Pankaj Sekhsaria, *Nanoscale: Society's Deep Impact on Science, Technology, and Innovation in India*. Bombay: Authors Up Front, 2020, ₹495 (cloth), pp. 182; ISBN 9387280705. E-book available

- Prof. Medha S. Rajadhyaksha

'Nanoscale': Insights into social impacts on scientific endeavours

Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it.
Ravindranath Tagore

The capacity to receive science in its true sense and develop into a society with scientific temper is yet a dream in India. The struggles of Narendra Dabholkar and many others expose the belly of our social structures that enjoy the fruits of developments in science and technology refuse to let ask simple questions about everyday experiences. The state encouragement for percolation of the past into the present creates a strange milieu of pseudo-science that subconsciously affects even the best amongst us. In this ethos, new discoveries and creative ideas become personalized and it is a challenge to sustain them through generations. While literature on how science contribute to society is available and has been discussed amply, there are hardly any systematic studies to address the impact of society on science, technology and innovation in India. Pankaj Sekhsaria's book 'Nanoscale' fills this gap. The publication is a outcome of six years of systematic and insightful study of five laboratories distributed over three cities, each of them working on some aspect of the cutting edge technology, nanoscience. A meaningful view of the inside of the laboratory required a sensitive outsider who had the patience to listen to simple stories, record, revisit and ultimately draw out meaningful conclusions. Dr. Sekhsaria did all this and then converted this research done for a doctoral degree into a very readable book. The complexity of the science did not deter him as he elegantly waded through multiple layers that comprised each case.

One could ask a question why the scientific endeavours investigated are in the field of nanotechnology. It is an excellent choice made by Sekhsaria. Firstly, it is at the cutting edge of science, internationally and nationally. There has been support for research in this area by government agencies funding science and technology. Secondly, nanotechnology, which essentially encompasses understanding and application of particles of miniscule dimensions (1 to 100 nanometers) has applications that span a wide canvas. Physicists, chemists, biologists working in basic sciences as well as clinicians and entrepreneurs, who also look at the possibility of commercial applications to solve problems of society, have keen interest in nanotechnology. This field of modern science also connects with history in some way as it can be integrated with traditional Indian medicine. The four case studies are chosen carefully, each treading on different aspects of the nanotechnology. Defining them as markers of Indian society, the four stories told cut across the social, economic and intellectual strata. The first story plays out in a University set up, describing the constraints of a well-established system and the innovative work done by a professor integrating teaching and research seamlessly. The second story is about work done in a relatively smaller institute that banked heavily on collaborations, application orientated work and an interdisciplinary approach where interface between traditional knowledge systems with modern science provides meaningful insights. The third is about nanotechnology in use to commercialize an equipment that could be widely used to resolve the biggest challenges of India, providing clean water to the poorest. The fourth story is about translation of basic work to bedside treatment, the ultimate dream of a laboratory worker and the much desired solution by the clinician. With these four case studies, an attempt is made in each case to crack the way the minds of people working in their areas of interest operates. All four set ups are addressing complex problems and for an outsider, the way they go about it is a black box. Sekhsaria opens this black box for us...he dwells upon where these teams come from, the dynamics within a team and the pressures they face, the social milieu that encourages as well as constrains them. Why they do what they do? An inside view of this creative community is not easy to get. And the

thesis and the subsequent book by Sekhsaria is one of the pioneering attempts to sensitively understand the working of a slice of society struggling to make the world a better place.

The first story Sekhsaria tells is about a brilliant professor from Pune University, Professor C. V. Dharmadhikari, who pioneered work on indigenously building a Scanning Tunnelling Microscope (STM). A journey spanning several decades, Dharmadhikari is credited for firmly establishing nanotechnology work in India. Over a period of twenty-five years (1988 to 2014) Dharmadhikari led a laboratory with a team comprising a large number of M.Phil. students, several doctoral and post-doctoral fellows who actually made cutting edge probe microscopes and published extensively in peer reviewed, highly rated international journals. It is said that one of the best way of understanding the working of a system is reconstructing it. Fabricating a complex equipment from scratch was an excellent experience for the students. Many of Dharmadhikari's students were subsequently hired in eminent national and international institutes. Interestingly, despite resounding success of his creations, Dharmadhikari's laboratory wound up unceremoniously after he retired. It is here that Sekhsaria's insights are relevant, for this is a situation of many pioneers in Indian science. In daily life, when society struggles to make its dreams come true, very creative solutions surface, collectively known in India as 'jugaad'. While, internationally, the term and the concept is recognized and appreciated a little grudgingly, jugaad has its own share of doubts and criticisms. With no compromise on the end result and efficiency, low cost equipments of all kinds can be seen in operation in Indian society. It is not a surprise then that jugaad would percolate into labs buzzing with creative energy. Embedded in a society surviving on jugaad, it is but natural that the thought processes of daily struggles find a place in innovations happening in a sophisticated scientific laboratory which is fighting for legitimate space in the international arena. Dharmadhikari's brilliance was in making a state-of-the-art STM using indigenous material innovatively. In a university setup, the mandate is essentially education and training, which was

done by Dharmadhikari in full measure. Building up authentic, complicated equipment all by themselves with a minimal budget was no mean achievement and in an ideal world should have been celebrated far more. The possibility of commercializing the output with all its `jugaad' was real. However, the opportunity was missed because often a good scientist will find it difficult to get into hassles of commercialization as the laboratory work itself is so exciting and engaging, exactly as Dharmadhikari points out. Commercialization requires collaboration with an entrepreneur. This collaborative approach is sadly lacking in Indian society. As Sekhsaria puts it, `Jugaad we have seen in a physics laboratory might not perform precisely the same function as it does in an urban slum or a farming village in rural India, but it is undeniably a part of the same continuum. "The link is cultural, social, economic and political; it is not unmissable, it is inescapable" This truth in this conclusion deserves attention by the society!

Sekhsaria devoted a substantial amount of time to the Center for Nanoscience, a laboratory which is a part of the Agarkar Research Institute, Pune. The engagement involved actually spending time with the investigators, interviewing them, attending their presentations and presenting his own work at various occasions. The choice of the institute for the study was perhaps wise as many of the projects being carried out focused on a unique situation arising in India out of coexistence of Ayurveda, a traditional knowledge system and the modern medical sciences. Young, active workers from across the country, conversant with modern equipments and methodologies in biomedical sciences were engaged in validating traditional Aurvedic preparations where the mechanism of action was not really known. This approach to science has its share of criticisms but working at the interface is important for often the age-old knowledge, specially about medicinal plants or metal preparations throws up very effective therapeutic products. S-Gel, a nano silver preparation developed and commercialized as a derma product, is a success story of this institute. It is suspected that many Aurvedic preparations work at nano level and their validation is necessary because side effects could be real and serious.

This is a unique social situation where two worlds interface with sceptic respect of each for the other. The holistic approach of Ayurveda and the reductionist approach of the modern medical sciences create flash points that need to be resolved. Neither the biomedical scientist nor the Aurvedic doctors are on the same knowledge platforms as each has a totally different way of approaching health issues. Yet the collaboration seems to be worthwhile and several other laboratories have taken it up. Traditional medical practices are recognized by the government with the setting up of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Hoemeopathy) Department. Making space for these traditional systems to run parallel with modern medicine is uniquely Indian and embedded in social milieu and does have effect on practice of modern science. Sekhsaria comments ‘The culture of innovation is dependent on the simultaneous existence in the same place , same space and at the same time of these two worlds , allowing for and even demanding collaborative work and creative interventions.’ And he concludes that “It is my contention that a rare opportunity of and for innovation lies before us.”

‘The old is made new, But the new remains old, There might be nano in the ceramic candles, But few will be sold.’ Sekhsaria opens each story with a rhyme that gives the message carried by the story. Indeed, it is quite difficult to understand when society perceives a technological innovation as ‘new’. And failure to do so can result in losses that come as a surprise. The International Advanced Research Center for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials at Hyderabad, a Department of Science and Technology funded prestigious institute enthusiastically wrote about its first nano material based innovation that improved purification of drinking water. They derived great satisfaction from the fact that the product developed in their laboratory by modifying the pre-existing ceramic candle used to purify water and with the brand name ‘PURITECH’ was in the market. Dr. Tata N. Rao, who personally had experienced the problems of water purification in rural India, led the project. A very fine and well trained scientist, Rao, with his team concentrated on improving substantially, using nanotechnology the quality of ceramic candle

used in a commonly used water filter. The product they developed was well tested in the laboratory and in the field for several relevant parameters and was sure to be a commercial success as it increased the price of the existing ceramic candle only marginally. G. Bharath Kumar, a successful entrepreneur, in his own right and knew the market, took up the mass production of the modified ceramic candle and launched the product with suitable advertising and distribution also in smaller towns. It, therefore, was totally unexpected when poor sales forced the production unit to stop manufacturing. While the scientists celebrated their innovation as a success with technology transfer to the field, the reality was that very few actually bought the modified ceramic candles. In his interactions with Bharath Kumar, Sekhsaria was struck by an explanation given by a colleagues of Bharath Kumar who commented that the ceramic candle technology itself was becoming obsolete and new alternatives had entered the market. Sekhsaria takes these thoughts further and discusses the idea of obsolescence with reference to research and innovation... 'old is not just the end, it can also be a new beginning'. He also stresses the importance of involving the user in research and technology development. Inputs from the society for doing science is mandatory, especially when the aim is its wider use. He concludes by pointing out that the nano enabled ceramic candles need not be considered as failure, the ceramic candles are still in use in the filters and so are the scientists and entrepreneurs and there is no reason why new realities should not emerge. The process is ongoing!!

The fourth case Sekhsaria has taken up is the most painful and stark example of how norms and behaviour of society make medical science and technological advancements irrelevant and unreachable to the beneficiaries. The study is conducted in two institutes, the LV Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI), Hyderabad and Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai, both of which have expertise in treating a childhood cancer, retinoblastoma. Often fatal, retinoblastoma, gallops and possibility of survival is only by removal of the eye. An alternative of precise drug delivery using nanotechnology is being investigated, but it is a losing battle right from the beginning because of the absence of the

patient reporting for treatment after the diagnosis in the first place. More so if it is a girl child! After all possible alternative treatments have been tried, the patient is brought in too late to be given any treatment other than palliative one. This frustrating scenario is fought actively by the clinicians by building up teams that include social workers who follow up individual patients. The challenge is huge and a clinician like Vikas Ketan at the Sankara Nethralaya takes on an additional responsibility by transforming into a 'Clinician-Scientist- Social activist'. Despite these efforts, the success in getting the patient to the clinic in time is almost impossible if the affected child is a girl. The poor status of women in India has been documented enough and the reality of the active elimination of the girl child adds to the tragedy. Javed Ali from LVPEI mourns the case of Prema More who could have been saved had she been brought to him on time. Retinoblastoma may not be the only killer faced by the girl child, there are probably many more health hazards where treatment is denied because of a strong gender bias in the society. Sekhsaria brings into sharp focus these issues of how a female infant is pushed into becoming a 'non user' of benefits of science and technology by the society. The hope for this situation lies in the fact that just a different choice can salvage the tragic end.

In 1987, Bijker, Huges and Pinch introduced the concept of 'Social Construction of Technological Systems' which suggests that scientific innovations that can produce different outcomes depending on the society in which it is developed. Different social groups perceive scientific development differently, perhaps related to the end use. The complete acceptance and stabilization of an invention in a society requires some sort of consensus. A socio-political milieu perhaps decides the direction development of science and technology takes in a society. Sekhsaria's study is unique as it addresses these issues by actually entering the laboratory set ups of the new developing science of nanotechnology. The study is extremely insightful. The method is of analysing and reviewing carefully and painstakingly the narratives by actually working in the field and drawing conclusions in each context. While the narratives provide very good insights, reinforcement with some qualitative data

is wanting in each case and a comparison of similar situations other than in Indian society is missed. The book is extremely readable and a must read for people working to build up a scientific temper in the society. It is a must read for scientists, social workers, administrators, clinicians and funding agencies and entrepreneurs alike. While this review may be limited, the book itself provides detailed insights and concludes on a very hopeful and positive note which should not be missed!

Dusad Nandini, ***Women and Media***. RSBA Publication, Jaipur, 2022,
Rs. 500/- (Hard Bound), pp. 100

- Chanda Asani

Dusad's first book is a reflection of what is possible by sensitive perception of women's lives and how media could be viewed through a gender lens. It is an introductory book for those who wish to know more about women's portrayal in different forms of media. It is delightful for general readers and enriching for research scholars of both media and gender studies.

The first chapter, Ways of Seeing and Representing Women in Media sets the pace of this recently published book by its title. Media she writes is 'different from other business enterprises and can play a critical role in sensitizing society towards women issues and rights.' Does media do this? Media persons have been putting their effort and published books to bring this out.

In news and in print media hardly any importance is given to development issues instead, media feeds stereotypical images of women. Feminist approach to media is a necessity to create alternative and proportionate coverage of women's issues. The author has addressed how media reports women as inferior and how low the percentage is of reporting of equality of status in compared to sensational crime related stories of women via research done by feminist scholars. Television and advertisements are compromising women's

multiple identities. The author refers to the International Federation of Journalism and Global Monitoring Project and states that media cannot operate in a social vacuum. The author mentions a basic need for media that ‘the masculine narrative is a kind of subjectivity that needs to change.’

Other than the women’s issues education, dowry, female foeticide, honour killing, working women and women journalists in media the author addressed how these issues get represented in media and affect however briefly about the issues. This book is a basic for all readers who would like to know where women stand in terms of media. There are ample references for those who wish to pursue the issues and/or do further studies.

The third chapter ‘Construction of Women in TV soaps’ is subdivided into three sections – Black and White 1959-1980, Colour 1980-1990 and Satellite 1990 onwards. Here too the author has shared researchers’ perspectives enough for an introductory overview of how women have been constructed in diverse hues through different periods. She has ingeniously juxtaposed stereotypes and gendered representations of the changing portrayal of women.

In ‘Construction of Stereotypical Women in Films’ the author has bared the invisibility of stereotypical women in five stages of films – 1896-1925, 1925-1950, 1950-1975, 1975-2000 and 2000 onwards. The book is an excellent introductory reference for different genres of media. This chapter gives a glimpse of the author’s in-depth comprehension of gendering that gets reflected in films be it Mother India or Sonbai in *Mirch Masala*; women as decorations, career women losing out to ‘normal’ girlfriends, as well as audience receptive to female-led movies. In the limited space the author has brought forth the low participation of women in film industry and that too hardly known.

Objectification of women with reference to advertisements which can occupy complete media section in a library has been sensitively covered in this chapter to see through promotion of domesticity. This chapter also reflects on the journey of advertisements in India and how women are portrayed and

objectified in patriarchal expectations. With changing society, the trends of changing advertisements have been stated with examples. The author has briefly but aptly commented on the acceptance of changing traditions and counter views.

I quote here Dr. Garima Shrivastava's statement in the foreword, 'An eye opening read for one and all'.

Siby K. Joseph, *Kasturba Gandhi: An Embodiment of Empowerment.*

Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Mumbai, 2020, pp.152

- Sandhya Mehta

While Mahatma Gandhi is regarded as one of the most outstanding persons in history, not much is known about his life-companion Kasturba. This book is a welcome addition to the scantily available material on her life and work. In the author's words, the primary attempt of the book is "to present Kasturba Gandhi in nutshell as an embodiment of an empowered woman who had an identity of her own", and he has been successful in this effort. The author brings to light the journey of this brave and courageous woman who was with Gandhi for sixty-two years, as a helpmate and best friend, and throughout this period they had been "learning from each other and sharing each other's joy and sorrows." The chapter-scheme of this well researched book is well-knit and the information provided is useful. The reader gets details about Kasturba's paternal family, her days before her marriage, her struggles in South Africa and India and her contribution as Gandhiji's companion in his struggle for the freedom of India. The book provides moving glimpses of the last days of Kasturba with Gandhiji by her side in Aga Khan Palace in Pune.

Kasturba, named as Kastur and also called Kasturbai, was born in April 1869. (The suffix Ba, meaning mother in Gujarati, was added to her name later.) A few months older than her husband, Kasturba was a strong and independent woman. Young Mohandas was possessive of her and put

restraints on her movements in daily life and expected her to obey his commands. The author points out that “This sowed the seeds of a bitter quarrel.” However, Kasturba retained her independent spirit.

It is well-known that after returning from England as a barrister, Gandhiji could not do well in his legal practice. In 1893, he accepted an offer from Dada Abdulla to go to South Africa. In 1896, Kasturba, along with their children, undertook their first voyage and accompanied him to South Africa. For Kasturba, it was a life of adjustments and hardships in South Africa, far removed from the life she was leading in Porbandar/Rajkot. Gandhiji dictated her and children to wear western style of clothes. Kasturba started wearing sari in a Parsi style, with socks and shoes and the boys wore coats and trousers, much to her dislike.

As Gandhiji started evolving, his ideas changed and so did his ways of living and working. Kasturba too accepted the challenges of the times. Her participation in passive resistance movement in South Africa was commendable. Her courage and bravery was remarkable when she was arrested and was sentenced to three months of hard labour. Her health deteriorated in prison. She suffered from hemorrhage after her release from prison and had to undergo a painful surgery without using chloroform because of her weak physical condition. Gandhiji took his vow of *Brahmacharya* in 1906. In his words, “The idea (*brahmacharya*) came to me and Ba took it up and made it her own. In the result the relationship between us was as one between true friends “.

When Kasturba and Gandhiji returned to India in 1915, they were lauded for their sacrifice during the non-violent struggle in South Africa and their love for their motherland. The author gives a description of the series of receptions and felicitations held in Bombay (now Mumbai) to welcome and honour Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi. However, there seems to be an omission of Mohammed Ali Jinnah’s praise for Kasturba. In January 1915, a reception was arranged by

Gurjar Sabha in Bombay to honour Gandhiji and Kasturba. Jinnah presided over the meeting and applauded the work of Kasturba in South Africa by saying that "For a woman to stand by her husband, share his trials and sufferings and sacrifices and even go to jail was the model of womanhood of which any country could well be proud of." (The Bombay Chronicle, 15 January 1915).

Kasturba played an active role in Champaran and Rajkot Satyagrahas. The author rightly observes that in 1917 in Champaran, "She helped Gandhi in understanding the harsh realities prevailing in the villages by surveying the conditions of village women. " She understood the sufferings of people. In 1939, Kasturba decided to join and support the people of the princely state of Rajkot in their Satyagraha against their ruler. Gandhiji could read her mind. He wrote: "Kasturba is a daughter of Rajkot. She felt a personal call. She could not sit whilst the other daughters of Rajkot were suffering for the freedom of the men and women of the State."

Kasturba remained a caring and devoted wife throughout her life. She looked after everyone around her. Gandhiji's health was her primary concern. In 1918, Gandhiji had a severe attack of dysentery. His vow of not drinking milk was an impediment to his recovery. It was Kasturba's simple suggestion, based on common sense that helped: "Your vow was taken against the milk of cow, but not against the milk of the goat." Even though Kasturba was not literate, she kept on evolving. Gandhiji had noticed her devotion to him and commented: "Ba blossomed more and more and freely merged herself in me, that is, in my work – which was service."

The Appendices of the book are well-selected and engrossing. They consist of speeches of Kasturba at the Ajmer District Political Conference and at Punjab Achhut Udhar Conference; her emotional letter to the eldest son, Harilal, expressing her anguish about his improper behavior; Gandhiji's articles

in praise for Kasturba - *My teacher in Non-Violence* and *She Stood Above Me*; and Subhash Chandra Bose's tribute to Kasturba.

This interesting book, based on meticulous research, convincingly demolishes the usual image of Kasturba as being just a shadow of her husband. It brings out different facets of her life and work and effectively displays her as an empowered woman. It is published by Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Mumbai to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Kasturba.

Vibhuti Patel and Nandita Mondal, ***Gendered Inequalities in Paid and Unpaid Work of Women in India***, Singapore: Springer, 2022, pages:

xx+297, Price: € 199.99, ISBN 978-981-16-9973-3. DOI:

10.1007/9789811699740

- Narayan Barman

Initially, the neo-liberal economic reforms gave an impression that they would enhance the employment opportunities by attracting the foreign direct investment (FDI) and expanding the manufacturing sectors, particularly to unorganised sectors which constitute the largest number of women workers in the developing countries like India. But in reality, it is witnessed that after the economic reforms of the India's economy the workforce participation of women went through a rapid decline in the last three decades; even the sectors which were formal in character in the earlier period became informal due to the restructuring of the production system marked by piece rate work, subcontracting resulting in casualisation of the workforce, home based work and temping which forced millions of the poor women workers on the periphery of the economy lead a precarious existence under liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (Patel, 2013). The present book bring out the inner essence of the women's work, work culture, environment and their daily livelihood struggles from different sectors of India which are often ignored by the state. Women's unpaid care work is not only invisibilised but also non-recognised. In this book the authors make an authentic effort to highlight the

fundamental loopholes of the unorganised sector that enhance intersectional vulnerabilities of women across caste, class, ethnicity, religion and gender.

In chapter 1, the editors of the volume provide an overarching concern of connecting the dots in women's paid and unpaid work in the context of rapid changes that have taken place in the 21st century. They effectively expose how the globalization in the economy reduce the women's participation in the workforce due to the mechanization in the manufacturing and commercialization agricultural sector which has partially benefited to men (p.2). Therefore the women are still forced to work in a traditional way of production marked by labour intensive, drudgery prone, monotonous and dead-end work. On the other hand in the era of privatization, the main motive of the employers to make the highest profit by using the employees without providing them social security and social protection entitlements. And women unorganized workers have become the main target of this vicious cycle and are sued as the cheapest labour. The author also analyses the gender relation of the workplace where women workers are increasingly being used as men's subordinates at the workplace, particularly in the country like India where labour relations are highly dependent on its hierarchical caste system. The informal sector workforce is composed of women from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward castes and Muslim women with restricted socio-cultural mobility (p.6). The global south has become mostly a supplier of raw materials and cheap labour for the global north. The author ends the chapter with the collective and organized efforts of women to challenge the oppressive situation.

Chapter 2, titled as 'Macroeconomic Policies, Neo-liberal Economic Globalisation and Women in the Workforce' by Vibhuti Patel makes attempt to show, how neo-liberal economic system has declined the women's collective bargaining capacity in the labour market, weakened the welfare functions of the state to the safeguard the interests of women workers. This chapter also brings to the fore how the new economic production system has

deindustrialized the production system by shifting of the factory-based production to the household resulting in enhanced the work load of women (p.19). In this system, women face high wage discrimination, the patriarchal social stereotypes that accentuate public- private dichotomy (p.24).

In chapter 3 entitled, ‘Women’s Work: Worker’s Agency and Dignity of Labour Under Lens’ by Nandita Mondal deals with the issue of women’s agency and dignity (P.30). She highlights ways in which working women’s voices get diluted during policy making. The author also argues that due to the limitation of the statistics, the actual ground reality based data about women workers, even targeted intervention becomes difficult (p.34). Hence, visibility of women’s paid and unpaid work in the statistics and indicators is a MUST.

Chapter 4 by Ananya Chakraborty asks a pertinent question in its title, Where do Migrant Women Work? Glimpses of Paid and Unpaid Work Among Women Migrants in Informal Sector in India’. While analyzing the pattern and trend of the women migration in India, the author argued that the poor women who migrate for the employment are initially forced to participate in the work which is highly exploitative because of economic compulsions (p.48). The chapter also highlights the nuances of socio-cultural determinants of the women migration of India. Based on her primary data collection, the author reveals how the lack of their technical skill and entitlements impact their bargaining power in the labour market (p.51).

In chapter 5, ‘Women’s Paid Work as a Bubble of Empowerment: A Case Study of a Social Enterprise Working With Women Artisans’ by Kaniska Singh and Asfia Jamal brings out the nuanced insights into the discourse on empowerment (p.74) and states that, participation of women in paid work can be ideal mechanization to empower the women. The author also presents a profile of historical gender gap in work participation (p.72) in this chapter.

Chapter 6, ‘Decoding Professional Women: An Analysis of Social Structure and Organizational Role Stress’ by Deepmala Baghel tries to unravel

different role stressors (role conflict, role overload, role isolation, role stagnation, role distance, role erosion, role ambiguity, personal inadequacy, resource inadequacy) afflicting working women. She also explores the work specific role stress among women in different professions that has its roots in omnipresence of patriarchy. She concludes that social context plays an important role, thus requires a mechanism to tackle the issue of role stress among professional women.

Chapter 7, Gender, Labour, and the Social Reproduction of Motherhood: A Study of Commercial Surrogacy in Mumbai by Aishwarya Chandran has deconstructed commercial surrogacy, a reproductive labour practice which operates in the context of its quasi-legal status. The literature is a piece of precise explanation of the reproductive labour relation of India where the women of the marginalised section of the society give their labour in favour of the elite group of people who take advantage of the economic helplessness of women. The author also shows how the caste, class and race and other socio-economic parameters like religion play the dominant role to this labour practice (P.129).

Chapter 8 ‘The Travails of Women Street Entrepreneurs in Aizawl, Mizoram’ is a field based ethnographic study by Lalremruati Rodi and Rama Ramaswamy in Aizwal, Mizoram. The chapter provides the conceptualization and analysis of dynamics of street entrepreneurship and offers insight into the socio-economic origins of the women entrepreneurs in the market of Aizwal, their business operations and challenges as well as absence of state support in providing basic sanitary and transport facilities. These women do their business in the city but reside in the peri-urban area. The authors profile life worlds of street entrepreneur women and give an idea about their daily grind of running petty business, life story, infrastructural inadequacy and unsurmountable problems.

In the chapter 9, authored by Gayatri Sharma and titled, ‘Negotiating Rights for Street Vendors: The Importance of Incorporating a Gender Perspective’ brings out a trajectory of daily life, livelihood of women street vendors and their daily livelihood vulnerability in the male dominated sector. The author also illustrates the scenario of legal rights and bargaining capacity of the women street vendor with legal institutions. The author states that while doing their business, the women vendor face the high gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

Chapter 10, Pournima Arvel in her chapter, “Begging or Caste-based Urban occupations?” explores the nuances of Beggary as a caste-based occupation among women in the metropolitan city of Mumbai. The chapter delineates the origin of begging in India and shows how the begging practices are related to Indian culture and religious sentiments. The author argues on the basis of her field based qualitative study that both in public and private spaces, women beggars face harassment by the public as well as brutalisation by the state.

Chapter 11 by Saptam Patel, “Making Visible the Invisible: Women Artists and Her story” shows that for centuries the art world has been highly gendered. Even in the contemporary art world also, women artists do not get a level playing field and end up as secondary contributors and rewardees. Male gaze is omnipresent in the artistic expressions in which women, their body and their experiences have been portrayed. During the 20th century, feminist women artists challenged these conventional depictions, but even in the 21st century, as the art markets, may they are controlled by men; a male talent is appreciated, valued, exhibited, rewarded and preserved. Her narrative on ‘Women Artists and Herstory’ strongly claims that the art and art markets are run by a discriminatory system where the patriarchal biases push the women’s art and artist in the corner of the art market.

Radhika Uppal and Amrita Gupta bring forth an incredibly attractive narration of women in non-traditional sector like driving in chapter 12, ‘Breaking Boundaries - Women in the Non-Traditional Livelihoods as Professional Drivers’. The chapter discusses how the neo-liberal economic system accelerates the disintegration of the traditional livelihoods of women. Neo-liberal economy opens the door to challenge the patriarchal dominance for women. As a result, gender norms change and a particular section of women come up in the non-traditional livelihood like driving.

Vijayamba R. takes her enquiry into the world of women working in the livestock sector as an allied agricultural activity in chapter 13, “Women’s Participation in Livestock Raising – Evidence from NSSO Employment and Unemployment Surveys 1993-94 to 2011-12”. Her study tries to investigate the participation of women in livestock and the factors affecting it. It also investigates the participation of women in various activities of economic importance to households that include some activities related to livestock production. The chapter shows the relationship between socio economic factors and women’s participation in livestock. Over 45% of women in the livestock belong to the other backward castes (OBCs) and among the women cultivators, 56 per cent of women are also doing livestock raising.

In chapter 14 by Kanchan Ekka titled, “Gender and Livelihood in Post Cocoon Activity: Understanding Patriarchal Legitimization of Women’s Work in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh” is based on primary research of the self-help group of women in sericulture and their collective endeavour to alter public perceptions and promote awareness in the community to change male behaviour and establish more egalitarian gender norms. The author has disseminated women’s contribution in cocoon activities and shown how the gender division of labour and lack of recognition make the women invisible in this sector.

Chapter 15, titled, ‘Precarity among Women Workforce in the Handloom Sector at Sualkuchi, Assam’ by Reshmi Haque examines the precarity faced by women handloom weavers at Sualkuchi, Assam in her chapter based on the findings of her fieldwork. The chapter highlights condition of women handloom workers and their survival strategies to cope up with male unemployment, poverty, low income, low literacy and large family size. The study reveals that few women weavers have desire and skill to become entrepreneur but due to social restrictions, socioeconomic constraint and family obligations, they fail to do so. Juggling between their duty as a parent and as an employee, they at times face emotional breakdown, alienation and feeling of low self-esteem. She poignantly profiles the occupational vulnerability of women weaver at work place, how the poor work environment, work related health risk, inadequate wage, and substantial debt (p.240) which restrict them to the socio-economic upliftment.

Chapter 16, “Women’s Labour, Self-Help Groups & Microfinance in a Neo-Liberal World: An Interrogation of the Role of Self-Help Groups in the Rehabilitation of Former Devadasis in Belgaum District Of Karnataka” by Lavanya Shanbhogue articulates the role of the NGOs for providing support to women who are physically and socially exploited and excluded. She observed that an impediment that stood in the way of the rehabilitative exercise is a stigma associated with caste-based subjugation and control for Dalit women. This perpetuates continued exclusion leading to marginalisation in the village economy. She concludes that the volume of social security and social protection on a long term and sustained manner could be of immense help in shaping correct policies for the rehabilitation process of marginalised group like Devadasis.

Chapter 17, on ‘Economic Crisis and Plantation labour: Changing Contours of Women’s Work in the Tea Sector’ by Ashmita Sharma discusses implications of economic crises in the tea sector on the political economy of the plantation labour. This sector overwhelmingly depends upon women’s

labour. The declining demand of Indian tea in the international market produces a subsequent reaction in the production market, since the big companies like TATA, Hindustan Unilever started withdrawing their venture from the production and concentrating mostly on marketing of tea. Therefore the tea production and labour relation in this industry went through a restructuring process from a formal to an informal level where with the casualization of the workers, the workers were deprived from entitlements. Similarly the informal production system diluted the power of labour union in the tea industry and casualization of the work led the workers, particularly women to more intense exploitation. Currently, the bargaining capacity between the workers with the owner has decreased tremendously. Subsequently, due to mechanization of the production system, the demand of labour has also reduced in this industry. Thus the labour out-migration has started for exploring the new sources of livelihood by the tea industry workers.

This book is aimed at the ‘reduction of economic inequality through engendered public economics policies, gender responsive participatory budgeting, transformative financing for gender equality and gender responsive legislative measures for social security and social protection as suggested in several studies by the contributors of chapters in the edited volume, becomes a need of an hour’ (10). In this book the authors bring out the wide spectrum of informal sector activities where women’s labour is crucial-cum-nuanced and, so far, has remained untouched by the academic scrutiny. That is the reason this book is a must-read for academicians, policy makers, workers’ organisations (trade unions, cooperatives, associations, self-help groups), media persons, thinking youths researchers dealing with the problem and challenges posed by enmeshing of paid and unpaid work of women in India.

Indranil De, Shyam Singh, and Shilpi Smita, *Social Norms, Gender and Collective Behaviour Development Paradigms in India*. Panda

Publication: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021, pp. 240, Rs. 4116/-.

- Dr. Sangeeta Desai

The book makes an important contribution to the epistemological understanding of social norms and logically argues how gender norms and social norms are basically institutions. While the crux of effective development interventions is understanding the complexity of social norms, the deconstructing or changing of the social norms is an arduous process. The book covers critical theme of the significance of institutions and social norms in women's workforce participation, women's empowerment and behaviour change in sanitation practices as well as a policy response to social norms. With the help of quantitative and qualitative studies the book answers the core question whether human choices are constrained due to social norms especially for women and what strategy need to be developed to either change or discard a harmful social norm that limits gender development. Through the understanding of social norms, including caste hierarchies, the regressive practices that communities follow has been explored. The collective behaviour of the society influences, limits gender choices and decisions with respect to sanitation as well as restricts women's full participation in paid economy.

Chapter 1 is an **Introduction to Institutions and Social Norms**. It delves deeply into the collective behaviour with respect to sanitation practices followed in rural hinterlands and provides empirical evidence for the same. While evaluating the behaviour of social norms with respect to sanitation, the NSS data has revealed that it is not necessarily about the accessibility of infrastructure or availability of resources that restricts the user from moving forward to its actual use rather it is the behavioural traits of the entire community that guides the decisions. Social norms are developed when certain behavioural pattern is collectively approved for specific activity. The government may sanction rewards and punishments for following or for discarding the social norms. When societies collectively assign or unassign the

toilet for defecation, respectively, then toilet use or open defecation becomes an institution. Thus institutions shape the expectations of the society, economy and governance.

Chapter 2, is about **Understanding Social Norms**. The authors assert that people's behaviour is influenced by the observation of what others do or by knowing what others expect them to do. While in cases where norm relevant information is less transparent, particularly private and costly to obtain, there is variability in individual behaviour and more selfish choices are made. Past studies have proved that social norms are necessary for cooperation and social order but at the same time social norms such as child marriage, female genital cutting, caste norms, smoking and drinking have also been harmful to the society. Human reasoning may help in evolving social norms. A command and control public policy may fail to usher in behavioural change. In order to bring a change in a social norm, interventions must create new beliefs within an individual reference network, so that the collective expectations of the people allow new behaviour to emerge. In order to abandon negative and undesirable norms the people's empirical and normative expectations are to be first changed. Similarly regressive gender norms which are detrimental to gender equality can be addressed through frequent discussions and motivating and changing attitudes.

Chapter 3 focuses on **Social Norms and Women's Work Force Participation**. Through the various pan India figures it is crystal clear that women's participation in workforce in India is dismissal. The reasons for lower Female labour force participate FLFP in India has been attributed to the unavailability and scarcity of jobs according to skills, patriarchal ideology, the pre-existing sexual division of labour and the preferred household choice to stay at home. Social norms surrounding female work are constraints on female labour force participation in India, as they dictate women's role as primarily caregivers and homemakers. The studies showed that women who opted for work faced negative sanctions, initially, for joining work. Tribal women were found to be liberated from regressive norms to a greater extent compared to

other women. The chapter addresses some critical questions as to firstly whether women's work force decisions are governed by social norms, customs or agency, secondly it looks at the resistance from the family if any should the woman make a choice of joining the workforce and the sanctions that the woman may face on transgressing the social norms. Some pointed assertions that have been made are that when social norms are examined with a gender lens then the focus should be on the attitude, practices, and beliefs as well as on the institutions which promote gender discrimination and inequality. The social norms that approve or disapprove women's paid work prevail irrespective of the education and income level, class and caste status of the woman.

Chapter 4 is on **Gender and Agriculture: Cases of Woman Participation in Rural Odisha**. Through case study of village in Odisha, the research highlights the gendered discrimination within the context of social norms in agriculture labour force in rural pockets. Previous studies have also pointed that women from lower caste are lowly paid and women from upper caste do not work as agricultural labourers and if they do work in their own field they do not get paid for the work. The increasing feminisation of agriculture due to men migrating to urban lands for economic opportunities is not new, however in the absence of land rights, female agricultural labourers, widows of the farmers and tenant farmers are left bereft of recognition as farmers and their consequent entitlements. The study aims to look at identifying the social norms associated with the women participation in agriculture and to examine the relationship between women participation in agriculture and their role in intra-family decision-making process. The study highlights that the lower participation of women in agriculture is not always due to regressive social norms. It can also be affected by customs, moral norms or descriptive norms

Chapter 5 is about **Reference Network and Sanitation Norms**. The chapter focuses on structural properties of the reference networks and answer the questions, such as who form a reference network and whether reference

networks extend their boundaries beyond the family and caste associations. This chapter also highlights the role of inter and intra-family relations in maintaining sanitation reference networks. The study compares the adherence to social norms in two villages of Gujarat and West Bengal respectively. It then brings out the differences that get reflected due to caste and gender hierarchy in following social norms. Women are more often expected to adhere to the norms than to decide about the norm and men depend upon the women to convince others to follow the norms.

Chapter 6 is about **Sanitation and Social Norms: Case study of two villages in Gujarat and West Bengal**. The chapter has aimed to analyse the sanitation behaviour of the villagers coming from different social economic background. The study reveals certain commonalities and contrasts in adhering to the sanitation behaviour. While the government through its *Swacch Bharat Mission* aims to make the country open defaecation free, it does miss out on the socio factors that motivate and influence people's decision of using or not using toilets. Thus, the economic incentives provided may result in construction of toilets but may not provide the push in using the same. The study concludes that a broad social network with low personal normative belief that toilets should be constructed can be challenged by exogenous shock. Thus the intervention strategy that is planned needs to devise mechanisms to give a shock and influence the nodes.

Chapter 7 is titled, **Collective Behaviour and Development Management: Policy Response to Social Norms and Behaviour Change**. The chapter addresses the crucial gap that exists in policy interventions regarding sanitation framework in India. The programmes have so far focussed only on individual behaviour and how that can be changed and missed the collective behaviour on adhering to social norms. Since social behaviour is driven by deep rooted social norms, social campaign and drives for a limited period of time will not change the social behaviour. When the outcome of a move against the social norms is uncertain, people prefer to follow the norms rather than going against them. Social nudges are especially important when

there is pluralistic ignorance, where individuals do not agree with the norm but follow it due to false normative expectations. In conclusion, it is stated that moral and descriptive norms can be changed through effective information, education and communication (IEC) campaigns. It is also important to influence the community leaders along with influencing individuals in the reference networks through appropriate IEC materials, which nudges the community to accept alternative social norms.

The book through various studies addresses that policy interventions need to address the local structures on the ground and one uniform approach may not work as beliefs, customs and socio cultural factors that influence sanitation behaviour throughout are different.



Sing

Today, I told her
Take a breath, let it go
And sing
A cheer
To revel for those victories
hard fought and hard won
And sing
The lament
remembering all the sisters,
Farewell, O lost and fallen
And sing
A hurrah
to the spaces carved,
voices that spoke,
paths forged and
ceilings that broke
Sing sister sing
Till there is breath in your body
Keep the beat going.
If they cut your tongue, hum
If they grab your throat, clap
If they cut your hands, stomp
If they break your knees, blink.
Sing sister sing
Move to the beat, feel it, become it.
A beat which won't be stopped
Of the song that will be sung.
For a future, where we rise as one
And reach that crescendo of freedom.

- Tejal Med

REPORT

A Step Towards Gender Equality: Enhancing Nutritional Status in Narmada, Gujarat

- Kavita Sardana

Breaking the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition is a key for the future generations in India to be able to unlock their full potential. This article attempts to understand the role of gender equity and equality when it comes to furthering the cause of nutritional security of a household, with a focus on women, infants, and adolescent girls. It does so by studying the nutrition profile of Narmada, a tribal district in Gujarat (India), and throwing light upon the impact of a gender-sensitive, community-based intervention (Project *SuPoshan*) that is implemented through a multi-stakeholder approach.

Decoding the Role of Gender Equality in Nutrition

The Indian constitution has granted both men and women equal rights and yet, gender disparities thrive. Unfortunately, the Covid pandemic has intensified existing inequalities and discrimination across every sphere – from health and nutrition to socio-economic aspects. India's ranking on the Gender Development Index¹ has been disappointing, despite rapid rates of economic growth.²

As the phrase carries, a woman is the 'architect of a family, a nation, and the whole world.' The realization is quickly mounting that equality is no more a social or gender-centric issue but an economic one. A McKinsey Global Institute³ points out that improvement of women's status in India could add \$12 trillion to global growth. Thereby, the growing conversation about the acute need for gender equality makes imminent sense.

As per World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Nutrition Targets to be achieved by 2025, UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of eliminating all forms of malnutrition by 2030, National Nutrition Strategy (NNS) of the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), and the National

Nutrition Mission⁴ (POSHAN Abhiyan) in India, malnutrition continues to be the topmost risk factor for morbidity and associated mortality. The National Family Health Survey⁵ (NFHS-5) – a large scale multi-round survey conducted throughout India by International Population services to provide information on health, nutrition at the state and district level – released in November 2020 indicates slow improvement in India’s malnutrition situation.

Equally alarming is the Sustainable Development Framework⁶ (2018) report that states nearly 4 out of 10 children in the country do not reach their full potential owing to chronic malnutrition, along with India’s food security crisis. Currently, India ranks 101st among 116 countries, according to the Global Hunger Index 2021⁷ (Von Grebmer et al. 2021). Further, in recent research, (Dhamija et al. 2021), the relationship between food insecurity and child malnutrition is seen in India.

Unfortunately, we are missing out on some easily doable and essential nutrition interventions during the first 1,000 days of life (270 days of pregnancy and 730 days of 0-24 months), i.e., the ‘window of opportunity’. We don’t have a formalised maternal nutrition policy as for now, but there has been an Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) National guideline since 2004. The promotion of IYCF practices, like ensuring effective exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, followed by the introduction of appropriate semi-solids, remains weak. The main reason for poor showing is an information deficit amongst the women owing to poor literacy rate, lack of awareness towards access to services, and the dependency on men.

As per the World Economic Forum (WEF), our country has recently been ranked 140th among 156 countries in the annual Global Gender Gap Index⁸ for 2021, slipping way below the 112th position. Women’s education, economic standing, social status, age, health, and decision-making capacity relative to men are significant determinants of maternal and child health (MCH) and nutrition (McNairn 2011, Kraft 2014).

Enabling Women to Own their Health & Nutrition

In India, many women are actively engaged in agriculture or informal labour sector, creating circumstances that leave them and their children vulnerable to poor nutrition. If not earning, the traditional patrilineal joint family confines women's roles mostly to the domestic work. Men are perceived as the primary providers and protectors of a family, while women are only seen playing a supplemental role. However, when it comes to food and nutrition security of a family, women many times are the sole owners of responsibility.

The gap between what is and what should be, can be closed with the right knowledge and skills – be it dietary intake, child rearing and feeding practices, health check-ups, immunization, repeated pregnancies, and even health related superstitions. Further, initiatives to improve nutrition cannot achieve lasting success without taking into consideration the social, economic, and biological differences between men and women and the gender inequalities which stand in the way.

Tackling Malnutrition in Narmada district, Gujarat



It is situated in the eastern Narmada of Gujarat & according to 2011 census,⁹ with a population of 5,90,279, it is spread across 5 Talukas, with 562 villages, 222 village panchayats, 27 primary health centres and 952 Anganwadis (These are govt. run rural childcare centres in India under the Integrated Child development Services (ICDS) programme to combat child hunger and malnutrition). Narmada has

been declared as 'aspirational' district by the NITI Aayog in 2018, as it lags in indices related to Health & Nutrition, Education and Basic Infrastructure.

To make a real, visible difference in nutrition care behaviour practices and service delivery, Adani Foundation, the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) arm of Adani Group, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in July

2018 with Women & Child Development Department of Government of Gujarat, to launch a nutrition intervention programme in Narmada through its flagship Project SuPoshan. The main objective was to transform the lives of people in a holistic way with a focus on nutrition of women & children with the potential impact on the Human capital & National economy of India. SuPoshan is currently being run in 14 CSR sites across 12 states of India. (Map attached at the end).

Adani Foundation prioritized improvement in food security, income, equipment, financial services, and training, realising that women have limited access to nutritional information and resources though they are growing, purchasing, and preparing most of the food which is consumed.

SuPoshan aims to utilize a life cycle approach through a community-based platform to address the issues of undernutrition and support Govt. of India's Poshan Abhiyaan. The intervention empowers women from within the community to become *SuPoshan Sanginis*, who play a pivotal role in spreading awareness on curbing malnutrition through correct food habits, assessment of malnourished children, and referrals to Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres (NRCs) which are government established Health Facilities to provide appropriate and facility-based case management to children with severe malnutrition under 5years.



Sanginis are trained every month through hands on sessions using videos, games and information education communication (IEC) material. In Narmada, a team of 215 *Sanginis* are being supervised by 23 SuPoshan officers. Together, they cater to the target groups i.e., children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. Investing in the

nutrition of the above groups, has the potential to create a downstream cascading impact in multiple domains transforming lives of individuals & women. Therefore, along with the government, there is a need for private sector and not-for-profit organizations to partner and alter the trajectory of malnutrition. Adani foundation's multi-stakeholder consultative approach supports women in terms of dietary habits, pregnancy care, proper breast-feeding skills and improving the dietary diversity at the household & community level.

Seeing *Sangini* as the Core of *Suposhan*

SuPoshan seeks to improve nutrition outcomes by understanding how women's empowerment at the household level helps to bolster positive nutritional behaviours and improved intrahousehold access to food. The word "Sangini" in Hindi means a companion. True to her name, she acts as a support system & facilitator to safeguard the health and nutrition security of children and women around her. She is equipped with information on maternal antenatal-delivery-postnatal care, Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) knowledge and practices, health services awareness and utilization, WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) practices, household food security & diversity through kitchen gardens, childhood illness and immunization.



Clad in a blue uniform, Sangini begins her day with household visits as per the area map. Equipped with the kit of anthropometric tools (weighing scale, mid-upper arm circumference tape, and stadiometer), she goes door-to-door. During a typical visit, she assesses the children, girls, and women, records the data on her handheld device, and counsels the family for the way ahead.

Suposhan's strategy is backed with robust measurement and screening process to monitor systematic results of activities. The Management

Information System (MIS) is well structured with details of each household and beneficiary. All data entries are done at the beginning of the intervention as a baseline in consultation with the data of Anganwadis, which facilitate nutritional food, medical aid & access to govt. schemes. (10 lakh Anganwadis run by the Govt. across India). Sangini acts as a bridge in making the beneficiaries aware of these services, schemes & their uptake. This helps close lot of gaps which cannot be met by the government alone. SuPoshan is keenly working in creating sustainable ways of ownership of health & it's potential impact towards the quality of life.

For implementation purpose, the project caseload is divided as per the norm of 3 Anganwadis with one Sangini, handling approximately 150 to 200 children (birth to 5 years), 420 to 450 women (19 to 45 years) and 160 to 170 adolescent girls across the district.

Interpreting the Nutrition Profile of Narmada

At the initial phase of the launch of SuPoshan, The Indian Institute for Public Health (IIPH), Gandhinagar, Gujarat – India's first Public Health University – was onboarded to carry out a baseline survey in 2019, followed by a midline survey in March 2022, and an endline survey at the end of 5 years. The midline was done to measure the impact of Suposhan's interventions, delivered through Suposhan Sanginis over a period of three years. The results show a marked improvement in terms of women's participation and awareness towards utilization of government schemes, institutional deliveries, immunization of children, and care during pregnancy and childbirth despite the COVID.

From the IIPH baseline and midline report for Narmada, it is observed that factors such as child age, gender, caste, family income, hygiene practices, diarrhoea, child immunization, maternal short stature, house type, land ownership, toilet availability, household food insecurity, mothers age, total children, birth place, duration of exclusive breast feeding knowledge, introduction of complementary feeding, continuation of breast feeding, fever

and infections are associated with at least one outcome of undernourishment (stunting, wasting, underweight).

But the penetration of SuPoshan at the household level, since last three years is clearly visible through positive survey results. There is a difference in terms of women's understanding of herself and her nutritional needs during pregnancy and lactation since each woman is counselled on the importance of nutritional status being an intergenerational phenomenon. However, undernutrition during the critical 1,000 days from conception to a child's second birthday resulting in life-long, irreversible damage, and compromised maternal, neonatal, and child health, physical and cognitive growth, educational achievement, and productivity as adults. (Dewey 2011) is made clear to women in counselling sessions.

Sharing below the midline survey results:

1. Literacy rate is 90% in women (2022) as compared to 83% (2019). Research has proven that investment in nutrition during pregnancy and lactation improves cognitive development, education, income levels, demographic dividends, and gender equality.
2. In terms of Maternal indicators – antenatal, delivery & post-natal care – the survey states that:
 - Number of women registered for last pregnancy, maternal and child protection card, went up from 74% (2019) to 99.5% (2022).
 - Institutional deliveries went up from 78% (2019) to 88% (2022) with a 5% decline in home deliveries.
 - Maternal knowledge and practices regarding IYCF practices was seen in 87% women.
 - In the context of adolescent health, consumption of Iron Folic acid tablets went up from 54% (2019) to 97% (2022).

3. As a step towards improving the dietary diversity of the family members, *Poshan Vatikas* or kitchen gardens were developed in the surrounding area around the houses for cultivating seasonal vegetables, fruits, herbs, and trees like Moringa, curry leaves. About 2000 Poshan Vatikas have been developed, reaching 10,000 beneficiaries in the year 2021. Hence food security improved from 39% (2019) to 43% (2022).

4. The report also highlights that mother were satisfied by the support given by the Sangini in terms of cash transfer after childbirth and cashless services at the govt. health facility. The consumption of government given Take Home Ration (THR) was promoted to curb hunger. These results reflect the role of women in changing the outlook of the community especially from the point of food intake, nutritional status throughout the life cycle of a woman.

5. The women empowerment score went up from 39% (2019) to 42% (2022). Also, Sanginis could create awareness and ownership in mothers – the score went up from 35% to 72%. Because of this the referral rate to NRCs for treatment of undernourished children rose from 1% to 18%.

6. As stated by mothers in the Survani village of Narmada, “Immunization is good protection for children, because of which children fall less sick and their growth improves”. Health workers in Bhadam village say that “Sanginis are a great support to them during Mamta Day and that their cooking demonstrations using the THR has created a positive impact about THR”.

Driving Impact – By Women, For Women

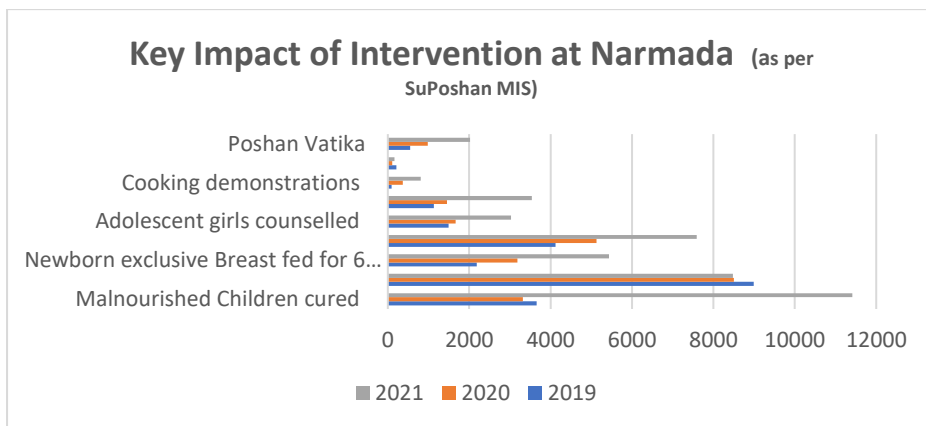
SuPoshan is an essential step towards breaking the cycle of poverty. This was seen in COVID times, when the husbands lost their daily wage jobs, Sanginis were still earning and supporting their families. They were actively involved in tele-counselling the mothers, adolescent girls (6,432 calls from May 2020 to October 2020, reaching 2,883 pregnant and lactating mothers, and 1,286 adolescents (source: MIS). They worked closely with the existing Govt.

agencies across all our project sites – be it for delivery of food packets, medicines, mask making, and distribution. Sangini is well accepted by the families and considered as guides and role models by many in the community. The following testimonials are a true reflection of the same:

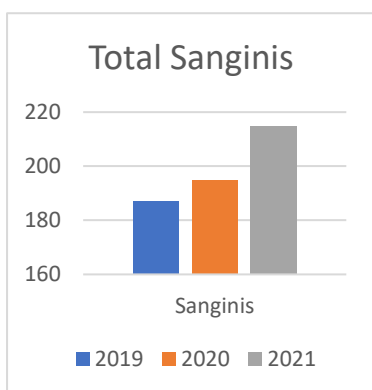
“During the lockdown my husband lost his job as a labourer but thanks to my work as a SuPoshan Sangini, I could fulfil the bare minimum requirements of the family. I am determined to work as Sangini in my village even if my husband gets a job at far off place, as a token of my gratitude towards the project.” - Neeta Gopalbhai Vasava (Taropa, Narmada)

“I was supported by SuPoshan team to stop child marriage by counselling the parents of Amisha, a 16-year-old school dropout who was considered a burden at home. Today Amisha is trained as a beautician and has completed her class 10th education. I have been successful in stopping four other child marriages and my efforts are appreciated in the Gram Sabha” -Rekhaben Piluji Vasava (Gadit, Narmada)

Along with the midline results, it’s important to state that Suposhan’s activities are based on the UNICEF framework in consultation with the public health criteria (UNICEF conceptual framework of child Undernutrition).¹⁰ It highlights that inadequate dietary intake and diseases are immediate causes which in turn influence factors ranging from human and social capital, women’s status in the society, political and social environment.



As per MIS, from 2019 till 2021, the number of children cured were four times higher; in other words they were out of the zone of being severely malnourished. Similarly counselling sessions on institutional delivery, exclusive breast feeding among lactating mothers and complementary food cooking demonstrations clearly brought a change. The above representation is also indicative of increase in the number of men sensitized in terms of taking responsibility of wife and the girl child, which is often neglected. Sanginis are making an effort to reach the last house ensuring that each child & mother is well nourished.



Another way of looking at the keenness of women's involvement in this intervention, is the increase in the number of Sanginis over a period of three years. Being an incentive based programme, each one works to the best of their abilities & motivates the community women to acquire self confidence & decision making ability. As per SuPoshan budget for the year 2020-21 in Narmada, out of INR 1.3 crore, INR 65 lakhs were invested in *Sangini* incentives, capacity building, uniform,

stationary, and much more. The incentives were in the form of direct bank transfers to Sanginis' account, promoting economic agency.

At each step an effort is made to create a holistic environment open for conversations at par with the men and other senior members – be it Panchayat members or district level officers.

Embracing Gender Sensitive Behavioural Change at Community Level

The activity-based inputs have generated an impact which the families at large are gradually embracing and making it sustainable as well. It is clearly visible in mass participation in village level events, focus group discussions (FGDs), plays, road rallies, celebrations such as National Nutrition Month, World Breastfeeding Week, New-born Care Week, Women's Day and much more. This is creating a wholesome environment for the entire community to become more aware and cognizant of their health and nutritional status.

The efforts put in by Sanginis has led to empowerment at three levels, firstly at their own level by trainings at our centres, secondly by disseminating this knowledge to community women and lastly by sensitizing the men towards making them understand the role of a care giver, as they are rarely involved in discussions about improving family's nutritional health. Sanginis emphasize on open communication and joint decision-making for a family's nutrition. Further, gender-sensitive Social Behaviour Change (SBC) approaches are strengthening the role of grandmothers at the household and community levels in the promotion of superstition-free, optimal practices related to women's and children's nutrition.

Cascading Impact on Gender Equality & Women Empowerment

The act of training women to become SuPoshan Sanginis has a sustained effect as their empowerment lasts much beyond the duration of the project. They are becoming role models in the community, contributors towards the nation's

growth, and not merely beneficiaries of charity handouts or schemes. As per the midline report, 56% women feel empowered in terms of self-security.

It's important to mention here that the journey from empowerment has led to entrepreneurship in a short period of our intervention in states of Maharashtra (Tiroda) and Gujarat (Mundra). Sanginis were given an opportunity to continue their journey of financial empowerment by helping them become a part of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Skill Training, Dairy, Lac bangle making, Incense stick manufacturing etc. Post exit from these sites, 215 Sanginis are still associated with other projects of Adani Foundation.

SuPoshan has the potential to become a model of change which can be replicated to manage the problem of malnutrition across the country as it capitalizes on the power of transformation of a woman's role in the rural community and proves the possibility of an empowered resource turning into an Empowerer. It's a step towards strengthening and investing in women's health and nutrition, as well as gender equality.

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Links of related articles by the author –

- Champions of change:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1e0fw9FRQtuFqBoDjmRpkIX-MbsE_-u-a/view?usp=sharing
- https://csrbox.org/Impact_stories_author_Kavita%20Sardana
- https://csrbox.org/India_CSR_news_Unfazed-and-Undeterred-in-the-Mission-for-Good-Nutrition- 993
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- https://csrbox.org/Impact/description/Article_full_SUPOSHAN-SANGINIS--SHEROES-CHANGING-THE-RURAL-WOMEN%E2%80%99S-WORLD 54
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Visit website – www.adanifoundation.org www.suposhan.in

A Report on the FES-Sophia Genderlogue 2021 (Held On 27th September and 4th October)

Good equality and diversity practices make sure that the services provided to people are fair and accessible to everyone. They ensure that people are treated as equals, that people get the dignity and respect they deserve and that their differences are celebrated. This is especially valid in the case of women and girls. When they are treated equally it leads to them having equal opportunity and they are better able to contribute socially and economically to the community, and to enhance growth and prosperity. In an equal and fair society the position of girls and women is likely to be safer by reducing the entrenched social and economic disadvantage that they currently face. It is 2021 and the goal of generational equality still seems like a distant pipe dream. However, to instil values of generational equality and its positive effect on the student community, we at Sophia College had planned a One Day Genderlogue event in collaboration with FES (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, New Delhi) on the same on 27th September, 2021. There was a Panel Discussion with prominent personalities from the field of labour law Ms Christine Nathan (Retired UN Official, ILO), as well as Medicine Professor Veena Vaswani from the department of forensic medicine at the Yenepoya University, Mangalore. The moderator for the discussion was Professor Vibhuti Patel. Some of the important points that came through in the discussion included the one by Ms Nathan who said that Covid 19 has largely impacted women. The impact of any price is never gender-neutral. The pandemic has brought extreme poverty and women are more laid off from work. Women in Domestic Work were told to leave with no wages, in households they asked for the Covid 19 certificate. Professor Vaswani said that we often thought when is this ever going to end. We are still the lucky ones, what about the people who are still migrating. Pregnant women who work and deliver also and those who couldn't take care suffer. This is something we should look at as post-traumatic stress. It was a very engaging and rewarding discussion attended by over 100 attendees on ZOOM.

This was followed by very moving monologue sharing's from the student community on the topic of "Generational Equality". via this two-hour Genderlogue we were able to engage and enlighten the young minds towards the concepts and learnings of the idea so that the notion of Generational equality will be in practice and not a mere precept.

On 4th October, 2021 the second Genderlogue planned in collaboration with FES (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, New Delhi) was on the theme of Gender and Public space for which too we had a panel discussion with Professor Shilpa Phadke, TISS a sociologist and an author of a book 'Why Loiter?' on the same subject, Ms Rachana Mudraboyina a transgender and human rights activist and Ms Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal , a theatre artist and activist. The moderator for the discussion was Ms Reena Agrawal, Lecturer in Sociology and co-Organiser of the Tata Lit Fest.

The discussion provided some insights like Rachana Mudraboyina said that only privileged transgenders can vocalise their issues, there is still a marginalized group among transgenders. We too face violence, the trans community often ignores the violence they face as they are helpless and they can't protest, there's fear everyone is held under fear. Now we have learnt to ignore it because we do not have space to be vocal yet we are trying to put forward our issues/points diplomatically.

The student community was mobilized to come up with creative poetry writing on the theme and recite them in the 2-hour program and a caption on a book mark contest was also held. The response was overwhelming and the entries were much appreciated by the judges and audience alike.



STATEMENT

Joint Memorandum from Women's Organisations to President

Date: January 3, 2022

To,
Shri Ram Nath Kovind,
President of India.

Ensure severe punishment for public incitement for sexual abuse of Muslim women

Respected Sir,

We have unfortunately witnessed the most disgusting display of brazen misogyny for the second time in less than a year. Earlier in July, 2021, an app called 'Sulli Deals' was shared on social media which purported to 'auction' prominent Muslim women, journalists, writers, activists etc. This was done to humiliate and terrorise courageous Muslim women who were writing and protesting against injustice and corruption. At that time, FIRs against those responsible were filed in UP and Delhi but, unfortunately, no action was taken. Regrettably, this inaction is part of a trend in which sections of the administration and even the judiciary remain spectators to criminal acts perpetrated against the minorities.

Whether it is hate-speech, physical attacks or prevention of prayer meetings, wherever members of Minority communities like Christians and Muslims are the victims, the police, the administration and even the courts remain mute. Often the police is physically present but does not intervene or when it does, it is to aid and abet the perpetrators. As a result, those preaching hate and violence are emboldened to commit further atrocities.

When no action was taken against those responsible for Sulli deals', the end of the year witnessed the appearance of a similar app, 'Bulli Bai' on social media. Several prominent Muslim women like Ismat Ara, who has filed a police complaint in Delhi, and Sayma, a radio personality were not only named

but their photographs were made public on the site which also spoke about ‘auctioning’ the women. Najeeb’s mother, Fatima Ammi has also named. There has been an outpouring of opposition to this vile behavior. While the IT Minister, Ashwini Vaishnaw, has announced that the GitHub user behind the app had been ‘blocked’, this is a very weak and inadequate response.

In a country where patriarchy is rampant and women suffer inequality in all fields and are vulnerable to unending violence, this public incitement to the worst kind of sexual abuse targeting Muslim women cannot and should not be tolerated. We would like to remind you that this latest atrocity has occurred in a situation where not only are members of the Christian and Muslim communities facing physical and verbal violence but in which public meetings are being held where so-called Hindu religious leaders are openly calling for genocidal attacks against them with impunity.

We, members of various women’s organizations, appeal to you as the highest Constitutional authority to use all the means at your disposal to intervene and ensure that those responsible for this vile and criminal behavior are punished with the severity that they deserve.

Looking forward to an immediate and positive response,

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDIAN WOMEN – Annie Raja
ALL INDIA DEMOCRATIC WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION – Mariam Dhawale
ALL INDIA PROGRESSIVE WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION – Kavita Krishnan
PRAGATISHEEL MAHILA SANGATHAN – Poonam Kaushik
ALL INDIA MAHILA SANSKRITIK SANGATHAN – Chhabi Mohanty

**All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers
(AIFAWH) on**

Union Budget, 2022-23

Budget [2022-23](#) betrays India's malnourished children and the Anganwadi Workers and Helpers

*Announcement of Upgrading of 2 lakh *anganwadi* centres is a hoax*

No increase in Budget allocation for 'Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0'

(earlier Umbrella ICDS Scheme) in Budget [2022-23](#)

In a year India has fallen from number 94 to 101 in the Global Hunger Index. Modi Government totally neglected the malnourished children as well as the frontline workers of the country in the Budget [2022-23](#).

The *Budget allocation for 'Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0' (Earlier Umbrella ICDS Scheme) in Budget [2022-23](#) is Rs.[20263.07](#) Crores whereas the Budget allocation last year was Rs.20,105 Cr.* If we take into account the inflation there is actual reduction in the budget.

In her budget speech, the Finance Minister of India Smt. Nirmala Sitaraman made an announcement that her government will upgrade two lakh *anganwadis* "that have better infrastructure and audio-visual aids, powered by clean energy and providing improved environment for early child development." We the *anganwadi* workers and helpers of the country who run the *anganwadi* centres which are not even having basic infrastructure like drinking water and toilets, despite years of demand by the federation, would like to ask the finance minister what magic she is having to make better infrastructure for two lakh anganwadi centres with no financial allocation.

As reported in the media, the so called '*saksham*' *anganwadi* and *POSHAN* 2.0 scheme renamed in the last budget speech is yet to finalise its guidelines! This is at a time when the malnutrition and hunger in India is at alarming levels. It is shocking that as per the ministry data, between March 2016 and March 2021, beneficiaries receiving Supplementary Nutrition fell by 19% from 102 million to 83.2 million. For children, it fell from 82.9 million to 67.5

million. At the same time, the number of children aged six months to six years was estimated to increase by 7.6%. During the same period, the number of children, three to six years, receiving pre-school education (PSE) declined by 34% from 35 million to 23 million. (Courtesy: India Spend).

It is also shocking that the food subsidy payable to FCI as per NFS Act has been cut down by 30% (Cut of Rs.65,000Cr) which will adversely affect the ICDS. This Budget has also cut down the budget allocation for the Mid-Day Meal Scheme by Rs.1267 Cr. This cut in food allocation and subsidies come when the income of 84% families has decreased.

While giving a hollow speech on “Recognizing the importance of Nari Shakti as the harbinger of our bright future and for women-led development during the *AmritKaal*” the finance minister has totally neglected the twenty-six lakh *anganwadi* workers and helpers and other scheme workers including the ASHA workers and Mid-Day Meal workers who are the “Nari Shakti” fought the COVID 19 and malnutrition of the country. There is no increase in their remuneration in the budget not to mention the minimum wages or pension.

In spite of the big struggles by the peasantry and the working class, including the historic Kisan Struggle, Modi government is again proving to be acting as the agents of the Corporates continuing the policies of selling the national assets and giving tax concessions to the corporate and going ahead with anti-labour codes.

AIFAWH call upon all the *anganwadi* workers and helpers to protest against the total neglect of the *anganwadi* workers and helpers and the malnourished children in the central budget [2022-23](#).

AIFAWH calls upon all the scheme workers to intensify the struggles for recognition as workers, minimum wages and pension as well as for the rights of the children and the people for nutrition, health and education.

AIFAWH also call upon the workers to organise protests including mass deputation/ gherao of NDA MPs and gear up to the countrywide general strike on 28-29 March 2022.

Issued by

A. R. Sindhu

General Secretary

All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers

July, 2022

To

Ms. Smriti Irani, The honourable Cabinet Minister, Ministry of Women and Child Development smritizirani@sansad.nic.in

Dr Mansukh Mandaviya, The Honourable Cabinet Minister, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare <https://mansukhmandaviya.in/get-in-touch/>

**A Petition for the Recognition of
Women Frontline Workers for their Role During the Covid Pandemic**

Recently the WHO has honoured one million (Accredited Social Health Activists) ASHA Workers of India for their grassroots work in the public health sector of India. The ASHAs are receiving worldwide attention and media coverage. Six cadres of all women Frontline Workers including ASHAs, ASHA Facilitators, Anganwadi Workers, Anganwadi helpers, ANMs (Auxiliary Nurse Midwives) and Nurses in both public hospitals and private hospitals had all played a stellar role during the Covid pandemic. These cadres largely come from the same deprived section of population that they continue to serve.

As the world moves decisively towards a healthier environment, the contributions and the sacrifices made by these ground level all women force of healthcare workers to fight Covid are at a risk of being forgotten, even as they continue to suffer the aftershocks of the superhuman efforts they had made for the country and the world. These women Frontline Workers' entire families including their children have been affected when they fought to contain Covid.

This is the right time for the nation to support and motivate our women Frontline Workers with decisive actions.

1. Do grant official acknowledgement and recognition to the contributions of every one of these six cadres of women Frontline Workers during the fight against Covid. (Build a memorial for those who gave their lives in the fight against Covid. /Give each of the cadres a letter/memento/ Give each cadre of workers awards. /Publish their stories of courage and determination.)
2. Women Frontline workers have suffered financially, physically, psychologically and several have their lost lives. Health workers have made out of pocket expenses due to physical illnesses from overwork; are psychologically stressed due to poverty and exhaustion; caught infections in the pandemic due to inadequate training and safety equipments; and been injured due to community attacks. These cadres have worked extra hours for months, while bearing serious financial losses due to cuts in incentives and delays in the payment of dues while doing Covid duties. All ASHAs have not received Covid incentives in all the states.
 - 2.1 Do ensure immediate compensation of all the delayed payments of dues for all these six women cadres by way of incentives/wages and also their Covid allowances.
 - 2.2 Do ensure compensation of all medical expenses due to injuries or illness in the course of duty, incurred by these six women cadres during the pandemic.
 - 2.3 Do ensure that the families of all the health care workers that lost their lives due to Covid or injuries are compensated by the insurance coverage promised to them.
3. Do ensure that all future pandemic preparations and plans of the nation include the training, provision of safety equipments, planned work responsibilities and compensation for all Frontline Workers as well.
4. ASHAs, ASHA Facilitators, Anganwadi workers and Anganwadi helpers have proved to be an irreplaceable part of public health services, particularly seen during the pandemic. However, these community health

worker cadres are designated as volunteers. They are not protected by any legislation, minimum wages or by any of the labour codes. They are paid inadequate incentives that are not linked to any scale, have no social security and are not entitled to any leave from work at all. It would be no exaggeration to say that these women only await one thing, particularly now when the world recognises their merit and that is adequate wages and decent working conditions. Do give these four cadres of volunteers the status of workers and not volunteers and ensure that they receive adequate remuneration, leave, social security and medical coverage by law. Do make amendments in the law in a manner that all states are bound legally to provide these rights. The nation owes these rural and slum dwelling women their rights. The world is watching, do set a memorable example.

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**Statement of Majlis on Ultra vires order passed by
Mumbai Police regarding cases of molestation and POCSO Act**

10.06.2022

To,
The Commissioner of Police,
Mumbai

Dear Sir,

Sub: Immediate withdrawal of your order No 245/2022
dated 6th June 2022

We, the undersigned organisations and individuals, are concerned with the rights of women, children and all marginalized groups.

Sir, we are shocked and distressed by your order (245/2022 dated 6th June 2022) which is a violation of the law and a travesty of justice.

Your order asking for a police officer to seek recommendations from an assistant commissioner of police (ACP) and permission from a deputy commissioner of police (DCP) in cases of molestation and under POCSO Act, is a grave violation of the law as under:

S. 154 (1) Cr.P.C. - information relating to the commission of a cognizable offence shall be reduced to writing immediately.

S. 166 A (c) I.P.C. if a public servant fails to record any information given to him under S. 154 (1) C.D.C., in relation to cognizable offence punishable under S. 326A, S. 326B, S. 354, S. 354B, S. 370, S. 370A, S. 376, S. 376A, S. 376AB, S. 376B, S. 376C, S. 376D, S. 376DA, S. 376DB, S. 376E or S. 509, shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend

to two years, and shall also be liable to fine. (Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018)

Until now a police officer would immediately register an FIR, on receipt of complaint as mandated by the law. Your order will cause unnecessary delays and distress to the survivors and their family. The procedure recommended by your order is not only ultra vires but will cause grave harm and threat to the victim. Considering the busy schedule of the senior officers, the following should have been considered before issuing the order

- a. The adverse impact on the survivor, who would have mustered great courage to approach the police station, to seek justice & redressal.
- b. The impact on the survivor and their family, should the accused get information that they have approached the police station.
- c. The threat and harm the accused can cause to the survivor and their family and a distinct possibility of tampering with evidence.
- d. The gross delay in medical treatment which could also lead to loss of evidence

We also take serious offence to your comments about 'False Cases' as your statements are not backed by any legal or evidentiary proof. Your concern for the alleged accuser's reputation being tarnished is also uncalled for and unwarranted.




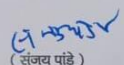
Your circular shows no concern, whatsoever, for the survivor and the trauma they have gone through in the most difficult times of their life.

Your order will undermine the efforts of committed individuals and NGOs who have worked tirelessly to implement the law. Thousands of police officers

in Mumbai have been trained to perform their duties as per procedures of the law and in a victim friendly and sensitive manner.

The Order issued by your office will cause serious infringement to the rights of survivors of sexual abuse and cause undue delay in their access to justice.

We demand the immediate withdrawal of the said order in the interest of justice.

 सार्वजनिक सुरक्षा विभाग बुरखाची क्र. २२६२०८२६ Email: cp.mumbai@mahapolice.gov.in	 महाराष्ट्र शासन पोलीस विभाग पोलीस आयुक्त बुरुन्मुंबई यांचे कार्यालय ऑ.डी.एन.रोड, मुंबई-४००००९	 ग्यान्याचा उग्र महोदय
जा.क्र. पो.आ/वा.क्र. १२४५/२०२२		दिनांक : ०६/०६/२०२२
कार्यालयीन आदेश		
<p>असे निदर्शनास आले आहे की, जुन्या भांडण्याच्या कारणावरून, प्रॉपर्टीच्या वादावरून, पैशाच्या देण्याघेण्यावरून अथवा वैयक्तिक कारणांवरून पोलीस ठाणेस पोस्को कायद्यांतर्गत अथवा विनयभंगाची तक्रार करण्यात येते.</p> <p>सदर गुन्ह्यांत कोणतीही शाहनिशा न करता आरोपीस तात्काळ अटक केली जाते. तपासा दरम्यान केलेली तक्रार खोटी झाल्याचे निष्पन्न होते व त्यानंतर आरोपीस कलम १६९ सीआरपीसी अंतर्गत डिस्चार्ज करण्याची कारवाई केली जाते. तोपर्यंत बराच उशीर झालेला असतो. अटकेमुळे आरोपीची नाहक बदनामी होते, समाजातील त्याच्या प्रतिष्ठेस धक्का लागतो व मोठ्या प्रमाणावर आरोपीचे वैयक्तिक नुकसान होते.</p> <p>अशा गोष्टींना आळा घालण्यासाठी गुन्हा दाखल करतांना सदर प्रकरणात सहाय्यक पोलीस आयुक्त यांनी शिफारस आल्यानंतर परिमंडळीय पोलीस उप आयुक्त यांच्या परवानगी नंतरच गुन्हा दाखल करण्यात यावा अशी सूचना देण्यात येत आहे. परिमंडळीय पोलीस उप आयुक्त यांनी परवानगीचा निर्णय घेतांना मा. सर्वोच्च न्यायालयाचे ललीता कुमारी प्रकरणातील न्यायनिर्णयाचे पालन होईल याची दक्षता घ्यावी.</p>		
		 (संजय पंडे) पोलीस आयुक्त, बुरुन्मुंबई.
प्रति : १) पोलीस सह आयुक्त (का. व सु.), मुंबई. २) सर्व प्रादेशिक विभागांचे अपर पोलीस आयुक्त, मुंबई. ३) सर्व परिमंडळीय पोलीस उप आयुक्त, मुंबई.		

Post Script: As a result of consistent collective efforts of women's rights organisations in Mumbai, the Police Department of Government of Maharashtra withdrew the notice.

SANGAT Secretariat - 29 September 2022

We, women from different countries in South Asia, stand in solidarity with the protesting Iranian women and call an end to the use of violence and aggression against the protesters.

We are saddened by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini who died at the hands of the Iranian State's morality police for exposing her hair and not wearing the hijab 'correctly'. The death touched a chord in the already simmering discontent on the harsh measures used by the State to control women. There are people, men and women, in 23 provinces who are protesting and who are being targeted and killed. An estimated 17 people have died and many injured, especially being blinded by police pellets fired at close range. We demand that this violence be stopped and discussions started with the protesters.

We the women of South Asia, living under different political regimes and coming from different religions believe that women's equality and empowerment is paramount in any nation and needs to be supported by people and the State. Women must have freedom to decide what they want to wear, what they want to study, who they want to partner, how many children they want and where they want to travel. Neither the men in their families or in the government should impose dress codes and choices on them. They must be free to wear or not wear the hijab.

We urge the Iranian Govt to respect the freedom and rights of Iranian women

Background

Mahsa Amini and Protests from 16th September 2022

In light of the death of 22-year-old, Mahsa Amini who had been arrested by the notorious Islamic Republic's, 'Morality Police', for not wearing her *hijaab* 'correctly' and resisting the strict code. She had been arrested on 14th September 2022 and news of her death was shared on 16th September 2022.

Raging protests in Iran have been sparked by Mahsa Amini's death whilst in police custody. The police denied that she was beaten in custody but claimed she had a heart attack. The protests started immediately after the news of her death in Tehran, then nationwide. It is reported that 41 [1] protestors have already died, and we fear further state brutality whilst clamping down on protests. The State had banned certain communication apps, and sites but as the protests grew, they enforced an internet blackout and restricted the use of social media. This has been claimed to be one of the largest uprisings through decades of oppression.

Both Male and women, the young and old are demanding their rights, the protests have escalated at this level due to decades of oppression, regarding ongoing issues regarding personal freedoms, strict dress codes for women, and the current state of the economy. Iranian women have been burning images of the Islamic Republic Founder, Ayatollah Khomeini whilst videos have been surfacing on the internet showing women, burning their hijab. There have been ten days of protests with support from Iranian communities around the world, thousands who have lost members of their families to state brutality in this regime.

Women's Rights Situation

There has been a significant decline of women's rights in Iran during the past four decades due to the 1979 Iranian revolution and the Islamic Republic. Prior to that, women had enjoyed significant rights and modernity when previous leaders wanted to establish European style leadership. Due to the strict Islamic laws, there has been more focus on policing women regarding dress code opposed to addressing laws and restrictions which prevented women from practicing basic freedoms, applying for a passport, facing gender discrimination in the workplace.

Sangat – A South Asian Feminist Network want to express our solidarity with the women in Iran who are trying to establish their basic rights. At a time when India is persecuting citizens for wearing the hijab [2]. We want to highlight the increasing powers of authoritarian governments and an autocratic leadership and the politics behind the hijab. We stand against those powers which are impinging on the freedom of expression and freedom of religion, each individual person should have the right to freedom from discrimination

and the right to freedom from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

We are concerned for the safety of the protesting civilians, as the Government of Iran has a previous history of inflicting brutal violence on citizens who oppose their regime. We are opposed to the rejection of pluralist values and the Internet blackout practiced by the state and the use of violence in crushing voices of dissent.

We demand that the internet curb imposed on citizens of Iran, the use of morality police, and the brutal attacks on the masses of Iranian citizens across the country must stop.

Sangat A South Asian Feminist Network

[1] “Iran will act decisively after biggest protests in years, president says”, (Accessed : 25 September 2022),

Reuters <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-president-raisi-says-protesters-should-be-confronted-decisively-state-2022-09-24/>

[2] As India turns 75, Muslim girls are suing to wear the hijab — and protect secularism (Accessed 26 September)

<https://www.npr.org/2022/08/24/1117415037/india-muslim-hijab-ban-schools>

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OBITUARY**Tribute to Padma Shri Dr Temsula Ao (1942-2022)**

With passing away of Padma Shri Dr Temsula Ao on 9-10-2022, the world of literary movement, women's rights movement and women's studies movement have lost a valuable member. Former chairperson of Nagaland State Commission for Women, academician, renowned writer and Padma Shri Dr Temsula Ao passed away on 9-10-2022 in Dimapur at the age of 80. Through her creative writings of fictions and stories, powerful poetry and ethnographic researches; Dr. Ao played a pivotal role in popularising the great Naga culture. Her public speeches on customary laws, human trafficking and women's reservation were backed by in-depth research and grass work connections. Her literary contributions are translated into Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, German and French. In 2007, her pathbreaking contribution towards the literary movement of the North East India was rewarded with Padma Shri. She was a recipient of several awards some of which included Nagaland Governor's Award for Distinction in Literature, Meghalaya governor's Gold Medal and the Sahitya Akademi Award. As a teacher at the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), she made remarkable contribution in mentoring next generation of students and scholars. After her retirement from NEHU in 2010, at the age of 68, as professor of English and dean of School of Humanities and Education NEHU.

Salute to Dr. Temsula Ao for her lifelong commitment to Naga culture, human dignity and women's rights.



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Dr. Vimala Ramchandran is a renowned feminist and gender expert.

Dr. Emmanuel Ortiz is an internationally respected Chicano/Puerto Rican/Irish-American activist and spoken-word poet who has worked with the Minnesota Alliance for the Indigenous Zapatistas (MAIZ) and Estación Libre.



GUIDELINES TO THE CONTRIBUTORS

Urdhva Mula is an interdisciplinary journal (ISSN No. 2277-7954) that publishes articles based on multidisciplinary research, as well as essays about diverse aspects of gender and women's issues. Gender functions as a central category of analysis. The journal concentrates on gendered representation of topics from the fields of literature and language, history, political science, sociology, anthropology, cinema and media studies, human development, law, and medicine. It also analyses the intersection of gender with race, ethnicity, location, nationality and disability.

Urdhva Mula is accessible widely and it seeks to incorporate an international vision, including book reviews related to women's studies and gender studies. It will be particularly useful for researchers on gender issues. Professionals, academics and students from other fields, whose experience might not be limited to gender issues but who are interested in the topic, will also find this journal a valuable resource.

Contributions to *Urdhva Mula* must report original work, and will be peer-reviewed. Manuscript preparation guidelines:

- Papers are accepted only in English. Manuscript to be submitted as Word documents file. (Font: Times New Roman. The title should be in font size 16, sub-titles in font size 14, and main text in font size 12.)
- Format and referencing should follow the APA guidelines.
- The title with the author's name, with brief intro, must be on a separate page, and the author's name should not feature anywhere else in the article, so that the peer-review process may be impartial.
- Articles should be 5000-7000 words in length. Papers that greatly exceed this will be critically reviewed with respect to length.
- Articles may express the personal voice of creative writing, or a reflection on a transforming text or event in the field of gender, or an impersonal presentation of data useful to researchers in that field.
- A short biographical note about the author must be supplied on a separate page.
- Authors whose work has been accepted for publication will receive a complimentary copy of the issue containing their article.



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Contemporary Women Poets of India*. ISBN 978-93-88332-24-8

***Urdhva Mula: An Interdisciplinary annual Journal on Women's/
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