

Urdhva Mula



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(Roots Upwards)



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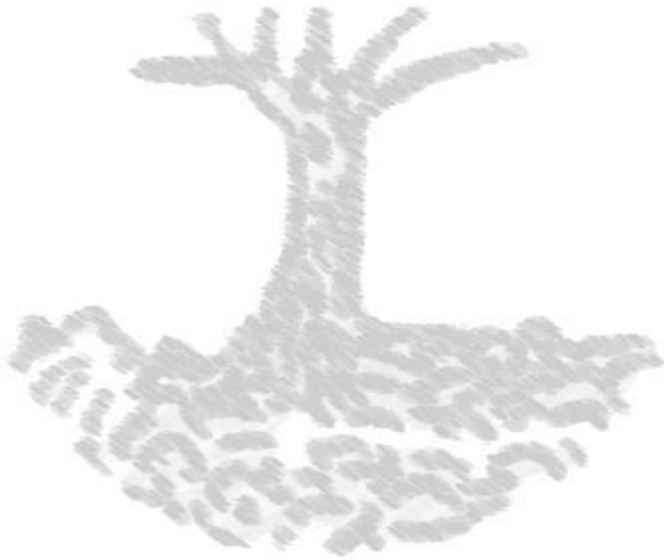
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Urdhva Mula
(Roots Upwards)

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

Dear readers,

Greetings from the *Urdhva Mula* team.

Currently, three important concerns demand our response.

In September 2023, the G20 Leaders Declaration in their gathering in Delhi affirmed "that gender equality is of fundamental importance, and that investing in the empowerment of all women and girls, has a multiplier effect in implementing the 2030 sustainable development agenda." Their commitment to 'women led development' in principle has provided more space for negotiations and conversations on a transformative agenda for gender equality.

Urdhva Mula is informed by intersectional and decolonial feminist and supports gender diversity activism, we join the scholars and activists of the global feminist movement in expressing our solidarity for the victims and survivors of the Israel-Gaza war and demand from the state and non-state actors to join end to stop genocide and establish lasting peace in the region.

SC Verdict on Marriage Equality on the 17th October, 2023 has made it crystal clear that all those who are committed to gender-justice need to work together towards formulating concrete measures for alleviating the systemic-&-structural discrimination and violence to which most queer and trans people are subjected and finding ways to offer legal recognition to the families they make for themselves.

The current issue has included articles that provide insights on gender dynamics in the field of world economy (by Prod. Vibhuti Patel), Literature (by Dr. Lata Pujari, Ms. Samrita Sinha, Ms. Geeta Sahu), Judiciary (by Dr. Vahida Nainar), Gender Budgeting (by Prof. G. Uma Assistant, Dr Sonia Murugan, Dr Mita Sinhamahapatra), Cinema Studies (by Dr. Elwin John) and migration studies (by Dr. Amita Rai) and oral history (by Dr. Srija Naskar).

Critical reflections in the book Reviews of *It's Been a Long Day: A Nonagenarian Remembers*, *Goa: Golden Heart Emporium* by Dr. Cicilia Chettiar; *Dalit Women: Emerging Patterns of Caste Based Violence* by Prof. Vibhuti Patel; *An Intersectional Gendered Discourse on Empowerment During*

Pre and Post COVID-19 Pandemic by Ms. Nikita Pathak; *Women and Work in Asia and the Pacific: Experiences: Challenges and Ways Forward* by Dr. Anurag Hazarika and Dr. Mandakini Baruah; *The Position of Women at Vijayanagara (1336-1565): A Study on Art and Epigraphy* by Prof. Vina Vaswani and *Girls in the Pandemic: Transnational Perspectives* Ms. Nischint Hora acclimatise us with the recent thought processes in the women's studies movement.

The section on public statements by the women's rights organisation signify the agenda of action of the feminist movement at the subnational, national, regional and global levels.

Urdhva Mula pays heartfelt tributes to pioneers in the women's movement whom we lost in the recent past: Prof. Aparna Dutta-Mahanta (20-8-1946 to 26-1-2022), Ms. Gouri Choudhury (12-12-1938 to 9-9-2022), Ela Bhatt (7-9-1933 to 2-11-2022), Ms. Chandita Mukerjee (1953-2023), Prof. Zarina Bhatt (1933-2023), Prof. Jalna Hanmer (29-5-1931 to 26-5-2023), Prof. Maria Mies (1931-2023) and Dr. Harshada Rathod (1953-2023). All of them had faith in collective effort of women, commitment to the empowerment of women and girls and dedication to combat gender-based violence and strive for gender justice.

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

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ARTICLES

Rethinking Gender: Issues of Work, Culture and Displacement

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

Introduction

Expansion of world capitalism in the 21st century is marked by commercialization of every core of human existence, monetization of every part of governance and the ever-increasing control of financial capital in the world economy. Money is the oxygen of capitalism and market economy rules the world and subsumes the non-market activities for the super-profit in this neo-liberal globalised production. Macroeconomic policy of liberalisation, marketisation and globalization (LPG), a marked feature of the late capitalism has created a condition where the financial capital reigns supreme. Unlike in the 18th and the 19th century, in the 21st century, you do not need a comprador to surrender sovereignty of the people of the nation, now the post-colonial nation-states themselves play the role of facilitators for giant multinational corporations (MNCs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) in promoting cash nexus in every sector of the economy in the interest of world capitalism by eroding the workers' rights (Patel, 2022).

In this situation, already skewed gender relations perpetuated over last 5000 years of human civilization get further distorted and women and girls get more and more resource poor, marginalized and commodified as they are largely in the 'care economy' not in the 'cash economy'. As per the United Nations, Women constitute $\frac{1}{2}$ of the world's population, $\frac{2}{3}$ of the world's workforce but get $\frac{1}{10}$ th of the world's income and 1% of the world's wealth (United Nations, 2020). In a nutshell, economic growth has bypassed a large majority of women and girls as their work is not monetised, hence not valued. Non-market activities of women that include cooking, cleaning, child care, elderly care, care of sick family members and back-breaking tasks in the subsistence economy such as lives-stock raising, collection of fuel-wood, fodder for

animals, kitchen gardening and water for domestic consumption are not valued by the capitalist economic growth models as none of these get them any money, though they do augment household resources. Women's work of social reproduction, both daily and generational, is not even recognized as work, it is treated as unproductive. Women, not only are deprived of rewards of their hard-work in the domestic arena, but its logical extension is found even in the mainstream economy that treats women workers/employees as supplementary earners when women join the employment market. As women's work is not treated as productive in the 'domestic arena', their work in professional life is also considered less worthy than that of their male counterparts. In every stratum of the economy- skilled/semi-skilled/unskilled; white collar-blue collar, intellectual-managerial-physical-manual, women get less pay as compared to their male colleagues. Hence, women remain at the bottom of the pyramid even in the period of capitalist economic prosperity.

Social Construction of Capitalist Markets

There is a need to deconstruct the myth of 'free forces of market' governed by so called 'laissez faire'. Markets are socially constructed and exacerbate intersectional marginalities of class, caste, race, ethnicity, ableism, geographical locations and gender. In the pyramid of poverty, women rank among the poorest of the poor in the world economy (Seguino, 2009). The ascent of financial capital does not challenge institutional hierarchy based on multiple marginalities faced by the large majority of the toiling poor, but it does accentuate inequality between 'asset owners' who are largely man, rich, upper caste, white and 'asset less' who are poor, lower caste, non-white men and women, persons with disabilities, ethnic/religious/sexual minorities and in all these categories women get most marginalised (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen & Werlhof, 1988). This intersectionalities in the process of imperialist capital accumulation increase the gap between those who control financial resources and those who are forced to do servitude for money for their bare survival needs (Piketty, 2014).

Volatility of crisis prone capitalist economies world over, does not allow economic independence to women that is a minimum necessary condition for the human dignity, autonomy, decision making power in the family, community, economy and society at large.

According to the UN Women (2016), women as self-employed and wage workers constitute 95% of the total workforce in South Asia, 89% of the total workforce in Sub-Saharan Africa and 59% of the workforce in Latin America and the Caribbean countries. These women in informal employment include street vendors, petty goods and service traders, subsistence farmers, seasonal workers, domestic workers, industrial outworkers.

Gendered Macroeconomic Scenario

Economic stagnation and deepening ecological, social, and political crises along with some kind of Green New Deal capitalism might lead to another long wave of accumulation in the context of the realities of uneven and combined development and contradictions of imperialism (Mandel, 1970). Changes of household production in the centres and the destruction of subsistence farming in the peripheries that should be taken up to consider the relations between paid and unpaid labour and between struggles within the capital-labour relation and against the expansion of that relation as factors impacting class formation. The further commodification of private households and subsistence production along with the privatization of public firms and services, important drivers of neoliberal accumulation, led to another wave of remaking classes and class-relations. A key lever enforcing this commodification, along with industrial restructuring and relocations has been the global finance. Mandel tried to show that the expansion of public deficits and money supplies would lead to galloping inflation as experienced by the post-colonial nation states (Patel, 1992).

Predatory Role of Financial Capital

Global financial networks of global economic oligarchies are pressurising the developing countries by hook or crook to surrender their economic sovereignty for super profits of Transnational Corporation (TNCs) and Multinational

Corporations (MNCs) controlled by predatory capitalism. Financial liberalisation has greatly eroded regulatory structures and mechanisms resulting into nexus of financial capital and politicians robbing citizens of their savings, earnings, assets and basic survival needs (Pollard, 2013). Financial scams by nationalised banks, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), cooperative Banks and Chit Fund Societies have become an order of the day. On the one hand when farmers are committing suicides due to their inability to pay debt, billionaires roam around in their luxuries even after being caught for financial scams. The super-rich have impunity for their economic crimes as entire criminal justice system subserves their interest.

Banks and financial markets have encroached upon both personal and public lives of both middle-class women and poor women through mortgages and pension funds who are using credit not only to make large purchases such as house, but they are forced to rely on credit to pay for basic needs such as groceries, education, insurance and health emergencies. Social protection systems are replaced by private ventures such as micro finance institutions, private insurance companies who have financialised their lives (Canterbury, 2020).

New International Division of Labour

Multinational corporations have long realised that the best way to reduce the wage bill and to enhance profits is to move parts of the production process to poorer countries like India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, etc. The cheap labour of Asian women is regarded as the most lucrative way to enhance profits. Women in developing countries are a 'flexible' labour force. Their cheaper labour forms the basis for the induction of women into export industries such as electronics, garments, sports goods, food processing, toys, agro-industries, etc. Women are forced to work uncomplainingly at any allotted task, however dull, laborious, physically harmful or badly paid it may be. A large number of poor women looking for work within the narrow confines of a socially imposed, inequitable demand for labour have become ideal workers in the international division of labour.

Globalisation is riding on the back of millions of poor women and child workers in the margins of the economy (Hoogvelt, 1997).

The relationship between the formal sector and the decentralised sector is a dependent relationship. The formal sector has control over capital and markets, and the 'informal' sector works as an ancillary. In India, more than 90% of women work in the decentralised sector, which has a high degree of labour redundancy and obsolescence. These women have almost no control over their work and no chance for upward mobility because of the temporary and repetitive nature of the work (Sassen, 2000).

The shift from a stable/organised labour force to a flexible workforce has meant hiring women part-time, and the substitution of better-paid male labour by cheap female labour. The new economic policies provide State support to corporate houses that are closing down their big city units and using ancillaries that employ women and girls on a piece-rate basis. Home-based work by women and girls gets legitimised in the context of increasing insecurity in the community due to a growth in crime, riots, displacement and relocation. Sub-contracting, home-based production, the family labour system, all have become the norm. This is being called an increase in 'efficiency' and 'productivity'. The casual employment of urban working-class women in the manufacturing industry (textiles is a glaring example) has forced thousands of women to eke out a subsistence through parallel petty trading activities known as 'informal' sector occupations (Patel, 2022).

The UN Women (2016) states, "Working in this informal, or grey economy, as it's sometimes called, leaves women often without any protection of labour laws, social benefits such as pension, health insurance or paid sick leave. They routinely work for lower wages and in unsafe conditions, including risk of sexual harassment. The lack of social protections has long-term impact on women. For example, fewer women receive pensions globally, and as a result, more elderly women are now living in poverty. Even in developed economies, such as in France, Germany, Greece and Italy, women's average pension is more than 30 per cent lower than men's."

Working Class Rendered Precariat

Globalization, aided by significant changes in transportation and technology, has meant wider and even deeper production networks and markets. These have aided changes in the “geography of production”, new globalisation triangles have emerged thought out Asia where financial hubs reign supreme while suppliers of cheap labour and raw material are impoverished. Competition has redefined product market context and necessitated reorganization of labour market transactions and regulations. Given the interface between product market and labour market, the employers supported by global financial institutions and some academics have managed liberalization of industrial relations systems and labour market such as decentralization of collective bargaining, liberalization of inspection system, anti-worker labour codes that allow employers freedom to lay off and retrench workers and close down industrial undertakings (without prior permission), free employ of contract labour, dormitory labour system, putting out system, anciliarisation and subcontracting. Feminisation of labour in SEZ, FTZ and EPZ is promoted by the state governments. Tamil Nadu’s *Sumangali* scheme, Tirupur model of production for global market has used dormitory labour system in which young unmarried women are made to sign contract for 3 years to work at SEZ at less than minimum wages and stay at the dormitories provided by the employer. Government of Haryana promoted similar scheme named “Sabala’ where adolescent girls are inducted into manufacturing sector as cheap and easily controllable labour. To meet the production targets, employers intensify production violating labour standards and occupational health and safety measures (Swaminathan, 2004).

Women in White Collar Professions

What happens to the middle-class women with professional degrees who are in the white-collar occupations of the shrinking public sector and in the corporate houses? As these verses, created during their workshops, reflect, women and men get differential treatment.

Gender at work

The family picture is on HIS desk.
Ah, a solid, responsible family man.
The family picture is on HER desk.
Umm, her family will come before her career.

HIS desk is cluttered.
He's obviously a hard worker and a busy man.
HER desk is cluttered.
She's obviously a disorganized scatterbrain.

HE is talking with his co-workers.
He must be discussing the latest deal.
SHE is talking with her co-workers.
She must be gossiping.

HE's not at his desk.
He must be at a meeting.
SHE's not at her desk.
She must be in the ladies' room.

HE's having lunch with the boss.
He's on his way up.
SHE's having lunch with the boss.
They must be having an affair.

The boss criticized HIM.
He'll improve his performance.
The boss criticized HER.
She'll be very upset.

HE got an unfair deal.
Did he get angry?

SHE got an unfair deal.
Did she cry?

HE's getting married.
He'll get more settled.
SHE's getting married.
She'll get pregnant and leave.

HE's having a baby.
He'll need a raise.
SHE's having a baby.
She'll cost the company money in maternity benefits.

HE's going on a business trip.
It's good for his career.
SHE's going on a business trip.
What does her husband say?

HE's leaving for a better job.
He knows how to recognize a good opportunity.
SHE's leaving for a better job.
Women are not dependable.

Devaluation of Women: From womb to Tomb

It is in this context, commercial-minded techno-docs and laboratory owners have been using new reproductive technologies that violate women's bodily integrity and dignity. Currently, in 80 countries in the world, mainly in South Asia, Central Asia, China and in the Middle Eastern countries, sex ratios are adverse for women and girls. Among the educated families, adoption of small family norm means minimum one or two sons in the family, they can do without daughter. The propertied class obsessed about capital accumulation does not desire daughter/daughters because after marriage of the daughter, the son-in-law may demand share in property. The middle and lower classes resort

to sex selective abortions of female fetuses (i.e. future daughters) to avoid dowry harassment or due to lower economic worth of women's work. Birth of a son is perceived as an opportunity for an upward economic mobility while birth of a daughter is believed to result in absence of old age security. In the patriarchal class society, among the upwardly mobile communities, boys are treated as 'blank cheques' that can be used to encash from their future in-laws. This mindset, in the context of neoliberal policies that has taken away state-funded social security and social protection for the elderly population, has given rise to son-preference who are perceived as old-age support and daughter-aversion as they are perceived as burden, their work being devalued as unproductive (Sen, 1992).

Gendered Commodification of Human Relationship

The neo-liberal capitalist expansion has ensured unlimited power to men to control sexuality, fertility and labour of women and sexual minorities. World capitalism uses cocktail of monetization/ commodification of man-woman relationship, toxic and hyper masculine violence and male supremacist value system perpetuated by patriarchal class society for concentration and centralization of economic-political-cultural-social-educational power in the hands of the crony capitalists who in turn use this power for predatory usurpation of natural and human resources (Shiva, 2022). The 21st century capitalism also thrives on the digital divide (WEF, 2021), the gap between demographics and regions that don't or have restricted access to modern information and communications technology (ICT), and that have access to ICT (United Nations, 2021).

Women have historically managed the unpaid care economy and fulfilled the responsibilities of providing food and nutritional security. As women's contribution to the economy and society at large remains unrecognized, largely underpaid and mostly unpaid, women and girls are main losers in this era of ascent of financial capital that drives the 21st century extractivist nature of imperialism, that in turn, thrives on the internal colonies, women being the last colony facing double whammy of patriarchal oppression and economic exploitation (Mies, 1999). Macro economy, controlled and managed by the

global capital, sees to it that women get entrenched only in micro finance thro' self-help groups and remain perpetually indebted and resourceless (Harvey, 2004). The global financial capital as a backbone of imperialism follows the logic of 'big fish eating the small fish' in its drive for intensified capital accumulation (Wichterich, 2020).

Ecological Crisis, Displacement and Erosion of Survival Base of the Women Proletariat

The restructuring of capital undertaken to manage the global financial crisis that emerged in 2008 has further deepened the crisis. The accumulation process has brought about serious environmental challenges for the sustenance of human civilization. Mega infrastructural projects are displacing communities on a massive scale. This has, on the one hand brought about unemployment, impoverishment and hunger among the marginalized poor and on the other hand, intensifies concentration of wealth of such magnitude that civil societies are being torn apart with rampant corruption, increased crimes, and mindless ethnic or religious conflicts. Most important, the financial dynamism which overshadowed everything else in the recent past has reached a chaotic stage. The world financial structure and production structure are now far more closely knit than during the recession of the 1930s and therefore the threat of a breakdown looms larger.

The 21st century capitalism has intensified onslaught on livelihoods of women proletariat in the rural areas by dispossession of their entitlements over land for subsistence production and grazing of domestic animals, water bodies, forest resources for day-to-day survival. The survival struggles of the urban proletariat women has also accentuated by neoliberal drive of privatisation of water, land grab for construction giants and dilution of standards of safe environment. Women's land and housing rights intersect with other problems such as discriminatory inheritance patterns, disinheritance through wills, agriculture and development issues, commercial use of forest-based resources, escalation of gender-based violence, the appropriation and privatization of communal and indigenous lands, as well as gendered control over economic resources and the right to work (Sassen, 2000). While women's human rights

highlight the importance of women being able to claim their rights to adequate housing and land, in order to lessen the threat of discrimination, different forms of violence, denial of political participation, and other violations of their economic rights. The working class, especially women and children have been totally dispossessed of their entitlements due to displacement and relocation in the mega development projects as well as due to climate emergency. The privatisation of public wealth such as lakes & rivers, islands and hills, forest resources and land has rendered millions of indigenous communities homeless, jobless and resourceless.

Invisibilised Workers in the Gig Economy

The growth of the ‘gig’ economy and ‘gig workers’ over the last decade has resulted in the fastest growing category of e-commerce workers. The global players such as Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, Uber, or Urban Company and Amazon are among the many companies that have come in to provide ‘services’ and ‘employment’ in the form of ‘gigs’. Behind the veil of algorithms, gig workers’ rights are grossly violated. Over the past two years of the pandemic, the gig work had exponentially expanded due to COVID19 triggered lockdown and introduction of ‘work from home’ culture for the economically secure classes of the economy. People’s union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) succinctly sums up the labour processes and labour relations of the gig economy in these words, “The working model of the gig economy is built on, “3 key elements– (1) mis-definition of workers as freelancers so that companies are able to evade labour laws and shirk off all responsibilities towards workers (2) ensuring a large reserve of workers, who compete with each other for work and orders, and push down their incomes and thus enable the companies to sell cheap services. (3) charging of commission by the companies for their ‘matchmaking’ services (matching the customer with the worker)” (PUDR, 2021). There is total absence of accountability of companies towards gig workers in terms of their labour and democratic rights.

In several countries of Asia and Latin America, Europe, America and Canada, the gig workers have registered their protests against their inhuman work conditions, low earnings, long days and unpaid waiting time. These include

the Swiggy workers' strike in September 2020 and the Urban Company workers' protest in October 2021. Internationally, in recent years gig workers have gone to court against some of the companies known for 'black hole of rights' and won some rights such as they should not be legally considered as 'contract partners, freelance entrepreneurs' but as 'workers entitled to the legal safeguards of social security and social protection'. Their struggles have exposed the facade of freedom of the freelancer, risks and costs of entrepreneurship, damage done by the tyranny of technology and anti-gig worker logic of ratings by the clients (Guest, 2021).

Conclusion

The COVID19 pandemic came into our lives in a period when public services and labour rights were already weak worldwide. Cash transfers were among the first social policy responses governments had in their toolboxes. They helped those who had been hard hit by the pandemic while also providing a boost to the global financial sector. The socio-economic crisis exacerbated by the pandemic became a business opportunity for the TNCs and MNCs. Indebtedness of the urban, rural and ethnic masses has been normalised. The present paradigm of political economy and the neoliberal mindset of the champions of world capitalism that seeks economic growth through aggressive production and consumption needs to be replaced by people centric philosophy and gender responsive strategies, social movements, refugee support and anti-racism.

Social reproduction and the sustainability of life are at the heart of feminist struggles. Women and girls play a critical role in care provision and social reproduction. The pandemic made it clear that when education and health systems collapse, women step in to provide the labour and sustain their families. That often comes at a high cost: physical and mental stress, livelihoods and economic autonomy.

Market fundamentalism of neoliberal economic globalisation, religious chauvinism and cultural nationalism, financialization of world economy, right wing sectarian political leadership both locally and globally, valorisation of

toxic patriarchy and hyper masculinity with hyper nationalism and jingoism by globally controlled media barons has intensified complexities in governance, polity, livelihood and survival struggles in the midst of climate change, for the mass of rural and urban workers, peasants, forest dwellers/tribals, fisher folks, petty traders, small scale industrialists, sexual minorities and women.

Ray of Hope

People's movement demanding democratic and participatory governance and polity that ensures social justice, distributive justice and gender justice and solidarity of the marginalised across intersectionality with faith that Another World is Possible to keep our morale going in these difficult times (Harvey, 2000). Young girls fighting for their right to education in Africa and South Asia, youth fighting against autocrats in the middle east, people in the industrialised countries fighting for job security, women fighting for dignity and safety at workplace provide rays of hope in the midst of civilizational crisis. Efforts to strengthen the global solidarity movement- united in its determination to fight against the concentration and centralisation of wealth in the hands of microscopic minority, the destruction of our earth due to capitalist greed, consumerism and hedonism, and the proliferation of poverty due to anti-people policies and inequalities based on class, caste, race, religion, ethnicity and gender. We must think and act, both, locally and globally.

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I'll Never Return

I'm the woman who has awoken
I've arisen and become a tempest through the ashes of my burnt children
I've arisen from the rivulets of my brother's blood
My nation's wrath has empowered me
My ruined and burnt villages fill me with hatred against the enemy
Oh compatriot, no longer regard me weak and incapable,
My voice has mingled with thousands of arisen women
My fists are clenched with fists of thousands compatriots
To break all these sufferings all these fetters of slavery.
I'm the woman who has awoken,
I've found my path and will never return.

By Meena Keshwar Kamal,
Founder of RAWA (1956-1987)

Wailing Women in Valmiki's *Ramayana*

- Dr. Lata Pujari

The Valmiki *Ramayana*, an exquisite masterpiece of Hindu literature, has transcended time, captivating the minds of listeners/readers across centuries. Reciting this divine poem is not only an act of great merit, but a gateway to unexplored realms of wisdom. Countless discussions, writings, and presentations have attempted to analyse its profound essence, yet the *Ramayana* never fails to ignite fresh contemplation with each reading. *Ramayana*, is not only a tale of valour, righteousness, and victory of good over evil but also a treasure trove of diverse characters and their emotions. It has a powerful storyline with depictions of courage, love, and sacrifice. Furthermore, the portrayal of women holds a significant place in the narrative.

Valmiki's focus primarily lies on the actions and decisions of male characters, referring women to supporting roles, further reinforcing gender hierarchies and unequal power dynamics. It depicts a patriarchal society where women's agency and freedom of speech are limited. These women's voices are either silenced or disregarded. However, there are instances where female characters defy societal norms and display moments of remarkable agency and assertiveness. However, the female characters play a pivotal supporting role in shaping the narrative and portraying the various facets of human emotions.

Freedom of expression

The epic contains several significant female characters, such as Sita, Tara, and Mandodari, etc., thus, it is crucial to analyse and question the rendering of women's freedom of expression in the narrative considering the impact it had and still has on shaping societal perceptions and expectations regarding women's roles and position. Their freedom of speech is often determined by societal norms and patriarchal structures. Women seem to have had a complete freedom to express their deepest emotions love, fear, anger, concern, etc. while lamenting the death of their husbands. Sometimes, some of these women's emotions express the sense of forthcoming events in the story. Remarkably,

when these wives, except for Tadaka, engage in heartfelt monologues before the bodies of their husbands, their intellectual strength and emotional resilience come to the fore. By critically analysing these passages we can gain insights, to some extent, into how societal perceptions and expectations regarding the roles and positions of women have been shaped.

The *Ramayana*, in the literal sense, is a story of *śoka* (wail/lament), for Valmiki's poignant encounter with a *Krauñca* female bird's (demoiselle crane) *śoka* moves him to compose this masterpiece. Valmiki initiates the epic by narrating an incident of a pair of *Krauñca* immersed in their playful courtship, shattered by a fowler who mercilessly kills male *Krauñca*, leaving the female *Krauñca* to mourn her beloved partner with a soul-piercing intensity. On witnessing the agony of separation of a loving *Krauñca* pair, Valmiki curses the hunter. The curse is issued forth in the form of a verse that he calls *śloka*. Interestingly, *śoka* is the recurrent theme/sentiment throughout the poem.

While the epic primarily focuses on Lord Rama's quest to rescue Sita from the demon king Ravana, there are several subplots that narrate the experiences of women, grieving the loss of their life partner such as Tadaka, Kausalya, Tara, Sita, and Mandodari. They emerge as captivating, multidimensional personalities, driven by desires, fears, and aspirations. They express their grief over the loss of their beloved husband according to their status in society, yet, grief conjoins them all. It would be interesting to understand how Valmiki uses such a life-changing event, such as the demise of a husband, as a powerful means to express the most intimate thoughts of the bereaved women. By examining the rendering of these characters, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and social context in which the *Ramayana* was written and the enduring themes that continue to resonate with readers today.

Tadaka

An interesting demon character Tadaka is the first grieving woman in the narrative, *Bālakāṇḍa*. Tadaka, depicted as an awesome and wicked demoness or *rākṣasī*, was originally a *yakṣiṇī*. Brahma conferred on Suketu (*yakṣa*) a daughter, Tadaka, endowed with the might of a thousand elephants and who

could assume any form at will. As Tadaka attained youth, she married Sunda, son of Jambha. Tadaka's fate took a tragic turn when the revered sage Agastya destroyed Sunda. Tadaka, determined to take revenge, ran to devour Agastya. The sage, however, not only repelled her assault but, in his wrath, cursed her transforming her into a fearsome *rākṣasī*. The consequence of the curse was such that her son Maricha was born as a *rākṣasa* too.¹ In Valmiki's narrative Tadaka's grief becomes an expression of her aggressive nature, an embodiment of her ferocious persona, instead of a lament over the death of her husband. The awesome strength of Tadaka dwindles before the might of a learned and ascetic sage. Though Tadaka breaks the female code of behaviour, she is left to survive in *rākṣasī* form, perhaps for two reasons: she is a woman and is pregnant. Deprived of her identity as a *yakṣiṇī*, Tadaka roams in the forest as a merciless *rākṣasī*, forever marked by the consequences of her lust for revenge, enslaved by her own violent emotions. Valmiki paints a vivid portrait of Tadaka, as a woman consumed by vengeance, driven by, perhaps, an unwavering desire to grant her husband peace/salvation through revenge upon his killer. Thus, her tale serves as a poignant example to other women of how a man possesses a right, without any mercy, to tame and disfigure a vigorous *yakṣiṇī*.

Kausalya

In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, we encounter Kausalya, the illustrious queen and beloved mother of Rama, plunged into the depths of grief upon the demise of her husband, Dasaratha. Kausalya is often praised for her virtue, righteousness, and is considered the epitome of ideal motherhood. The heart-wrenching decision of banishing Rama to the forest for fourteen long years shattered Dasaratha, who, unable to bear the separation from his beloved son, breathed his last in the presence of Kausalya. On Dasaratha's passing, Kausalya collapses on the ground losing consciousness. Valmiki describes her as, "Being prostrate with grief for the king, Kausalya and Sumitra fell unconscious. Rama's mother was lying by the king by contracting her body. She looked pale and dark like a star hid in darkness".² For the first time ever in the story, Kausalya holding Dasaratha's head on her lap, directing her words to

Kaikeyi with unwavering conviction, says: “Now you attain your object of desire and enjoy the kingdom by getting rid of all your thorns. You have destroyed the clan of Raghu and Kuvja is at the root of it. You know not through your greed you have taken a poison administered by another”.³ Being a principal queen Kausalya prioritises the prestige and existence of her husband’s clan while venting her rage and lamenting his death. Kausalya boldly holds Kaikeyi and Kuvja responsible for the tragic loss of Dasaratha and other harrowing episodes that happened within the palace. Thus, Kausalya not only mourns the passing of her husband but also is devastated by the separation from her beloved son, Rama. This pivotal moment brings forth two significant observations, firstly, Kausalya, with resolute determination, employs forceful language against her junior co-wife. Secondly, it becomes evident that the display of righteous anger directed at a woman / women appears devoid of dangerous repercussions, or challenges to societal conventions.

Tara

In the *Kiṣkindhyakāṇḍa*, Valmiki, describes the lament of Tara, a beloved wife of Vali, the mighty king of *Vānaras*. Tara's presence in the epic is remarkable, as she embodies a captivating blend of beauty, intellect, courage, and compassion. She is the voice of reason and wisdom and at times a wise counsel to Vali. Amidst the intricate twists and turns of fate, Tara, implores Vali to disregard Sugriva's claim to the throne, urging him to avoid the looming conflict. Despite her pleas, Vali dismisses her advice and marches resolutely into battle. In the clash between two brothers, Vali and Sugriva, Rama secretly strikes down Vali, and Sugriva can thus reclaim the throne of *Kiṣkindha*. Upon Vali's untimely demise, an inconsolable Tara, and her co-wives surrender to the depths of grief, under the eyes of their relatives and courtiers: their mournful wails pierce the forest of *Kiṣkindha*. We see Tara, holding Vali’s lifeless body upon her lap, is distressed at the thought that he dismissing her advice, met his untimely demise. Memories of his affectionate love for her and their beloved son Angada flood her anguished mind. As Vali lay defeated on the battlefield, breathing his last, Tara's heart shattered into a thousand pieces. Yet, amidst her profound grief, she found solace in extolling her husband's unparalleled

bravery, proclaiming that the battlefield is the sacred domain where mighty warriors and heroes truly shine. Tara, although, filled with pride for his valour and noble lineage, as he is Indra's son, mourns the fleeting existence of courageous warriors and muses: "Let not prudent people henceforth marry their daughters to warriors".⁴ Tara finds herself robbed of dignity and happiness, a solitary figure, thrown in the ocean of anguish. In the abyss of widowhood, she laments: "The woman who has lost her husband may possess sons or wealth, but still she is called a poor widow by the wise".⁵ Standing beside Vali's body, she examines her own existence. Her cordial relationship with Vali was beyond a marital relationship. Vali and Tara's friendship is characterized by love, trust, respect, and a deep understanding. For Vali, Tara is wise counsel, providing emotional and moral support during challenging times. As narrated in the text, Vali and Tara enjoy each other's company and often spend time together, engaging in activities they both enjoy. This is revealed in her speech when she grieves over losing Vali not just a husband but a dear friend. Tara marvels at the apparent paradox of Sugriva's triumph, a seemingly weaker adversary, winning Rama's unwavering friendship. She pleads Vali to acknowledge her tears that he never allowed to fall before. Mourning Tara finds herself too feeble to embrace Vali's lifeless body. Despite her awareness of Rama's indomitable might, she extols Vali's heroic deeds. Incidentally, in a subtle yet cautious manner, Tara remarks on the pivotal role Rama's single arrow played in freeing Sugriva from Vali's grip, leading to Sugriva's victory. Tara firmly believes that Vali, a valiant warrior who met his death on the battlefield not because of lack of valour but because of the fatal arrow discharged by Rama, would remain invincible within the realm of immortality. In her grief, Tara repeatedly recalls Vali's disregard for her cautionary words, forsaking both his royal fortune and their shared destiny. Turning her attention to their son Angada, she asks him to bid a final farewell to his departed father, who embarks on the journey to the next world. It seems, Tara clings to a glimmer of hope that Vali would respond to Angada and Vali might be restored to life or at least to exchange poignant farewell. Yet, receiving no response to Angada's respectful homage, Tara employs a stirring metaphor, likening herself to a cow standing beside her fallen bull, slain by a

lion.⁶ Through this vivid imagery, she reveals that Vali's departure not only deprived her of a king and a beloved husband but also Angada bereft of a loving father blessing him with a long life. Valmiki's heart-wrenching narration invites us to immerse ourselves in the tender, agonizing final journey of Vali and Tara's inconsolable grief, leading us to empathize with their plight. Furthermore, she perceives the battle as a sacrificial rite and questions Vali, "...how could you at the end bathe in the stream of Rama's shafts without me?"⁷ Traditionally, religious rite is considered complete only when a performer bathes along with one's spouse.⁸ Though Vali was responsible for his own fate, Tara bears the weight of her failure to prevent his fateful clash. She acknowledges with regret the fact that her royal status along with Vali has forsaken her. Unlike Tadaka, whose power was physical, Tara's intellectual acumen sensed the impending danger at Vali's doorstep. In the captivating narrative of Tara, Valmiki conveys the prominent role that a husband plays in his wife's life. He masterfully demonstrates the profound influence husbands wield in the lives of their wives, thus clearly revealing the unequal dynamics between partners.

Overwhelmed by sorrow and anguish, Tara approaches the glorious Rama by praising his heavenly beauty and immense power. With a strong conviction, Tara appeals to Rama, affirming Vali's unwavering loyalty to her. Fuelled by the prospect of a reunion in the realms beyond, she implores Rama to grasp the very arrow that had brought Vali's tragic end. In her fervent plea, Tara seeks to bridge the divide between life and death, driven by an insatiable desire to unite with her beloved Vali once more. She is assured that even in the company of nymphs Vali would be distressed without Tara in the heavenly region. She invokes Rama's own experiences of separation from his beloved Sita: "*O hero! As you have been distressed with sorrow for Janaki in this romantic Hilly Valley, Vali too in heaven will likewise be sorry and grow pale for me. Thou knowest how a handsome man becomes afflicted on account of the separation of his wife*".⁹ Tara is aware of the prevalent rule of *dharma* (duty) and acknowledges the moral dilemma posed by taking a woman's life but urging Rama to perceive her as an embodiment of Vali's very essence, thus absolving

him of any guilt associated with an unrighteous deed. Drawing *dharma* from the sacred rites of marriage, Tara reminds Rama saying: "...You see, the husband and the wife are quite inseparable and this is proved by the authority of the Vedas and by their equal rights in the sacrifice. On this earth there is not a better gift to the wise man than a wife, and for religious merit, you give me my dear ones...".¹⁰ Thus, Tara fervently expresses her unwavering desire to follow Vali into the realm of death. Like intricate threads woven into a fabric, husbands possess the power to shape and mould their wives' destinies, as their presence permeates their wives' every breath, every joy, and every sorrow. Once widowed, they are left with very limited or no rights to decide their fate. However, in the end, women must bear the consequences of men's actions. Whether through physical might or mental insight, men have long dictated the degree of women's intervention in their domains.

Sita

Sita, the wife of Rama, as a central female character, is often portrayed as submissive and obedient. When the formidable Ravana abducts and confines her within the realm of Lanka, Sita's indomitable spirit remains unyielding. In Asoka Forest, she endures her captivity in stoic silence, counting each passing day with the unwavering assurance that her beloved husband Rama would come to her rescue. Yet, there are instances where Sita, while captive, reveals her inner strength and unyielding voice, such as, during her resolute conversation with Ravana. She is the fourth woman mourning the loss of their husband. An episode in the *Yuddhakanda* narrates how Ravana devises a scheme to deceive Sita. Aware of the fact that a wife is a point of pride for any man, Ravana cunningly aims to triumph over Rama by winning Sita through deceit. Accordingly, Ravana instructs Vidyujjivha to conjure up Rama's severed head and shattered bow, and goes to Asoka Forest to show it to Sita. Ravana then fabricates a tale of Rama's demise at the hands of Prahasta, accompanying his story with the display of the bow and lifeless head. Sita, on identifying the bow, and lifeless countenance of her beloved Rama, consumed by sorrow, breaks into tears. Deeply grieved Sita holds Kaikeyi responsible for the destruction of the heir of the *Ikṣvākū* dynasty. She attributes the end of the

noble *Ikṣvākū* line to her quarrelsome nature. With an unexpected depth of tormenting anguish Sita faints. Later she laments her own plight. She sheds tears over her dreadful widowhood and grieves because now her rescuer is taken away from her by the cruel hand of fate. She thinks about Kausalya's devotion towards her son, and her heart aches for the astrologers' prediction about Rama's longevity has proven false. Further, she praises Rama's qualities, his intelligence, fluency in polity, and his uncanny ability to foresee danger. While uncertain about his untimely demise, she turns the blame inward, questioning whether her very presence was the fatal omen that led to Rama's destruction and her own prolonged endurance. "Perhaps," she ponders, "...I am myself fatal night (death) that has brought about your destruction and my forced endurance. I am quite innocent, but you have embraced the earth by discarding me".¹¹ Even the gold-plated bow, which Sita revered and worshipped as a symbol of Rama's *kṣatriya* power, proved futile in saving him from his tragic end. Accepting that Rama met his inescapable fate while dutifully fulfilling his father's pledge, she is assured that he is reunited with his ancestors in the celestial realms. However, she cannot help but protest, lamenting that despite his virtue, Rama should not have forsaken his family in such a manner.

Sita pleads to Rama's soul to guide her and honour the marital sacred vow that he would perform all the rites with her. The mere thought of Rama's torso, left without performing the last rites and cremation, torments her, fearing that it may have fallen prey to the ravenous jaws of wild beasts. Her concerns extend to Kausalya, who awaiting the triumphant return of her son and daughter-in-law to Ayodhya, on seeing only Lakshmana and on apprehending the news of Rama's demise, and Sita's confinement amongst the *rākṣasas* would be devastated. Enveloped in gloom, Sita begins to condemn herself by saying: "I am extremely unholy; it is for me that the stainless hero, Rama, after crossing the ocean has drowned in the ditch. He married me through infatuation. I am a stain to my race. I am death in the form of his wife. Perhaps, I did not give anything in charity in my prior birth, therefore, I am lamenting even being the wife of the hospitable Rama".¹² Left with no recourse, Sita beseeches Ravana

to perform a noble act by reuniting her with her departed husband in death. She implores him to slay her upon Rama's lifeless body, uniting their physical forms while allowing her soul to follow him into the eternal realm. In this way, Sita pours out her lamentations for the fallacious portrayal of Rama's demise woven by the treacherous Ravana.

It is evident, for a few moments, Sita struggles over Ravana's deceit. Consequently, Sita in her indescribable grief has two crucial thoughts that echo those of Kausalya: firstly, that Kaikeyi is undeniably the root cause of their tragic predicament; secondly, her deepest concern is the extinction of the *Ikṣvākū* dynasty. She severely holds herself responsible for Rama's pitiable end that too at the hand of a lame *rākṣasa* named Prahasta. In questioning her past life, she conveys her belief in *karma* (act), and reflects on the importance of charity in the contemporary culture. It is worth noting that throughout her mourning, she refrains from holding Ravana accountable for her husband's demise or her own plight. True, Ravana, as the king of the *rākṣasa* clan, remained a devout Brahman devotee of Śiva. This begs the question: did Sita fear being cursed? Or perhaps dreaded a life imprisoned within the confines of the Asoka Forest? Or was there another hidden concern that plagued her mind? Thus, her intellectual depth shines through as she confronts the complexities of love, loyalty, and the undeniable power of fate.

Mandodari

Mandodari, a wife of Ravana known for her beauty, intelligence, and moral integrity, is often portrayed as a virtuous and noble character in the epic. Mandodari is a complex character who is torn between her love for her husband and her revulsion at his violent and tyrannical behaviour. The abduction of Sita by Ravana plunges Mandodari into a profound state of sadness and distress. She valiantly attempts to dissuade him from his wicked act, forewarning him about the grave consequences that await. Despite her sage advice, Ravana callously dismisses her pleas.

In the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Valmiki renders Mandodari's lamentations on the tragic demise of her beloved husband, Ravana, at the hands of Rama. Mandodari,

steeped in sorrow, praises her lord for his valour of conquering the three worlds including Indra. Yet, in a state of bewilderment, Mandodari questions Ravana's lack of shame in being killed by mere a humble mortal who lived a life of exile in the Daṇḍaka Forest. She eliminates the possibility that other gods could even think of committing this act. She suspects, however, that God Vishnu, in the form of Rama, with the assistance of gods in the form of the *Vānara*, caused the death of Ravana. In Mandodari's thought-provoking insight of Rama being Vishnu, a captivating validation emerges - the affirmation that Ravana's awe-inspiring prowess could only be toppled by the divine might of an almighty God. To reinforce her beliefs, she recounts past incidents where Rama single-handedly annihilated fourteen thousand *rākṣasas*, including Khara, and Hanuman's subsequent fiery destruction of the once invincible city of Lanka, a place even gods would hesitate to approach. Mandodari, saw in these incidents the prediction of imminent peril, hence her to advise Ravana against furthering hostility. However, by disregarding her words Ravana became infatuated with Sita, a fatal desire that ultimately sealed his own destruction.

Undoubtedly, Sita was the cause of the end of Ravana, Remarkably, in her sorrow, Mandodari recognizes Sita's virtuousness and speaks highly of her unwavering chastity: "Sita is superior to Arundhati and Rohini in every respect, ... Her fortitude is unparalleled; she is more forbearing than the earth, and she can stand everything; she is more beautiful than beauty itself, the splendour of all splendours and highly devoted to her husband. But having brought her from the interior of a dense forest you have been slain with all your brood. You wanted to enjoy Sita, but instead of that desire being fulfilled you have been destroyed by the fire of her chastity. That you were not reduced to ashes by the wrath of the Sita when you abducted her, was simply because fire did not venture to approach you for your former prowess ...".¹³ Mandodari boldly attests to Sita's resplendent virtue, even as Ravana committed the vile act of abducting her. Mandodari proclaims that Sita's purity blazes with a danger akin to fire, capable of effortlessly consuming Ravana. Yet, despite her

immense power, Sita displays her magnanimity by sparing him, acknowledging his past valour.

Nevertheless, Mandodari denounces Ravana, in that due to ignorance and lust, he overlooked his own harem women those were more beautiful than Sita. Here, Mandodari holds Sita accountable for Ravana's death. Yet, with a heavy heart, Mandodari envisions Sita's future, free from sorrow and reunited with Rama, while her own existence plunges into an ocean of despair. Grieving Mandodari recalls her heyday with Ravana, lamenting the loss of her regal fortune in the face of widowhood. Furthermore, she describes Ravana's handsome physical features but deplores that the beauty of his countenance is disfigured by Rama's arrow. It is true that Mandodari was the most fortunate woman having a father of *Dānavas*, a husband king of *rākṣasas*, and a son, conqueror of Indra. She declares that she had a great sense of security and confidence in the valour of her protectors and she laments that an ordinary man became the source of their undoing.

Mandodari enumerates Ravana's good qualities such as a vanquisher, the protector of dependants and followers, the slayer of the brave, the protector of Lanka, etc.¹⁴ The helpless Mandodari questions Ravana for departing on an unknown path without taking her as his companion but leaving her alone behind. Ravana seems to be particular regarding his wives' appearance in public, hence, Mandodari tries to wake him up by making him aware of their fatal condition: "... Are you not angry seeing me thus unveiled, and coming on foot up to the city-gate? Look, the veils of your queens, that did protect them from shame, have slipped from them, yet, you didn't feel provoked by the sight? ...". Mandodari believes that the tearful curses of those chaste and devoted wives must have played a role in his ultimate downfall, confirming an age-old proverb that suggests misfortune befalls when the tears of a devoted wife touch the earth.¹⁵ In her grief, Mandodari briefly considers Ravana as the cause of the *rākṣasa* clan's ruin but swiftly corrects herself, acknowledging that he had ascended to heaven, leaving behind his achievements and failures. Mandodari's sorrow is compounded by a sense of powerlessness, for despite her earnest efforts, she was unable to prevent Ravana's tragic fate. Mandodari's

poignant tale serves as a profound exploration of love, devotion, and the complexities of loyalty in the face of moral ambiguity. Her narrative unveils the delicate balance between personal desires and the consequences they entail.

Conclusion

These women emerge as exemplars of strength but that is not what they are worshiped for. They are revered for their unwavering dedication towards their husbands, the pivots of their lives. These five exceptional women hold the revered title of principal wives, their virtue shining brightly. However, even their steadfast loyalty could not shield them from the distressing plight of widowhood. Apart from Kausalya, whose husband's life was not claimed on the battlefield, the remaining four women suffered the irrevocable loss of their beloveds in war. Tadaka, Kausalya, Tara, and Mandodari, each a mother-of a cherished son, exemplify the sacred duty of a wife, supporting their husbands in fulfilling their debts to the gods through their participation in sacrificial rituals and to the *pitṛa* (ancestors) through the gift of progeny.¹⁶ Fascinatingly enough, these remarkable women unveil a captivating interplay of three distinct generations. Tadaka, the formidable matriarch and grandmother to the Ravana, epitomizes the earliest era. Next in line, we encounter Kausalya, the venerable mother of Rama, representing the second generation. And finally, in the third generation, we find Tara, Mandodari, and Sita. What truly catches the eye is how their mourning reflects the spirit of their respective eras. Tadaka's grief is unrestrained, while Kausalya's, in her dedication to her husband, embodies the essence of submission. Tara, Mandodari, and Sita, are much more vocal than the former two, yet, submissive, revealing a remarkable blend of intellect and humility. This trio of extraordinary women — Tara, Mandodari, and Sita — recall the qualities of their husbands. With grace and eloquence, Tara pays homage to the valiant Vali, capturing his tender nature, unwavering care, noble character, and the regal radiance that emanated from his very being. A warrior unrivalled, a threat to adversaries, he commanded respect both on and off the battlefield and was forever devoted to his cherished wife. Sita celebrates Rama's profound intellect, praises him as a diplomat who effortlessly foresaw threats and charted paths to overcome them, a heart with kindness and

gentleness, forever open to others' plight. A true luminary of righteousness, he personifies the union of wisdom and compassion. On the contrary, Mandodari recounts Ravana's tempestuous temperament, a fiery force that propelled him towards both victories and defeats, a formidable protector, a great warrior, and an abductor. Ravana's character was an amalgamation of achievements and flaws, forever ensnared in the web of his own pride. Unmistakably, Mandodari possessed an acute discernment of Ravana's vulnerabilities; however, bound by the chains of her gender, failed to guard or counsel him successfully from the repercussions of his own deeds. Thus, these three women shed light upon the multifaceted nature of their husbands, with profound introspection and captivating insights. Tara, Mandodari, and Sita chose to grieve submissively, refraining from placing blame or seeking retribution against those responsible for their husbands' demise. Perhaps it was Tadaka's tragic fate, a victim of a man's rage, that influenced the rest of the *Ramayana kāṇḍas* (sections), where women mourned silently, abstaining from blaming or acting against the assassins of their beloved husbands. In the wake of this profound silence, a thought arises: do women truly discover their rightful haven within any *varṇa*, where the norms of *varṇas* could have shielded them from vulnerability and allowed them to fearlessly express their emotions against their husbands' adversaries. For it is a poignant reality that women, like the ill-fated Tadaka, often bear the brunt of male fury, leaving us to question the efficacy of societal structures designed to protect them. These remarkable women, Tara and Sita, expressed their desire to follow their husbands in death; however, they did not adhere to *satī*, which was a questionable practice in the era under discussion.

Another striking point worth discussing within the melancholic lamentation is the desperate bid to escape from the agony of separation from their beloved husbands, Tara and Sita implore Rama and Ravana for mercy by reuniting them with their spouses into the realm of the afterlife. Interestingly,–grieving Mandodari refrains from making such an appeal to Rama. This enigmatic act of Mandodari sparks numerous intriguing thoughts: does she perceive Rama as a mere mortal unworthy of bestowing salvation upon her? Could it be that she considers Rama to be beneath her noble lineage? Is she aware that even in the

face of her desperate yearning for release, a man, bound by the righteous path, would never kill a woman? Or, perhaps, the *rākṣasa* culture reserved a sympathetic space for their widows? It is noteworthy, Mandodari laments the death of her husband, but not on her ill-fated widowhood.

Who can better comprehend the depths of a woman's turmoil than another woman? Valmiki's lamenting women, while expressing profound affection for their spouses, blend their individuality into a resounding chorus of unity. Sita's abduction by a relentless man and her subsequent banishment to a distant land was a matter of great concern for the women associated with nobility. Tara and Mandodari, compassionate and observant, sensed Sita's anguish while the patriarchs cast doubts upon her purity. With the intention of safeguarding Sita's honour, Tara beseeches Rama, reminding him of the significance of a wife, while Mandodari emphatically attests to Sita's unassailable chastity. The saga of these exceptional women transcends time, engaging and captivating our intellects with its profound messages of strength, devotion, and the complexities of gender dynamics.

While the Valmiki's *Ramayana* offers glimpses of women expressing their thoughts and exerting agency to some extent, their overall freedom of expression is constrained within the framework of societal expectations and patriarchal norms. While women find limited freedom of expression, their voices are often subdued, tethered to prescribed roles as obedient wives. Yet, it is within this dichotomy that we uncover the complexity of their existence. The epic's female characters, endowed with virtues like chastity, patience, and silence, evoke both restraint and strength. A critical analysis reveals the delicate balance they navigate, where individual agency and expression flicker amidst the prevailing gender dynamics. Mourning the loss of their beloved husbands, their voices may appear subordinate, but their experiences of grief and profound loss resonate powerfully, transcending the boundaries of time. Thus, a comparative study of the "wailing women" depicted in various versions of *Ramayana*, could perhaps, shed some light on the gender dynamics obtained at the time the poems were composed. Although these women's roles may be

subordinate to those of the male characters, their experiences of loss and *śoka* are no less significant.

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Registers of Protest: A Comparative Study of Poetic Voices of Dissent from Kashmir, Northeast India and the Dalit Community

- Ms Samrita Sinha

Introduction

The history of the borders of South Asia like Kashmir and the Northeast India has been fraught with systemic political violence that has perpetrated a culture of military oppression and unbridled interventions of state apparatuses like the army. The apparatus of caste has also dominated the socio-cultural fabric of India since the very inception of a socially stratified system of labour entrenched in social hierarchies. The objective of this research paper is to attempt a comparative analysis of the poetry of three poets from India and Kashmir, Tamsula Ao, Ather Zia and Meena Kandasamy who are located within diverse geographical and liminal cultural spaces to critically explore the poetic tropes employed to register protest against state apparatuses and misogynist power structures. Through this comparative analysis, this paper seeks to explore how through writing poetry, these women are making vehement effort at reclaiming agency and socio-political participation to make their voices of dissent heard. The objective is to interrogate what constitutes nationalism as it is informed by the politics of their peripheral location within the discourse of the nation. This paper thus seeks to problematize the idea of the nation as a unified composite masculinist construct and further seeks to explore the inner terrains of the female psyche caught in the interstices of political violence, internal displacement and identity crisis as reflected in the works of poets such as Tamsula Ao, Ather Zia, and Meena Kandasamy from a Standpoint feminist perspective (Harding 27).

Standpoint Feminist Epistemology and the Outsiders-Within

Critically interrogating traditional epistemic systems of knowledge, Standpoint Feminism looks to “experience”, “being” and “location” as an alternative standpoint from where claims to “knowledge” can be made from “difference”. Sandra Harding argues that Standpoint feminism is a useful strategy for

legitimizing feminist knowledge, as “outsiders-within”, women from their marginalized situatedness are able to provide more inclusive knowledges (Haraway, 19). In contemporary feminist scholarship in India, Sharmila Rege adopts the idea of the standpoint lens in her unravelling of Dalit women’s issues. Donna Haraway talks about “situated knowledges”. Hence, “location” of the subject is important as the subjugated subject is itself a space to begin with and subjugated knowledges according to Donna Haraway, “promise adequate, sustained position of knowledge given their “location”, “being” and “experience” within structures of power (Haraway, 25). As “outsiders-within”, these poets interrogate power structures and politicize the notion of ‘Indianness’ as a monolithic construct refusing to surrender and fit into any given identity moulds. The critical analysis of these poets’ works will seek to bring the category of ‘difference’ to the centre of feminist analysis which will take into consideration their locations within the Indian scenario - a Naga poet whose cultural historiography has been under threat of erasure, the Kashmiri poet psychically torn asunder by extreme instances of militarization, a marginalized Dalit woman writer fighting caste oppression. Writing from their individual locations their very experience of being, provide objective, transforming accounts of the world perceived as “real” (Haraway 26).

Temsula Ao is a Naga poet writing in English, who responds to identity crisis through revisiting folklore in her works. The prejudiced representation of the Northeast in the nationalist discourse and the popular consciousness that thinks of the Northeast as a primitive and backward topography, has had an adverse effect on the psyche of the people who have been marginalised by an apathetic Indian State. The Indian nation-state instead of looking after the concerns of its marginalized citizens empathetically, has reduced the Northeast to a “state-of-exception”, unleashing unbridled terror and fear through repressive apparatuses of control as the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) that has only resulted in the alienation of the Northeast from the mainland India.

Ather Zia is a poet and academician from Kashmir writing in English. Her debut collection, *The Frame*, explores the context of Kashmir's militarization by the political apparatus of India. In her online digital journal Kashmirlit,

Ather Zia writes, "As a people living under an occupation which is camouflaged within a patina of democratic set-up and draconian laws, there is a constant erasure of our bodies, memories and identities." Ather Zia's poetry can be situated within the contemporary context of Kashmiri separatist nationalism.

The poetry of the contemporary Dalit poet Meena Kandasamy, is informed by the politics of her marginalized subjectivity. In her virulent poetry she situates the trope of the 'ideal Indian woman' outside of all familiar cultural paradigms. Her feminine consciousness defamiliarizes all known cultural contexts within which the Indian woman has been situated. Kandasamy's poetry interrogates all aspects of epistemes that connect the idea of Indianness with virtue in anthologies, *Touch* and *Ms. Militancy*.

A discussion of the works of these poets in the spaces of Eurocentric academia would help recuperate the third world voices from narratives of silence, passivity and backwardness and would debunk the myth of the perpetually docile, voiceless, suffering Indian womanhood as constructed by Eurocentric feminisms. Their works foreground pluralistic notions of womanhood and feminine subjectivity, furthering the project of dismantling the trivialization of third world voices and bringing to the forefront diverse and underrepresented voices which refuse to surrender to victimhood. (Mohanty 56). In this collective ideological battle against totalizing epistemes, the very political nature of these poets' 'location' fortifies them with strategies of resistance. Furthermore, a focus on these poets' lived experiences would help recover what has been omitted or distorted in the rhetoric of Indian nationalism as well as Indian Academia. The canon of 'Indian writing in English' has largely been dominated by 'mainstream' writers who have defined what 'Indian writing in English' entails. In an interview, Meena Kandasamy a Dalit feminist writer was asked whether as the first Indian woman writer writing Dalit poetry in English, her writing can be considered as offering a parallel or alternative to mainstream Indian writing in English. This question implicitly carries the bias and prejudice that mainstream academia harbours against such writers who come from liminal spaces within the Indian cultural context. To the

aforementioned question, Meena Kandasamy answered, “I would not attach labels like parallel or alternative. The so-called mainstream is something that has been hijacked by an elite minority. As a consequence, their culture, their practices, their view-points are being identified as mainstream. The real India, crumbling under its caste system and its corruption, isn’t present in their writing. I could just say that voices of women and men from the oppressed castes and minorities will give credibility to the mainstream. It will give the mainstream image a makeover, make it authentic and real” (Kandasamy 19). Even important anthologies of feminist theories as those edited by Maitrayee Chaudhuri and Mary E. John do not focus on the plight of women in the Northeast. In the Indian context, the term ‘Northeast’ is not only a geographical directional moniker but a term to differentiate racially and culturally people from the Indian borderland. To the mainland India, the Northeast Indian people and their culture constitute the ‘Other’. But in recent times the voice of dissent has shaped the literary resistance to this politics of othering and marginalization. In this transcultural era, reckoning the Northeast not only as a part of the Indian mainland but also a part of its diverse culture has marked a paradigm shift (Chaudhuri 10).

In Dipesh Chakraborty’s influential book, *Provincializing Europe*, he problematizes the presumption of the universality of Eurocentric experiences and questions how it came to be represented as universal through imperialism and through the complicity of nationalisms. Secondly, he advocates the provincialization of history by interrogating its putative monolithic nature. For this, he distinguishes between two types of history that have arisen with the spread of capitalism and the emergence of the modern world – first a history that is posited as a condition characterizing the Centre and the Capital and second the history that is part of the subculture and which may not be subsumed in the discourse of the Centre. In the Indian context the history of the Centre and mainland India eschews the history of the Northeast and liminalizes it. The central premise of Chakraborty’s seminal work is predicated on how at different times, in different places, different sections of people have struggled to conform to the discourse of the centre (Chakraborty

232). From this follows that to belong is to struggle. The literature from the Northeast is thus a sustained attempt to record the cultural, psychological and economic repercussion of prolonged marginalization. The Northeast Indian literary doyens have now taken up cudgels to awaken mainland India to a realization of its diversity of culture as a strong basis for a respect for diversity and not as a means for othering and decentering.

Identity Assertion in Temsula Ao's Poetry

Temsula Ao's poetry gives voice to those people whose history has been pushed to the margins by recreating their past and reinventing tradition as part of the nationalist agenda of identity assertion. In Maitrayee Chaudhari's *Feminism in India*, Vidyut Bhagat's essay on Marathi folklore explores the concept of 'tradition' as a radical tool to envision newer possibilities of resistance through a renewal of indigeneity (Bhagat 40). Similarly, Temsula Ao, too, by revisiting indigenous Ao-Naga tribal traditions in her poetry, denigrates homogenization of the Northeast and upholds a diverse, plural and unique cultural identity. The Northeast has always been looked at through the lens of violence and insurgency. As opposed to such essentialist notions, Temsula Ao's poetry authors a new kind of an ethnographic exploration foregrounding a sense of indigeneity and cultural pride. She has published five collection of poems - *Songs That Tell*, *Songs That Try to Say*, *Songs of Many Moods*, *Songs From Here and There*, *Songs From The Other Life*.

In an article entitled "*Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective*" Temsula Ao writes about identity – "For a Naga, identity is a many layered concept"- She starts and goes on to discuss about the implications of identity in the wake of globalization with certain specific examples of the Ao Naga tribe. She says that while there is no historical or material corroboration for the myths of their origin, they have been accepted by the people as the genesis of their tribal history. For a Naga, identity is conditioned by the village of his birth and residence, because it ascribes to him a "specific ethnic and linguistic space." This is where the ambivalence surrounding the concept of "national

identity” emerges. When asked to opine on the status assigned to the Northeast region in relation to the mainstream, she said –

“The Northeast still demands special treatment by way of reservation and scholarship we are not yet self-sufficient; we depend on the centre for everything..... We are ethnically so different – physical features, food, dress and we get treated differently. This reluctance of the rest of the country to accept this difference as natural in a multicultural situation has only accentuated the duality of the “Northeast” and “mainstream”. This has proven to be the main hurdle in the process of the much vaunted national integrationis there a particular framework to which we the Northeasterners have to blend into and transform ourselves? Why can’t we just be ourselves and still be Indians instead of blending with them? Is it so difficult to accept the other as they are and not treat them so differently?” (Ao 53)

There are two notions that emerge from this statement by the venerable Temsula Ao – that the ‘nation’ as an emerging postcolonial concept is a site for much dispute and debate as in a country like India cultural plurality makes the phenomenon of national integration almost impossible and second, that multiculturalism is a political collusion to achieve national solidarity whereas in actuality mainland India remains intolerant towards the cultural uniqueness of the Northeast. Jhilam Chattaraj says about Temsula Ao,

“Her stories attempt to make the new generation of Nagas realize the necessity to preserve the Naga way of life against the invasion of migration and adaptation of metropolitan modernization of India. Temsula Ao’s stories exhibit her desire to create an imaginary Nagaland that she has lost and that which she wishes to recreate through her stories.” (Chattaraj 27)

Homi K. Bhaba’s concept of cultural hybridism further corroborates the ambiguity surrounding the concept of nation. According to Bhabha’s concept of cultural hybridism, members of a postcolonial society have been caught in the interstices of their own uniqueness, cultural and communal history and that

identity lent to them by the colonial power (Bhabha, 165). Herein Temsula Ao's claim that the Indian identity becomes a total disclaimer of all that a Naga has conceived of himself to be through generations becomes axiomatic. A Naga or any other Northerner would have to incorporate into his or her personal and national identity the traditions inherent in being tribal, being Naga, and being an 'Indian' (Ao 22).

Temsula Ao's poetry gives voice to those people whose history has been pushed to the margins by recreating their past and reinventing tradition as part of the nationalist agenda of identity assertion. In the poem, "New Terror", Temsula Ao says -

The old ruler sits forlorn
On his mouldy throne,
Before him lies his mate
Lifeless and long gone
Her blood and entrails oozing,
Darkening the earth with new colour.

In the eerie silence
The subjects wait for new assurance
But the old one only stares with rheumy eyes,
Unseeing and gone beyond all cares.

At last a bold youth speaks,
'Grandfather, you taught us
How to prowl and prey,
Dodge the spears and sidestep the traps.

But now the new enemy
Comes from nowhere,
Moves like lightning
And kills at will'.

In the aforesaid lines, Temsula Ao talks about the unpredictability of life in Nagaland with the enemy being not an outsider, rather the nation-state itself. Ao's powerful lines refer to the indiscriminate violence unleashed by the AFSPA, that is the Armed Forces Special Powers Act that had been a replication of colonial forms of governance by the Indian nation-state in the aftermath of post-independence. The AFSPA had arbitrary powers to repeal Articles 21A and B of the constitution that protects right to life and right against unlawful arrest. In the light of the suspension of these fundamental rights, Nagaland had been reduced to a state of Necropolitics as theorised by the Cameroonian philosopher, Achille Mbembe.

He stops and waits
For rebuke or other response
But the old ruler holds his peace
Oblivious to all around him
Except his lifeless mate.

Suddenly a young voice cries out,
'Grandfather I saw, I saw one
He looked so funny
All dressed up like a tree.'
The village idiot butts in
'Yes grandfather, I saw it too
But he was not chasing
Grandmother, but another tree'.

There is a general murmur
Voicing outrage at the upstarts
For speaking out of turn.
But the ancient one is beyond anger
And has no wisdom to offer
To counter
The new terror riding
On streaked lightening.

Necropolitical Reduction of Life in Nagaland

The imagery of violence and terror and a necropolitical reduction of life in Nagaland can be understood through the political philosophy of Mbembe's ideas about the political contradictions of global democracies. In his renowned book, "Necropolitics", Mbembe theorises about how democracies function in autocratic ways towards the instrumentation of human lives and withholding the ultimate right to decide how certain section of demography may live while another section must die. Necropolitics therefore entails as Mbembe theorises the "subjugation of life to the power of death". In "our contemporary world", postulates Mbembe, various types of "weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjugated to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living-dead". (Mbembe 20-80). This is the condition of life that has ensued in the states of India's northeast in the aftermath of the implementation of AFSPA.

He shuffles and slowly descends
To lie besides his mate
In object abdication,
And the young are newly lost.

The old regime has given way
And a new order
Has overtaken the habitat
Grinning on children's faces
Painted with psychopathic stripes.

Violence has only bred further violence and the clamping down by the Indian nation-state of the northeastern border-states has only resulted in a pushback and irreparable resistance. Tamsula Ao's poetry is a powerful and sensitive record of such political contradictions that underlie the political paradigms of nations that call themselves democracies. Her poetry is an important aspect of Indian writing in English as it brings to light important spaces of dissent that question the very ethos of India as a unified democracy.

Kashmiri Separatist Nationalism and the Imagery of Violence

Ather Zia is a poet and academician from Kashmir writing in English. Her debut collection, *The Frame*, explores the context of Kashmir's militarization by the political apparatus of India. In her online digital journal *KashmirLit*, Ather Zia, the political poet from Kashmir, writes, "As a people living under an occupation which is camouflaged within a patina of democratic set-up and draconian laws, there is a constant erasure of our bodies, memories and identities. We are inflicted with active forgetting in order to survive. At the border where the direct gaze of prose is constricted with barbed wires of multiple coercions, poetry spurts forth. Poetry makes one a witness, rather than just an archivist. One's life-blood, all that is political and emotional; lived, remaining, and forgotten coagulates into a poem." Ather Zia's poetry can be situated within the contemporary context of Kashmiri separatist nationalism. As Urvashi Butalia in her well-researched work, *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir* says, "It is now widely accepted that while women seldom create or initiate conflict, they – along with children and the aged – are often its chief victims and sufferers. Nowhere is this truer than in Kashmir. Yet, despite this, women's suffering has, until recently, barely been acknowledged. The Kashmir conflict, for example, has generated a vast amount of analytical and historical literature; very little of it actually mentions women." (Zia 26)

Zia writes about guns and pellets, rape, militarization, violence and forced disappearance in Kashmir. In a powerful poem, "In Kashmir: Writing under Occupation", she articulates the violation of the woman within the culture of armed conflict. Moreover, in the context of Kashmir, women who have become the targets of violence, have no one to talk to, for everyone, it is the male who is the hero, whether as an army man, or a militant, or simply someone caught in conflict. In a powerful poem, "In Kashmir: Writing under Occupation", she articulates the violation of the female subjectivity within the culture of armed conflict.

"they want us to write. in blood.

and only write. of peace.

they capture our land. make us sow rice that is not seed. kill us. rape. They tell us we are ungrateful. like children - who do not see what is good for them. holding us with many kinds of guns: they grimace at the world calling our blood on their faces -vermillion"

The imagery of violence in the poem is startling and unnerving in its phallocentricity. The association between blood and vermilion once again reinforces the integral link between violence and nationalism as vermilion in this context is a marker of masculinist victory. The word 'rape' draws attention to the idea of the female body being the site of political control within the discourse of nationalism. Rape can be interpreted as a tool of political dominion to keep the woman in a state of absolute subjugation. Susan Brownmiller's work has been seminal in examining the connections between rape, masculinity and militarism. In her book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, she points out, "War provides men with the perfect psychologic backdrop to give vent to their contempt for women. The very maleness of the military – the brute power of weaponry exclusive to their hands, the spiritual bonding of men at arms, the manly discipline of orders given and orders obeyed, the simple logic of the hierarchical command – confirms for men what they long suspect, that women are peripheral, irrelevant to the world that counts, passive spectators to the action in the central ring," The very trope of the nation-as-woman within the discourse of nationalism makes them more vulnerable to the use of rape and forced pregnancies during armed conflicts. Through a strong and autonomous poetic vocabulary, Ather Zia does not speak from the periphery merely as a passive spectator to the action in the central ring. On the contrary, her poetic voice is a clarion call to Kashmiri women to make their voices heard and to transcend their victimhood and reclaim political agency. Her digital journal offers such a unique uninhibited space for the denizens of Kashmir to offer resistance to their oppression.

In another poem, "Homecoming", Ather Zia writes –
His lunch is getting cold, she whispers, to herself

The nickel-plated, copper edged bowl,
placed just right on the thread-bare mat
white, glob of pudgy rice
wet with glistening collards,
a twisted wreath of peace
the slogans rise
Khoon ka badla khoon se lenge
(blood for blood) –

The stark imagery of food with that of military ammunition is noteworthy in the first stanza. The food plates and bowl that are “nickel-plated” and “copper-edged” signify a life depleted of nutrition. Food is a source of comfort and nutrition and it is a significant cultural signifier. However, these lines give us a picture of Kashmiri life lived under the constant shadow of threat and fear. Lives where even sources of nutrition and comfort are controlled by a culture of military impunity. The aforesaid poetic lines also signify a domestic space completely overtaken by military intervention and metaphorically speaking, the complete breakdown of the boundaries between the spheres of the private and the public. The public domain that is injuncted with violence, bloodshed and military control completely overwhelms and threatens to rupture the sanctity, peace and value of the private sphere.

Lal * chowk is lal today
(red square is red today)
She closes the window,
Shivering; shuts the sunshine out,
The noise dims - only for a moment
She waits, like everyday
For him to come
grease, gas, and sorrow marking his face
he remembers to forget the
phantom coolness of the trigger
warmth of a mission, which he thought was bigger than his heart,
now he tries to coax unwilling vehicles to life

touching the worn map behind his grandfather's framed picture,
for the last time, every time
in the garage where everything creaks with age and poverty
She puts her ear to the closed window
Khoon ka badla khoon se lenge
(blood for blood) -
Lal chowk is lal today
(red square is red today)

The poem records the inner voice of the female persona waiting for the return of the son. These poignant lines try to enumerate the inner conflict and the trauma of the female subject and her ontological state that has been reduced to that of perpetual waiting. The poem can be seen as a tribute to the mothers of children of enforced disappearance. It is a sensitive record of the trauma of the female subject in perpetual waiting and the concomitant stress, fear, and anxiety as she helplessly witnesses the violence happening outside while waiting for the return of her son. The enforced passivity of the female subject in perpetual waiting is also, as this paper argues, a manifestation of dislocation and internal displacement. In these lines, we see the unsettled and perpetually anxious mother whose state of anxious uncertainty is not only traumatic but also causes a rupture in her ontological universe.

The shouts fill the
Emptiness everywhere
Seething a little,
she wrings the dripping rag,
cleans the already-clean kerosene stove,
whispering, his lunch is getting cold

She watches the weathered door open a flood of eyes,
Cramming the small dark room,
The aroma of cooling lunch
drowns in short gasps of fiery breaths
He is cradled in a sea of frightened arms,

Sleeping like he never could -
The yelps of kicked-about dogs in the night,
the moans from his father's room, and mother's prayers,
never let him
She laments his cold lunch
He does not hear,
like always
He has arrived, he has arrived
but he is not here
his lunch is getting cold
*Meaning : Lal means the colour red and chowk means square. Named after
Red Square, Moscow

The closing lines signify the arrival of the son's dead body and the figure of the mother waiting for her son to come and have lunch signifies this state of an ontological indeterminacy where there is never a sense of closure for the Kashmiri mothers who never know whether their sons would be coming back to have the lunch that they have cooked for them. By creating a space for the voices of such subjects to be heard, Ather Zia is making a political statement through her poetry. She is giving visibility to such subjects who inhabit invisibilised space of marginality in a military culture of impunity with an enforced passivity and a loss of their human dignity. Her poetry can also be read through the very important lens of human rights literary studies. By narrativizing the mute suffering of Kashmiri women, Ather Zia is making a political plea for a reclamation of their human rights and making poetry a very powerful entity that can mediate such political demands. Her poetry therefore is a political praxis, integrating activism with aesthetics. By doing so, as a third world female poet, Ather Zia is also politicising literature as a tool of dissent and a powerful register of protest.

The Poetics of Dalit Resistance in Meena Kandasamy's Works

The political poetry of the contemporary Dalit poet Meena Kandasamy, is a significant domain for exploration as like Ather Zia, she expresses dissent against the oppressive paradigms of the caste system and situates gender

discrimination within this paradigm. Her poetry is informed by the politics of her marginalized subjectivity. She is the first Dalit poet writing in English. In her powerful and unsettling poetry, she situates the trope of the woman outside of all familiar cultural paradigms. Her feminine consciousness defamiliarizes all known cultural contexts within which the Indian woman has been situated. Hence, for instance her 'Sita' walks out on Rama and falls in love with her abductor. By the time Rama wins her back, she has perfected the act of vanishing. The ideas of chastity, eternal sacrifice and unflinching devotion to husband as foregrounded by the figure of Sita in Indian mythology is interrogated and debunked. The Hindu idea of Sita becomes an absent centre in the poem and a transgressive Sita replaces that age-old model of virtue and perfection. Kandasamy's poetry interrogates all aspects of epistemes that connect the idea of Indianness with virtue in collections, *Touch* and *Ms. Militancy*.

However, the violated female psyche virulently lashes out at the injustices of patriarchy and rises above her victimhood. Her poetry is rooted in the personal and the style is characterized by startling wit and humour without a trace of self-pity. The radical language that Kandasamy employs manifest the violated female psyche. In the poem, "My Lover Speaks of Rape", Kandasamy speaks of sexual violence and marital rape. Very few Indian poets have dealt with this subject.

"Blues blend to an unforgiving metropolitan black
And loneliness seems safer than a gentle night
In his arms. i return from the self-defence lessons:
Mistrust is the black-belted, loose white mechanism
Of survival against this groping world and I am
A convert too. Yet, in the way of all life, he could try
And take root, as I resist, and yield later, like the earth."

What is very interesting to note is that the language itself embodies violence suggesting how the female subject is constituted by this register that bespeaks violence. Like Temsula Ao and Ather Zia, Meena Kandasamy too speaks of

how violence constitutes female subjects within socio-ontological paradigms such as certain geo-specialities like the Northeast India and Kashmir and the caste system. In her delightful poem -

“Algorithm for converting a Shudra into a Brahmin”, Kandasamy says -
Begin.

Step 1: Take a beautiful Shudra girl.

Step 2: Make her marry a Brahmin.

Step 3: Let her give birth to his female child.

Step 4: Let this child marry a Brahmin.

Step 5: Repeat steps 3-4 six times.

Step 6: Display the end product. It is a Brahmin.

End.

Algorithm advocated by Father of the Nation at Tirupur.

Documented by Periyar on 20.09.1947.

Algorithm for converting a Pariah into a Brahmin

Awaiting another Father of the Nation

to produce this algorithm.

(Inconvenience caused due to inadvertent delay is sincerely regretted.)

This poem was first published in *The Little Magazine*. What is remarkable about the poem is Kandasamy’s startling wit and humour and her scathing sarcasm. This poem is a scathing critique of Gandhi’s views on the caste system as the closing line is an oblique reference to Gandhi, the father of the nation. In her works, Kandasamy has often interrogated the word, “*harijans*” as used by Gandhi to address the Dalits. She feels that it is a word that unduly romanticises Dalit without any emotional empathy. She feels that Gandhi only intellectually sympathised with the Dalits while employing descriptive words that reinforced social binaries. By romanticising them, he only furthered the social distance between people of different castes. Such romanticization was not commensurate with an ideology of spontaneous social integration. Also, as the poem records, Gandhi’s speech about social integration was deeply offensive to the Dalit community, suggestive of a predatory assimilation. The steps mentioned in the poem attest to this fact.

Ranjit Hoskote in his appraisal of Kandasamy's poetry says, "there is considerable current of surprise and elusiveness that does battle with the strain of predictability in Kandasamy's poetry; even when she rehearses a well-established choreography of feminist self-assertion, she does so with a sharp eye for detail, a grasp of worldly insight and an appetite for phrasal shape-shifting." (Hoskote 24) It would be very interesting to see how Meena Kandasamy uses language as a tool of subversion and transgression through what Hoskote terms as 'phrasal shape-shifting'. It is through language that she seeks empowerment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper asserts that the element of dissenting political stance and moral outrage is a common thread running through the political poetry of these significant Indian poets who all speak from a peripheral cultural situatedness. Their works legitimize the figure of the 'outsider-within' from a standpoint perspective. They all speak from a peripheral situatedness and psychic displacement, within the context of the discourse of the nation and the politics of identity. Their works problematize the rhetoric of India as a unified nation and gives legitimacy to the 'outsider-within'. Their poetry seeks to give voice to the experiences of the multitude of women whose ontological experiences are located in the 'outsider-within' context, perpetually existing on the periphery and the fringes of the discourse of the nation. In the works these Indian poets, a newer praxis of political dissent can be seen to be evolving which in turn sets newer directions in contemporary Indian poetry.

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Bilkis Bano Case: Remission Reverses Reparation

- Ms Vahida Nainar

On the 75th Independence Day in 2022, as Indians celebrated the country's achievements, a rather disquieting news came in that indicated the kind of freedom and independence that will be appreciated and applauded in new India going forward. Gujarat government granted the remission of the life sentences and granted freedom to the eleven convicts in Bilkis Bano case that took place in 2002 in Gujarat. (Ojha, 2022; Gurmat, 2022)

The remission is an executive decision of the Gujarat state government under a 1992 remission policy in force at the time the crime was committed and when the accused were convicted. This policy was invalidated by the Supreme Court (SC) in November 2012 and a new policy was initiated in 2014 based on SC directives (CNBCTV18.com, 2022). The new policy does not allow remission for prisoners convicted for murder with rape or gangrape. The committee that recommended the remission consisted of five Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislators and other ex-officio government officials that potentially vitiates both the process and outcome of the remission review process. The remission allowed the premature release of the convicts who received a hero's welcome by their relatives as well as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), as they were felicitated with garlands and sweets on coming out of the jail. (Newsclick Report, 2022)

The BJP legislator C.K. Raolji defended the remission recommendation with "They were Brahmins and Brahmins are known to have good *sanskaar* (values). It might have been someone's ill intention to corner and punish them," added the MLA in the interview, which has gone viral on social media. "I don't know whether they committed any crime or not. But there has to be intention of committing crime." (One India Desk, 2022)

The news of remission has rightly been received with the outrage that it deserves, though one hoped the outrage was more widespread and mainstream.

There are country-wide protests, signature campaigns, press conferences and statements made questioning the remission. Several valid questions have been raised and addressed, particularly in the print/alternative media and progressive circles. Why does state govt have the power of remission of life sentences? Why did SC sent the application for remission of sentence to Gujarat government and not to Maharashtra government where the accused was tried and convicted? Why was the remission based on 1992 policy and not the 2014 one? Was the prosecution and the judge who convicted the accused consulted? Was the impact of remission on victims considered? How many remissions of life sentences of rapists have been approved by the Gujarat government? (Sheikh, 2022; Sharma, 2022; Sen, 2022; Thapar, 2022; Telegraphindia.com, 2022)

Bilkis Bano herself has spoken and given an indication of the impact the remission has on her and expressed concern about its impact on the overall cause of gender justice. (India.com News Desk, 2022) She has spoken about her renewed sense of fear and from the exodus of Muslims out of her village, it is clear that the fear is extended to her community. She has asked for return of her right to live in peace and without fear. Several petitions have been made to SC to rule on the remission of the sentence (Balaji, 2022), including one by Bilkis Bano herself but these actions have not yielded results by way of cancelling the remission of the sentences and compelling the convicts to serve the rest of their life sentences in prison. In November 2022, the SC dismissed Bilkis Bano's plea for review of the judgment that permitted Gujarat government to decide on the remission application by the convicts.

State governments have the power of remission of life sentences of convicts. However, there is no transparency on how this power is exercised and what criteria are used to assess the eligibility of convicts for remission. The remission committee members states that all the rules were followed but there is no clarity on what the rules are. It is this aspect that is of concern in the remission of the convicts in Bilkis Bano case. Several issues have been raised around the remission but three broad points are discussed in this article. One,

remission on Bilkis Bano case exposes the intersection of three-dimensional prejudice based on gender, caste and religion that is embedded in the right-wing Hindutva ideology. Two, the question SC poses ‘does the horrific nature of the crimes qualifies to deny remission or make remission wrong.’ Three, the comments of Justice Salvi given to several news and media portals on the remission of the convicts.

‘They should be human beings first’

Justice Salvi, the trial court judge who first convicted the accused in Bilkis Bano case raised several important issues but one that is important and remains unexplored is his response when he was asked how the ‘remission’ was influenced by the fact that the convicts were ‘brahmins who are known to have good *sanskar*’. He said ‘they should be human beings first.’ (Mishra, 2022) It is an interesting response but what does it mean to be human and show humanity? By all means, it means being kind and compassionate to fellow human beings but beyond that, what does it mean to be human in socio-political terms?

In any society, there a presumption of a social order that is basic and pre-political i.e. even before they are written in constitutions as fundamental, civil and political rights. The presumption is an underlying normative expectation of humane socio-political relationships between individuals on how to conduct oneself with another, the attitudes to imbibe about others, simply because of being part of the human race, regardless of whether there exists any specific or defined relationship with each other. (Scanlon, 2008) The premise is an unassailable recognition of individual dignity and a meaningful order of socio-political existence. J. Améry, a survivor of Auschwitz contemplating his experiences avers that ‘at the core of the meaningful order is one's assumption of physical wellbeing, the belief that the other person will respect the physical body and spare any harm to it, and a very justified expectation of help in the event of distress.’ (Améry, 2009)

The horrors of violence like that of Gujarat in 2002 becomes possible only

when there is no scope of self-resistance or another's assistance, destroying thereby as Améry suggests the victim's assumptions of an existence of a meaningful, just and humane socio-political existence, through destruction of victims sense of self or physical sovereignty, ending along with it a part of life known until then.

The current generation is not aware of the kind of violence Bilkis Bano endured which destroyed her sense of physical sovereignty. The years gone by has even faded the memories of the brutality of the violence for those who consciously remembers the Gujarat violence. Several excerpts from the Bombay High Court (HC) judgment on the Bilkis Bano case i.e. *Radheshyam Bhagwandas Shah vs The State Of Gujarat 2017*, being the only official record of the details of the case and therefore authentic, are reproduced to demonstrate the details of violence that attacked the victim's physical sovereignty and to substantiate other points made in the article:

... There were incidents of arson and looting in village Randhikpur from the morning of 28.2.2002 and consequently, there was exodus of Muslims from the village in search of safety. The Prosecutrix along with some members of her family fled from Randhikpur. After leaving Randhikpur, the Prosecutrix and others including some of her family members, went from village to village. One of the persons who was in the group of the Prosecutrix, was her cousin sister Shamim. Shamim was pregnant and about to deliver a child. In the night of 28.2.2002, they stopped at village Kuwajer. There Shamim delivered a baby girl. Next day morning, they left Kuwajer. (Para 4(11))

... They stayed in the house of PW 20 Nayak for two days. They were informed that there is danger, hence, on 3.3.2002 early in the morning before sunrise, they started proceeding towards village Sarjumi via Pannivel. When they were near Pannivel, two white vehicles in which there were about 25 people, came from Chhapparwad side towards Pannivel. When they saw the group of the Prosecutrix, they stopped

their vehicles. They started shouting “Musalmanoko Maro” and ran towards the group of the Prosecutrix. These persons who came in the two white vehicles, were carrying swords, lathis and sickles in their hands. (pg. 12, para 4(11))

... Accused no.4 - Shailesh Chimanlal Bhatt pulled Saleha the daughter of the Prosecutrix, from her arms and smashed her on the ground due to which Saleha died. Accused no.1 Jaswantbhai Chaturbhai Nai who was holding a sword, was going to assault the Prosecutrix with a sword, however, she held out her hand to ward-off the blow, due to which, she received injury on her left hand. Accused nos.1, 2 and 3 forcibly removed the clothes of the Prosecutrix and committed rape on her. First she was raped by accused no.1- Jaswantbhai Chaturbhai Nai, then by accused no. 2 - Govindbhai Nai and thereafter by accused no.3 Naresh Modhiya. The other accused persons i.e. accused nos. 5 to 12 in the meanwhile, tore off the clothes of the other females in the group and committed rape on them and assaulted the male members in their group. In the meanwhile, on account of rape, the Prosecutrix became unconscious. She was unconscious for many hours. When she regained consciousness, she found her relatives lying dead including Shamim's baby. The Prosecutrix was totally naked. She found one petticoat (Lengah) nearby. She wore the same and crawled upto the hill-top and hid there. The next day morning, she came down on the other side of the hill. There she met one woman i.e PW 11 Sumaliben who gave her some clothes. (pg. 13, para 4(12))

When the violence is because of prejudice based on markers of identity like that of religion, there is little scope of reviving the sense of destruction because of what the violence convey to the survivor and her community. It conveys that she and her community is excluded from the meaningful order of a just and humane social existence, that safety and protection of their physical and metaphysical self does not matter to this order and they cannot, therefore, have any expectation of assistance to alleviate them from the violence. It also

simultaneously indicates that a part of the society has converted from being a just/humane social order into an inhumane one where significant members of the society are dehumanised.

In Bilkis Bano's case too there are several aspects that conveyed to her that she and her group are excluded from the just and humane social order; and they cannot have any expectation of assistance. One, Bilkis Bano stated that her attackers were not strangers. She knew the accused persons who used to buy milk from her family. Because there was no animosity between her or her family with the accused persons, she had a justified and reasonable expectation that those who know them will not cause them any harm but she and her group were attacked anyway. Two, Bilkis Bano had a 3 years old child and was 5 months pregnant at the time of the attack and in small villages such facts are widely known. She had a justified and reasonable expectation that those who know her will spare her child, respect her physical sovereignty and not cause her foetus any harm but that did not prevent the attackers from causing her, her child and her foetus grave harm. There are other facts that emerged during the trial as noted in the HC judgment that conveyed the same message to Bilkis Bano.

She met one Adivasi lady PW 11 Sumaliben. However, she was hostile to Bilkis Bano and wanted to assault her. So Bilkis Bano told her not to assault and requested to provide some clothes. According to the evidence of Bilkis Bano, the lady provided blouse and odni to her. (pg.25 para 8)

It is the case of Bilkis Bano that when she disclosed the names of the offenders, the police objected to the disclosure of the names and also threatened that she would be given a poisonous injection at the hospital if she speaks out the names and she was warned to keep mum. The police took down her statement but it was not read over to her. The police forcibly obtained her thumb impression. (pg.37, para 20)

Another biggest manipulation by the Investigating accused in the case is not to take Bilkis Bano to the spot on the same day i.e., on 4.3.2002 and to only visit the spot at Kachha road at night on the same day ie., on 4.3.2002. Though the police had visited it, they did not conduct either inquest panchanama or spot panchanama. (pg. 317, para 277)

... the dead bodies which were found on the spot were hurriedly buried so that no other person or the relatives of the dead persons was given any opportunity of identification of the deceased. (pg.319, para 279)

... missing of dead body of Saleha is another circumstance in respect of defective investigation. He submitted that photograph of dead body of Saleha was taken on 4.3.2002. However, her body was not found at the time of inquest panchanama at Exhibit 123 and spot panchanama at exhibit 124 which were drawn on 5.3.2002. Mr. Venegavkar submitted that the bodies were left unguarded. They purposely did not protect the dead bodies due to which some of the bodies went missing and Saleha's body and body of Shamim's new born baby were lost. (pg.320, para 280)

Postmortem was conducted in deliberate haste without examining and noting the necessary facts with a view to suppress the material evidence on the point of Sections 376 and 302 and the bodies were hurriedly buried with sacks full of salt so that they would decompose faster and the evidence would disappear. (pg.393, para (ix))

...nothing was done by the police or the Doctors but they conducted haphazard post-mortems, dug a pit with the help of labourers, put salt in it and buried 7 dead bodies one on top of the other in the same pit. In the photographs, 7 bodies are each complete in one piece, however, when the bodies were exhumed by the FCSL and CBI on 28/30.1.2004, not a single skull was found which is extremely strange to say the least. (Pg.334)

All these lapses which clearly appear to be deliberate show that the investigation is not only faulty but it is downright tainted. (pg.341, para 297)

Individuals impacted by experiences such as above are degraded and disregarded as an equal member of the human community. The Gujarat violence as exemplified in Bilkis Bano's experience leaves the survivor and community with a sense of complete abandonment crushing their beliefs and expectations of assistance leading to existential isolation or what Jill Stauffer calls 'ethical loneliness' in her book 'Ethical Loneliness - the injustice of not being heard.' (2015) Stauffer reckons that being abandoned by those in power to help, produces a profound sense of loneliness that requires more than restitution, rehabilitation and reconciliation. (2015) Such abandonment results in a breakdown of human political relationships not only between the victims and the perpetrators but also between the victims and the society; and the victims and the state.

The violence Bilkis Bano and her group endured caused the breakdown of the human political relationships of Bilkis Bano and the 'the collectively hated other' community she represents. To mend the relationship and alleviate the victims' collective sense of existential isolation, several measures of reparation that goes beyond rehabilitation, restitution, and reconciliation; and extends to justice, compensation, guarantees of safety/ security had to be proactively and simultaneously initiated.

The only measure of reparation that Bilkis Bano received was justice after many years of long struggle and it came from the same system that contributed to her sense of existential isolation as evident in some remarks of the HC judgment.

'... the Prosecutrix (Bilkis Bano) supported by human rights activists filed Criminal Writ Petition No. 118 of 2003 (Exh. 61) before the Supreme Court praying that the order of learned Magistrate accepting "A" summary be set aside and also prayed for transfer of investigation

to Central Bureau of Investigation. The Supreme Court allowed the Writ Petition and passed the order of transfer of investigation to C.B.I. on 16.12.2003.’ (pg.18, para IV)

‘Mr. K.N. Sinha, PW 72 the Officer from C.B.I. took charge of the investigation from Gujarat Police on 1.1.2004. The C.B.I. conducted detailed investigation.’ (pg.19)

‘... 14 helpless persons including children and women were brutally murdered by these accused. While committing this inhuman act, three women were raped i.e Halima, Shamim and Bilkis Bano. This shows that the accused had no regard for law and order and were perverse. These murders have shocked the conscience of the society and is a gruesome offence which is to be dealt with capital punishment.’ (pg.366, para 317)

Justice done fifteen years after the incident is a small step towards mending the broken human political relationship between the victim and the state. The remission of life sentences of those convicted in this horrific incident of violence reverses this process and snaps the tenuously put together relationship all over again.

Bilkis Bano’s sense of fear after the remission has spread to the entire village as Muslim families leaving Randhikpur and seeking shelter in a relief camp in Devgarh Baria, where Bilkis Bano and her family have been living since 2017. (Raja, 2022) One of the women arriving at the camp said, “None of us has the kind of courage that Bilkis has shown in the past two decades to fight. On our way here, we came across a huge convoy of the ruling party near Kesharpura and were petrified. I held on to my daughter tight.” (Raja, 2022)

While the survivor’s human political relationships was first broken by a string of horrific violence, the second and subsequent breaking of the tenuously put together relationship does not require violence to snap. The news of remission, the felicitation of the convicts, the celebration of their freedom and the

acquiescence of the society at large itself accomplishes the job. It is a testament of the extent to which there is societal consent to the ideology of hate and how it has strengthened or normalised the hate of the Muslims in Gujarat.

Crimes against humanity

At the first hearing of the petition against the remission on 25 August 2022, Justice Rastogi of the SC noted ‘day in and day out there is remission of sentences of life convicts, what is the exception here? Does the horrific nature of the crimes qualify to deny remission or make remission wrong.’ (JRK Report, 2022) It almost responds to Advocate Indira Jaising’s contention in an article a couple of days earlier that there can be no remission for crimes against humanity. (Jaising, 2022) So what is crimes against humanity and how does it relate to the Bilkis Bano case?

Crimes against humanity as defined in Article 7 of the International Criminal Court is when a range of criminal acts are committed as an attack, with knowledge of the attack, against a civilian population as part of a widespread or systematic attack pursuant to a plan or policy. The key constituent elements of crimes against humanity are that prohibited list of acts were: 1) part of an attack 2) against a civilian population 3) with multiple commission of acts 4)) systematic or widespread 5) pursuant to a plan or a policy 6) of state or non-state organisation and 7) prohibited acts done with the knowledge of the attack.

Several situations of mass crimes in India including Gujarat 2002 are and can be termed as crimes against humanity. (Nainar, 2013) The 2002 violence spanned for months all through the state of Gujarat and there were many incidents of mass violence like that of Bilkis Bano e.g. the Best Bakery case and the Gulberg Society case to name two other cases. All these incidents that happened over a span of days are crimes against humanity but even one incident rises to the elements of crimes against humanity as defined in international law.

Bilkis Bano incident itself was a part of an attack that was happening all over Gujarat. Bilkis Bano and her group were unarmed civilian group escaping from

their village to safety. There were multiple criminal acts committed in this one incident - rape, gang-rape, assault, murder, torture. The attack was systematic i.e. the group was armed with weapons, their plan was to hurt and kill Muslims and they were aware that similar targeting of Muslims were happening all over Gujarat thereby also satisfying the element of knowledge of the attack.

Like in Bilkis Bano case, in each incident of mass crimes there are often series of criminal acts. These acts, when they are investigated and prosecuted, are charged as common crimes under different sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) that deal with each of these criminal acts. What remains unaddressed and un-prosecuted is the fact of the attack pursuant to a plan or policy, the knowledge of the attack, that it was on an unarmed civilian population and that it was the systematic and widespread. It is these aspects of the incident that makes the crimes serious, distinguishes it from the common criminal acts of the IPC sections and raises the gravity of the crime to a *jus cogens* norm i.e a compelling law that allows no defence for commission of prohibited offences. It is therefore important that mass violence incidents like Bilkis Bano case and other similar mass crimes are cast accurately as crimes against humanity.

The idea of the offence called ‘crime against humanity’ is to acknowledge that such incidents attack the core of what it means to be a humane and just social order and that such violent incidents cause de-humanisation in the society. It is the destruction of the just and humane social order and the consequence of de-humanisation of the society that needs to be recognised, prohibited and sanctioned through recognition of ‘crimes against humanity’ in Indian laws. Such recognition will pave the way for mass crimes like that in Gujarat 2002 to be accurately cast as crimes against humanity and prosecuted as such. Recognition of Bilkis Bano type incidents as comparable in gravity to international *jus cogens* norms also makes it possible to question or at the very least set a higher standard for remission of sentences of convicts charged with crimes against humanity.

Remission of sentences per se is not a problem. Indeed, every just and humane

social order must have the possibility of remission of sentences. It is the criteria against which the decision of remission is taken that is of importance. There is no clarity on the general criteria for remission of sentences in Gujarat state or how the specific remission of the sentences of convicts in the Bilkis Bano case was decided. In the absence of stated criteria, the remission can be assessed against international standards as set in Rule 223 of the Rules of Procedure and Evidence of the International Criminal Court (ICC) that prosecutes crimes of grave nature i.e. war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Applying these criteria as listed below, can give an indication of whether the remission in the equally egregious Bilkis Bano case measures up.

(1) *The conduct of the sentenced person while in detention, which shows a genuine dissociation from his or her crime.* There is nothing known about whether the conduct of the convicts on the Bilkis Bano case showed genuine disassociation from their crimes. In fact, the statement of the BJP MLA C K Raulji referred above shows continued denial on the part of those in support of the convicts that the crimes ever happened, despite the long trial and the details of the crimes as recorded in the HC judgment.

(2) *The prospect of the re-socialization and successful resettlement of the sentenced person.* There is no doubt about the fact that the sentenced persons in the Bilkis Bano case would successfully re-settle and re-socialize given the news of how they were welcomed by their family, friends and the right wing Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) persons upon their release.

(3) *Whether the early release of the sentenced person would give rise to significant social instability.* The remission of the convicts has already caused a significant social instability with news of the departure of Muslims from Randhikpur to a safer area and the general sense of fear among Muslims of the possibility of impending violence.

(4) *Any significant action taken by the sentenced person for the benefit of the victims as well as any impact on the victims and their families as a result of the early release.* It is clear that the sentenced persons took no action for the

benefit of the victims nor was the impact of the remission on the victim and her family a consideration in the decision of remission of the sentenced persons in the Bilkis Bano. What's more, given the felicitation of the convicts upon release and the general celebratory environment, the impact on the victim did not matter to the social order who were vested with the decision of remission.

(5) *Individual circumstances of the sentenced person, including a worsening state of physical or mental health or advanced age.* There is no news of ill-health of the sentenced persons in the Bilkis Bano case and it was clearly not the reason cited for remission.

The remission of convicts in the Bilkis Bano case does not measure up to the above criteria set in international law for a crime similar in gravity as those adjudged in the ICC and the judges deciding remissions in the ICC would be hard pressed to justify release such convicts.

Three-dimensional prejudice

The remission and the debates around it shows intersection of three dimensional prejudice on the basis of gender, caste and religion that is embedded in the right wing hate ideology. The prejudice is apparent when the remission is seen both as a message and a means of communication. What is the message and who is the communication between? There are several messages that the remission represents and some of them are:

* Sexual assault on women is not a serious crime and that they could not expect to be free from fear even upon conviction of the offenders given the possibility that they can be set free by an executive decision. The Prime Minister of India gave a slogan of 'Nari shakti' (PTI, 2022) on the same day of the remission of the Bilkis Bano case convicts that put all the 'naris' of the country in fear of the message that remission conveys.

*The slogan of '*nari shakti*' does not apply to all women and women from communities that the ideology excludes from the social order does not qualify or is not eligible for '*nari shakti*' or empowerment, clearly showing the

religion-based prejudice embedded in the ideology.

*Violating women of the identified ‘enemy’ in service of the ideology is an integral part of the ideology and will be rewarded and facilitated.

*Normalize the idea of sexual assault on Muslims in the society at large so as to gradually reduce the outrage when it happens. This has already happened with SC/ST and other marginalised categories. Sexual assault on Dalits has become so normalised that there is rarely any public outrage when it happens.

*Even after being convicted for horrific crimes, men from ‘good Brahmin families’ will remain untainted and be felicitated for doing they ‘holy’ duty towards the cause of ideology clearly setting them apart and ahead as the preferred caste within the ideology.

*Display of brute overall political power without restraint, the ability to align institutions of the state to further the ideology and show the extent of what all can be gotten away with no matter how grave or serious the crimes.

The communication is one-way and it is between:

- * the ideologues of the hate ideology and those who profess, proliferate and believe in the ideology and the minority Muslims of Gujarat. Remission is a direct message to the minority Muslims of Gujarat. It reminds Muslims not to get too comfortable for ‘they’ will be back any time to continue or finish the job.
- * It is also between the ideologues of the hate ideology and those who profess, proliferate and believe in the ideology to their ‘foot-soldiers,’ cheer-leaders and the silent consenting majority on how support to or assistance with carrying out the hate will eventually be rewarded and felicitated.
- * It is between the ideologues of the hate ideology and those who profess, proliferate and believe in the ideology to the non-consenting society by displaying their proximity to power corridors and state institutions; its use to

harass, intimidate, defame and punish them for resisting the ideology.

The objective of the message and communication is to manufacture, strengthen and consolidate consent to the ideology of hate; and de-humanise the larger society vis-a-vis a part of the society. The acceptance and success at electoral politics is a proof that this consent is complete in several places and has been growing in others. The idea is not only to gain electoral success and capture power but also to share the responsibility or the ‘glory’ of the spread of hate politics and the crimes that ensues, thin among the general public.

Everyone who contributes to the electoral success of the hate ideology share responsibility in the gradual dehumanisation of the larger society. When a society is dehumanised, the kind of society that is left is one where the culture of rape and violence generally and against ‘the identified enemy’ is normalised. It is a society that makes murderers, torturers, rapists of their men or revellers of such crimes among their own communities. There is research to show that when conflicts created through culture of hate and violence, particularly sexual violence, directed at the ‘other’; the violence becomes normalised and remains a dominant part of the culture even when the conflict ceases. (Meger & Sachseder, 2020; Kostovicova, Bojicic-Dzelilovic & Henry, 2020; McGill, 2017; Ramisetty,& Muriu, 2013; Pankhurst, 2012; Lambach, 2007) The violence often turns its tentacles inward also because of its inability to distinguish between ‘the identified enemy’ and one of their own. The news item of - a BJP worker from Madhya Pradesh who was seen repeatedly assaulting an elderly man, asking him if his "name is Mohammed,” and show his Aadhaar card. (The Wire, 2022) Hindus in Gujarat have been attacked for resisting the hate ideology and rising in defence of the just and humane social order by protecting the persecuted minorities. (Jha, 2017)

If consent has been given, it can also be withdrawn. There are many who are questioning their consent and wondering whether their consent that was initially extended for good governance or ‘*ache din*’ is now extended automatically to the hate ideology and the persecution/crimes that such

ideology brings in. It remains to be seen if this questioning will lead to withdrawal of their consent to the hate ideology and refusal to share responsibility for the crimes that ensue as a result of the proliferation of the hate ideology.

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Gender Disparity & Food: Glimpses into Madhur Jaffrey's Childhood Memoir *Climbing the Mango Tress*

- Geeta Sahu

Introduction

Theoretical perspectives

On the onset, for the purpose of providing a foundation for the discussions of this paper, it is essential to outline the theoretical perspective that the paper chooses to rely on for its narrative analysis. In order to support the textual references and arguments in this paper, it is necessary to understand the theoretical formworks that support the paper. The paper makes extensive use of the theories of gender studies and feminism which include theories on gender roles, gender spaces, family norms, structural hierarchy and cultural studies. These theories have been used to support the reasoning's of the primary text, namely, the memoir of Madhur Jaffrey titled, *Climbing the Mango Trees* which exhibits the gender disparity with reference to food and joint family norms.

About the Author

Madhur Jaffrey, born as Madhur Bahadur, on 13th August 1933, in Delhi, is a famous cookbook and travel writer, food critique and actor. She is known as the person who introduced Indian cooking to the Western world. An actress, writer and an accidental cook, Jaffrey has several books to her credit.

About the Memoir

Climbing The Mango Trees (2006) is the childhood memoir of Jaffrey. The memoir is a remembrance of Jaffrey's childhood during the 1930's and 1940's in India. It is an appetizing tribute to Jaffrey's multicultural upbringing and belongs to a relatively new trend in life writings, namely, a food memoir. Although there is no exact definition of a food memoir, this genre consists of the writer's memories related to food. Barbara Frey Waxman (2014), in her article on food memoirs, defines the genre as "A culinary memoir that chronicles the growth and development of the memoirist through the lens of

food memories, in narratives that either begin with childhood or that interpose frequent flashbacks to earliest formative experiences.” A food memoir, thus, is a testament to the impact that food has on prompting memories of a long-lost time and place.

The memoir opens with Jaffrey’s memory of food which was the honey that was fed to her on her birth by her grandmother. “Grandmother welcomed me into this world by writing Om, which means “I am” in Sanskrit, on my tongue with a little finger dipped in honey” (Jaffrey 3). The memoir also ends with the memory of food which had been prepared for her grandfather’s thirteenth day after his death. Even for a serious occasion like this, Jaffrey gives tantalizing details of all the special dishes which were prepared for the event. She says, “I ate and ate until I could eat no more. I then got on my bicycle and rushed to Number 5, where I immediately started a letter to Kamal to give her our news” (Jaffrey 236). In *Climbing The Mango Trees*, Jaffrey’s memories revolve around food prepared on joyful occasions like birthdays, picnics, festivals, special family meals as well as on sad moments like the death of family members, all of which bring a deluge of memories to her mind. One can starkly observe a deep alliance between food and relationships, love, traditions, family values, lifestyle, culture and seasons.

It has been observed that memoirists write about their childhood, love or grief, about going away and coming back; or about loss or illness. But unlike Jaffrey, very few talk about the kitchen smells and treats in such details like Jaffrey does in her memoir.¹ Since the memoir falls under the genre of a food memoir, Jaffrey has devoted a considerable number of pages to share the tried-and-tested recipes of her family. Her mother’s love and care for Jaffrey continued through the recipes that she sent her daughter while she was away at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. When Jaffrey asked her mother to teach

¹ Virginia Woolf (1929) once wrote that novelists “have a way of making us believe that luncheon parties are invariably memorable for something very witty that was said, or for something very wise that was done. But they seldom spare a word for what was eaten” (96).

her cooking, her mother obliged by sending her daughter airmails, writing to her all the traditional recipes which she had mastered over the years. However, Jaffrey who knew, “less than the rudimentaries of cooking then (Jaffrey 242), learnt to cook through her past experiences of food during her childhood. Therefore, food is a significantly integral part of this memoir.

The gendered cooking norms

Traditionally, in India cooking is considered to be a woman’s responsibility. Irrespective of their age, the male members in the family stay out of this domain. It is very typical of an Indian woman to express her love for her family through food. Jaffrey’s mother was no exception to this. She says about her mother, “She cooked the foods my father loved to eat” (Jaffrey 39). Tastes are pathways which lead towards not just the stomachs of her family members but also towards their hearts. Women themselves consider cooking as their duty and take up the responsibility upon themselves. Often, women recognize cooking as a medium for establishing relationships with their family. A meal, a recipe, or a kitchen is not just a daily chore, but much more for a woman. It establishes relationships between family members. The thought and willingness to cook a particular food item because a family member likes it creates a special bonding between the mother and her children or other family members. The *phirni* that she served from the refrigerator when Jaffrey bicycled back home on a hot and sweaty day, the cooling glasses of buttermilk that she made for her daughter while she was busy preparing for her annual exams, the *badaam ki goli* that she gave her daughter before she left for her examination and the “mango-and-ice-cream-party, sometimes with *rasgullas*” (Jaffrey 209), that she arranged after the results were announced, were all a part of Jaffrey’s mother’s love for her daughter. Food thus becomes a woman’s means of showing her love for others.

The joint family and food norms

Within the joint family, food established a collective relationship between the joint family, especially through meals which were eaten by all the members together. Jaffrey has described the evenings that the joint family spent together in the drawing room. All these social occasions were “fuelled with food and

drinks” (Jaffrey 92). The whiskey-sodas, tea, lemonades, nuts, *pakoris*, spicy cauliflower with peas, carrot *halwa*, etc. were all a part of the family bonding. While the savouries were prepared by the women in the house with the help of servants, the men enjoyed their evenings in drinking, eating and gossiping. The men invariably ate first and the women ate only after their husbands and children were well fed.¹ Consequently, men always enjoyed the privileges that women did not.

The activity of cooking and the gendering of food

As a child, Jaffrey experienced gendered differences in addition to a partial attitude towards feeding male members in the family. When women are in-charge of preparing and serving food, they invariably tend to feed their own children, particularly the male children, the best pieces and the largest portions available. Jaffrey noticed a “disturbing pattern”, in her house. “Very often, the choicest pieces of meat were missing” (Jaffrey 96). She observed, “Then I would see *Taiji* merge from the kitchen with a small bowl and quietly spoon out these choice pieces to just her own three children, Raghudada, Sheila, and Rajesh” (Jaffrey 96). Jaffrey had a similar experience in her *Nana’s* house where men were always served first. As Jaffrey watched them eat, the men devoured almost all the mushrooms. She wondered, “If there would be any left for us. As the men served themselves generously, I would hold my breath. When it was our turn to eat, there were fewer mushrooms and more sauce” (Jaffrey 134). Gender does not merely symbolize differences; it also symbolizes discrimination. Sexism within food is a domestic practice which is extremely common in India. It has almost become a systematized behaviour which puts the food choices and nutritional requirements of the male members in the family as topmost priority. This is because, unlike women, for the male in the family, food and its consumption are not associated merely with life sustenance. Over the past many years arrays of cultural and social emphasis

¹ Shefali Moitra (2002) says, “In patriarchy man is born with a male gender privilege. This advantage is gained by choice. Although one cannot be held personally responsible for having such a privilege one can be held personally responsible for not doing anything to stall the perpetuation of male gender privilege (9).”

are built around this context and unfortunately none of them favour women. It is a common practice in India to feed the male children great amounts and better food than the girl's in the family, thus, creating gender discrimination. Such patriarchal food habits put women in an inferior position. Therefore, one can say that Jaffrey's experiences related to the gendering of food are a cultural phenomenon. Women's memoirs are particularly interesting because the dynamics of gender emerge clearly in them.¹ Jaffrey distinctly traces the gender differentiation within the family through food. Among other issues, her memoir helps the reader to look afresh at the ideology of hierarchy and its ramifications. It is also a comment on how gender relations are unequal and strained in the Indian society.

Food, culture & space

Culturally, space is a gendered concept. It is typical of men to have a physical space in the house which no one else is allowed to occupy. The necessity for women having a "space" of their own in the house is neither thought upon to be important nor is it necessary. Since, it is an uncontested and an unwritten rule that cooking is a woman's responsibility; the kitchen is automatically believed to be a woman's space. Consequently, cooking creates gendered spaces. The kitchen is treasured by most women as being their space. In Jaffrey's family too, the divisions of space were more or less gendered. She says, "If the men drank and ate *kababs*, the women served them willingly enough but went back into the kitchen to prepare meals" (Jaffrey 23). Cooking was the only activity which gave women a surety of not merely their space but also their existence. Women recognized their talent through cooking. A woman is not simply expected to cook, but to assume the role of a nurturer towards the family, before she even considers her own needs. The kitchen thus, becomes a gendered space in which the woman is burdened to primarily serve the needs of others. However, women are never made to realize that the ability to cook is a talent. Rather it is looked down upon as a mundane activity, which every

¹ Seymour (1999) rightly says, "Within the joint family, structural hierarchy is primarily governed by the position and relationship of the individual in the kinship structure and gender (227).

woman is “supposed” to do.¹ Similarly, all the women in Jaffrey’s family cooked, but it was never recognised as a “skill” by anyone in the family, including the women themselves. Therefore, she mentions that, “The skilfully made *parathas* and traditionally preserved pickles were never considered as “skills” by anyone” (Jaffrey 29).

Like space, food is also a reflection of a certain culture. Culture is the external space where the subject can conduct her own self-examinations with reference to anonymous systems. Accordingly, food becomes an expression of not just the entire cooking system, but also a culturally determined space in the family. Although Jaffrey’s parents stayed a few bungalows away from the joint family, they followed the tradition of the family to have all their meals at the ancestral house where her grandparents lived. Space determines a person’s identity as much as it is shaped by culture and traditions. Tradition is the vehicle of culture. It symbolizes the exemplification of culture.² Jaffrey’s memoir voices the food traditions which were followed by her family in the past when she was a child. Consequently, Jaffrey’s memoir is not just a strong gender reflection on memories behind the kitchen doors, but also the food culture traditions and gender discrimination that she witnessed in by her family.

The food revolution and its effects on the transformation in women’s lives

A significant change that Jaffrey’s memoir elucidates is the change in the culture of cooking and eating food outside the home. She says, “There was a major change, a revolution really, in the city’s food. Before independence, most upper class and middle-class families ate at home” (Jaffrey 187). Except, occasionally eating a *paratha* at *Parathe Wali Gulli* or ordering *aloo bedvi* from *Ghantaywallah* for breakfast and the men ordering *bazaar* food, the

¹ Beth Kephart (2013) says, “Cooking was what my mother did because that’s what she was sure mothers did. It came naturally to her, and because it did, she never recognized the colossal quality of her talent” (91).

² To bring out the difference between culture and tradition, Kelkar and Gangavane (2003) say, “The term ‘culture’ refers to art, religion, literature and everything that is created by human beings. It is transmitted through various traditions which is handed down from generation to generation. By its nature ‘tradition’ is a repetitive exercise of certain ways of thought and praxis” (26).

family limited themselves to eating home-cooked food. “Eating out was condoned and outside food was believed to contaminate the “fabric of our pure clean lives” (Jaffrey 188). However, the opening of a restaurant named Moti Mahal, not just changed the culinary culture of preparing food by introducing the concept of cooking in large clay ovens called *tandoors* but also changed the eating habits of Jaffrey’s family. It altered the family’s popular notion that eating was a private activity which was to be done in the confines of a house and initiated the idea of eating in public.¹ Jaffrey’s memoir discusses in detail about the new food culture of eating publicly, which brought about a positive change in the cooking culture of their family and subsequently eased the work of women which expected them to cook extensively; specially during occasions like festivals and picnics. Rather than women spending laborious hours in the kitchen preparing special foods for picnics; the younger generation now started picking up food from Moti Mahal for their picnics instead of packing home-cooked meals. Consequently, food became an instrument of bringing about a change in people’s eating habits and re-constructed the gender equations within the family. It brought about a transformation in women’s lives as they had relatively more free time which enabled them to stay away from the kitchen and spend more time with their family.

Conclusion

In the memoir ‘*Climbing The Mango Trees*’, Jaffrey’s memories revolve around food. It can be observed that food and gender lead the memoirist towards writing her childhood story. This is Similar to what Sven Birkerts (2007) has stated, for Jaffrey that every single food item tasted in her childhood, offers a store of associations and memories.

It is not possible to write a memoir without making use of memories. As a child, Jaffrey plays the role of a sharp teenaged observer who strongly felt the gender disparity and food within the joint family. The food that she experienced in her childhood, established a unique relationship with her mother

¹ Barbara Marshall (1994) says that these changes are associated with gendered processes (9).

even after Jaffrey grew up and became independent. She treasures the original recipes of her mother more than any other possible material that's valuable to her. Jaffrey points out the difference between the ideal and the real world and deliberates the issue of gender relations within the joint family. Gender differences discriminating the approach towards girls from the male members of the family are apparent in the memoir. Women's life writings are of particular interest to feminists because the dynamics of "gender" are more clearly reflected in women's life writings than men's life writings. One can understand life only if one takes into account gender roles and gender expectations. Women's lives can never be written by taking gender for granted. The memoir also illustrates how women's life writings provide interaction between individual and society in the construction of gender.¹ Therefore, both, individual agencies and social structures become essential aspects for a better understanding of gender issues.

Regarding feminist theory and women's life writings, recognition of the impact of gender and an insistence on the importance of the female experience has provided vital common ground for feminist research and thought. The recovery and interpretation of women's lives have been central concerns of feminist scholarship from the earliest pioneering works to the present. Studying women's writings and learning from women's experiences have been crucial to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world. Since the feminist theory is grounded in women's lives and aims to analyse the role and meaning of gender in those lives and society, women's personal narratives are essential primary documents for feminist research. These narratives present and interpret women's life experiences. They can take many forms including biography, autobiography, life history - a life story told to a second person who records it - diaries, journals and letters.²

¹ Morris Weitz (1977) says, "The child's own space within the home is full of gender signals" (1977).

² The Personal Narratives Group (1989) is of the opinion, "The fact that human experience is gendered is central to the radical implications of the feminist theory. That Feminist theory emerges from the responses from the lives of women. (4)

Jaffrey's memoir strongly states that the activity of cooking is not gender specific. Madhur Jaffrey exhibits the ability to use cooking not just as a talent but also as a profession. With the food revolution a new culture introduced to people that men (and not women) worked as cooks in the newly opened restaurants like Moti Mahal. As a successful cookbook writer, she breaks the traditional myth that women are supposed to cook as a responsibility and that according to the Marxian theory of Economics; the ability to cook has limited value because it is an unpaid job. The traditional family recipes cooked by the women in her family and which she savoured throughout her childhood, were efficiently used by Jaffrey to become a famous cookbook writer. By doing so, she rose beyond the myth that cooking for the family was merely a matter of routine. The finer textures and tastes of food appealed to Jaffrey beyond trivial customary liabilities that women are expected to fulfil.

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"I will write" by Angel Guinda (originally in Iranian)

If they take away my words
I will write with the silence

If they take away my light
I will write with a density of
darkness

If I lose my memory
I will invent another form of
oblivion.

If they seize the sun the clouds,
snatch away the planet,
I will spin in my orbit.

If they shut away the music,
I will chant without a voice.

If they torch the paper, evaporate
the ink,
detonate the computer screen and
smash all walls,
I will write on my breast.

If they extinguish the fire that
brightens me,
I will write on the smoke.

And when the smoke is gone,
I will write on visions born without
my eyes.

If they take away my life,
I will write with my death.

Sholeh Wolpé, the acclaimed Iranian-American
poet and translator shared on Instagram
(On 23 September, 2022)

Gender Budgeting in India – A Case Analysis of The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare

- Dr. G. Uma, Dr. Sonia Murugan, & Dr. Mita Sinhamahapatra

Introduction

The process of acknowledging women's contribution to economic activities, especially agriculture and its allied sectors, started in 1950 by feminists. Feminist economists and feminists' researchers did field-based research and documented women's contributions to agriculture sectors. The notable contribution was from Ester Boserup. Her work on "Women's Role in Economic Development", first published in 1970, brought the women's contribution to agricultural activities. It helped United Nations (UN) to declare the decade for women (1976-1986). Her work was also widely discussed in the first international conference on women held in Mexico City in 1975 to know the women's status and position in economic activities (G Uma & Mita Sinhamahapatra, 2022). Ester Boserup has further shown a path for the United Nations to formulate a framework, 'Women in Development (WID),' to include women as development constituents in all policies and programmes. At the same time, it took 25 years after independence to consider women as development constituents in India. Women were considered recipients of welfare measures till the fifth five-year plan (1951-1978) as per the existing literature (Advani, Poornima, 2001; Jain, Devaki and Diane Elson, 2011; Spary, Carole, 2019; & Vidya, 2019). The earlier studies also showed that the Plans and Policies of the Indian government had addressed the Practical Gender Needs (PGNs) of women (Idya, 2019). This constituted welfare of women and marginalised, women's education, maternal and child health, nutritional supplement to expectant mothers and infants, and drinking water until the fifth five-year plan.

The shift in approach happened in the sixth five-year plan (1980-1985), and women were considered development constituents. Thus, the shift from welfare to development happened, and empowerment was part of the plan objective of the ninth five-year plan (1997-2002). The Government of India has implemented Women Component Plan (WCP) as one of the strategies to

empower women in all aspects from the ninth plan onwards by allocating 30 per cent of the financial resources to the select ministries and departments of Central and State governments of India (Vidya, 2019). The WCP was discontinued in 2009-2010 due to poor implementation by the Central and State governments (Vidya, 2019). The agriculture sector has been prioritised in the first five-year plan itself by allocating required finance to increase productivity. The government has also introduced community development and extension activities to transform socio-economic life in rural India in the first five-year plan. The extension workers have trained to meet farmers to introduce new scientific techniques to improve productivity. The existing socialisation process and inbuilt patriarchy made male extension workers consider males as farmers, and they failed to recognise women as farmers. Hence the extension activities have been strengthened in a gender-blind manner without recognising women's contribution to agriculture. Recognising women's contribution to economic activities and empowering them to exercise their agencies independently will address the food security of family and society members. It further leads to children's overall well-being, improves children's access to education, improves the health of the family members, and improves the nutritional requirement of children and the overall well-being of women in society.

Rationale and background

The concept of collecting gender-disaggregated data and looking at agriculture from a gendered manner rarely exists in India. The existing studies (Swaminathan et al., 2011; G Uma & Mita Sinhamahapatra, 2013; & Itishree Pattnaik et al., 2017) point out that agriculture and its allied sectors in India need to be looked at from a feminist's perspective to theorise and recognise women's contribution to agriculture. This is due to the changing nature of agriculture and its contribution to the macroeconomy in India. There are paradoxes in Indian agriculture. Firstly, Agriculture and its contributions to the GDP have reduced over time.

In 1950-51, the contribution of agriculture to the overall GDP was 59% and had further declined to 13.94% in 2013-14. The contribution of agriculture and

allied sectors was only 16.38% in 2020-21. Alongside the GDP, the percentage of male agriculture workers in 1961 was 75.9 per cent; it has reduced to 59.9% in 1999-2000. There was a drastic reduction in the number of male agriculture workers. The percentage of female agriculture workers was 85.7 per cent in 1961 and was reduced slightly to 74.9 per cent in 1999-2000. As per the data presented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare to Lok Sabha, there are 55.4 per cent men and 75.7 per cent women workforce in agriculture in rural areas in 2019-20 (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare, 2022). The data about the contribution of agriculture and allied sectors and the percentage of workers show the lack of employment opportunities specifically for male workers. The data on women workers showed that the agriculture and allied sectors became feminised. At the same time, it is one of the sectors in India that employs the highest percentage of unskilled persons. In India and other countries, agriculture is always looked at from a gender-blind manner. The government and agriculture-related institutions concentrate more on increasing productivity by developing mechanical tools and techniques to make the agricultural sector gender-neutral. The government has formulated policies to address the food security of the country rather than looking at the contribution of male and female in agriculture and addressing the concerns of all by developing appropriate policies and programmes which reduces the drudgery of all genders.

The Economic reform initiated in 1991 based on the principles of neoliberal economic policies also brought new reforms and showed the path to formulate new policies. Reforms have also impacted differently in different sectors. Firstly, the implemented reforms benefitted service sectors, becoming the largest sector in terms of Gross Value Added (GVA) at current prices. Approximately, GVA at current prices for the Service Sector is 92.26 lakh Crore INR in 2018-19. 54.40 per cent of GVA at current prices is the service sector from India's GVA total of 169.61 lakh crore INR. Concerning industry, it was 29.73 per cent which is 50.43 lakh crore. In comparison, the agriculture and allied sectors share only 15.87 per cent. We are further presenting the facts based on GDP composition. In 2017, Agriculture contributed 15.4 per cent to

GDP, 23 per cent from industry, and the most significant contribution came from services which was 61.5 per cent. The contribution of agriculture and allied sector to the economy at current prices in 1950-51 was 51.81 per cent, the industry was 14.16 per cent, and the service was 33.25 per cent. There was a decline in the share of the agriculture and allied sector, which was 18.20 per cent in 2013-14. At the same time, the share of the service sector has improved to 57.03 per cent and the industry's share to 24.77 per cent (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2021). The above facts showed the decline in the contribution of agriculture over the period. It was around 14 per cent of the country's economy. But, still, it accounts for 42 per cent of the total employment (Trading Economics, 2022).

Secondly, the decline in the contribution of agriculture and allied sectors to the overall economy brought internal migration. Migrated population from agriculture joins in the service and manufacturing sectors as informal workers in search of better livelihood options. Rural populations tend to migrate to urban once the employment opportunities are reduced in rural, thinking that urban will provide better advantages. Boserup called this phenomenon an imaginary advantage in the cities and towns (Boserup, Ester, 2008). As per estimation, 37 million labour left agriculture between 2004-2005– 2011-12. The reduction of employment opportunities in the agriculture sector led to the migration of the unskilled male population to urban areas to seek better economic opportunities in the secondary and tertiary sectors. This has made agriculture feminised, and large sections of women have become part of agriculture. This can be further explained by the data presented here. India accounted for a 1210.2 million population. The population distributed 833.1 million in rural areas and 377.1 million in urban areas (Census of India, 2011). This shows that two-thirds of the population lives in rural areas.

Thirdly, among female and male ratio in the population as per the 2011 census is 108.8 males for 100 females. We further probed with the male-female worker ratio. Rural areas in India constitute 348 (72.37) million workers, and the remaining workers in Urban areas (133million: 27.63 Per cent). The Work Participation Rate (WPR) of rural and urban areas in India is 42 per cent and

35.3 per cent only. Looking at the work participation rate in a gender-segregated way, WPR among males is higher than among females. The WPR among females has declined in the 2011 census compared to the 2001 census. The data brought invisibility to women's work. The gender aggregated data further highlighted women's contribution to the agriculture sector.

More than 70 per cent of rural women engaged in agriculture work (NSSO, 2017-2018). But they own only 13.9 per cent of the land (Agriculture Census, 2015-16). Women engaged in 60-75 per cent of farm-related work. Women produce nearly 60 per cent to 80 per cent of food commodities in South Asia. But they are invisible, and their work is not recognised (Oxfam India, 2018). The number of men employed in the dairy sector in India is 15 million, while 75 million women are associated with dairy farming in India.

Along with that, the existing studies talked about women's awareness of the various activities of agriculture and its sectors, the process of food production, details of the benefits of various plants and trees, the medicinal value of plants and details about animal feed plants. The women's knowledge of various agriculture-related activities is well documented and theorised as Indigenous Knowledge (I.K.). The study on seed-preserving technology, the medicinal value of plants, and the sustainable use of forest resources are well documented (Agarwal, B, 1992; Agarwal, B, 2001; & Gupte, M, 2004).

In this process, introducing neoliberal economic policies in India in 1991 paved the way for private investment in secondary and tertiary sectors. It also contributed to importing certain agricultural commodities. Simultaneously, it contributed to specific sections of the farmers producing export-oriented cash crops. The data collected by the government (Census of India, 2011 and agriculture census, 2015-16) never recognised women as a farmer. They rarely collect data in a gender-segregated manner to know the exact number of women in agriculture. But feminist economists work in agriculture documented the women's contribution to agriculture and its allied activities. These studies showed that women have contributed to various activities, from sowing seeds to harvesting crops.

Research Questions and Method

Our aim here is to bring a broad understanding of women in agriculture and their contribution to various activities of agriculture and related sectors to sustain the growth of agriculture. Feminists have well documented the contribution of women to agriculture and its sectors. The work of Ester Boserup in Africa paved the way for feminists to contribute more to agriculture.

She discussed women's contribution to agriculture and industry, and her work brought light to women's land rights (chapter 1). In her book, she clearly states that

"Africa is the region of female farming par excellence. In many African tribes, nearly all the tasks connected with food production continue to be left to women. In most tribal communities, the agriculture system is that of shifting cultivation: small pieces of land are cultivated for a few years only, until natural soil diminishes. When that happens, i.e. when crop yield decline, the field is abandoned, and another plot is taken under cultivation. In this type of agriculture, it is necessary to prepare new plots every year for cultivation by removing bush or grass cover. Tree felling was always done by men, most often by young boys of 15 to 18 years, but to women fall all the subsequent operations.; the removal and burning of felled trees; the sowing or planting in the ashes; weeding of crops; the harvesting and carrying crop for storing and immediate consumption" (Boserup, Ester, 2008 pp4-5).

According to Ester Boserup's work, Women lost their land right under European rule. In the late 20th and 21st Centuries, women are equally entitled to inherit the land like males in most of society through legal rights. Still, they may have access to land to do agricultural activities, but they do not have control over lands to utilise the same land for other purposes besides agricultural activities. Various factors, including region, religion, customary norms, and existing legal rights, play a significant role in the inheritance of land rights and access and control over lands (Boserup, Ester, 2008; Agarwal

B, 1994; Mukhopadhyay, 1998). Studies further analysed that the existing patriarchy and socialisation process not only alienated women from the control of the land but also didn't value their contribution to agriculture and food security.

The existing studies (Boserup, Ester, 2008; Agarwal, B, 1994; Mukhopadhyay, 1998; and Kabeer, Naila, 1999) pointed out that women contribute to agriculture activities as farmers and farm labourers by accessing land resources, but they do not have control over the lands. To explore further and the need to allocate more resources through budgetary provisions, our research would like to analyse the budgetary allocation to bring light to women's contribution to agriculture. We have used secondary data to put forth our arguments. We have proposed the significance of bringing gender-sensitive policies and programmes in the agriculture sector and the significance of allocating appropriate resources for addressing the needs of women in agriculture.

Research Questions

The above discussion raised the following research questions for us to probe further using secondary data to bring conclusions and provide policy prescriptions.

1. Whether Indian agriculture is looked at from a gender perspective?
2. Does government allocate enough resources to address the needs of women in agriculture?

Method

The researcher undertook a study using the gender and development approach as a theoretical approach and Gender Budgeting as an analytical tool. The data relating to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contribution of Agriculture and allied sectors, Female Labour Force Participation, percentage of women engaged in agriculture, and budgetary allocation for women in the ministry of agriculture to address the needs and concerns of women farmers have been taken to address the research questions of the present research.

Gender and Development Approach

Gender and development as theoretical understanding explored the exciting gender relations between men and women in society. It emerged after critiquing the existing Women and Development (WID) approach. The earlier WID approach assumed that creating economic opportunities and improving the women's financial status and position would improve overall women's status and position on par with men. The path-breaking study conducted by Boserup in 1970 (Boserup, Ester, 2008) further revealed that society considered women inferior due to their subsistence production and paid less. Boserup's study did contribute to the development of the WID approach. Men assumed a position as wage workers, farmers and traders. The mechanisation of agriculture contributed to assuming men in a superior position in agriculture. The mechanisation of agriculture, improvement in irrigation, and scientific innovation in high-yielding crops further lowered women's status in agriculture and alienated them (Whyte & Whyte, 1982). The policies and programmes based on the WID approach didn't translate intended changes among women. Feminists studied the WID approach and realised that providing economic benefits would not bring changes in the life of women. The existing patriarchy operates at different levels differently. Patriarchy further reinforces existing gender relations and treats women as inferior.

The Gender and Development Approach (GAD) came into existence after critiquing WID and studying the status and position of women. The GAD approach proposed to change existing gender relations by developing appropriate policies and programmes (Young, 1993). The GAD approach did talk about women's status and position. GAD scholars further focused on the gender division of labour in public and private spaces, access and control over resources and benefits, the material and social position of women and men in different contexts (Parpart et al., 2000), practical and long and transformative strategic gender needs of women in specific social and political contexts (Molyneux, 1985; and Moser, C, 1993) and empowerment (Moser C, 1989; Rowlands, 1997; and Parpart et al., 2002). GAD approach specifically facilitated States to formulate laws and programmes to address women's and

men's needs and other genders by incorporating gender planning as an effective tool to challenge existing gender relations. GAD approach was able to differentiate practical and strategic gender needs to bring changes in the life of women further. Apart from developing a framework, the GAD approach could design various tools like gender budgeting, gender-sensitive planning and policymaking and gender mainstreaming to incorporate women's issues and marginalised sections of the population in the laws and policies.

Gender Budgeting

Gender Budgeting is a methodology to assist the government in integrating a gender perspective into the budget as a critical national plan for public expenditure (Patel, 2003; MWCD, 2015). It can directly promote women's development when funds are allocated for programmes (Patel, 2003; Reddy, 2011) that address women's socio-economic needs and improve women's position in both public and private spaces. A Gender Budget is not a separate budget for women (Goyal, 2010; MWCD, 2015). Instead, gender budgets attempt to assess government priorities as they are reflected through the budget and examine how they impact women and men and, within that, certain groups of women and men. It was one of the essential tools in the GAD approach. As Sharp and Broomhill (2002) explain:

"[they] are a mechanism for establishing whether a government's gender equality commitments translate into budgetary commitments. Without a suitable economic underpinning, a government's equality commitments are unlikely to be realised. Gender budget initiatives go beyond assessing programmes explicitly targeted at women and girls and seek to expose assumptions of 'gender neutrality within all economic policy' - raising awareness and understanding that budgets will impact differently on women and men because of their different social and economic positioning".

It is appropriate allocate suitable economic resources to address the concerns of all genders. The process and implementation of gender budgeting are referred to in various manners like 'Gender-sensitive budgets', 'gender budgets', and 'women's budgets. Irrespective of the way it is referred to, these different

names talked about the processes and tools aimed at facilitating an assessment of the gendered impacts of government budgets. In the evolution of these exercises, the focus has been on auditing government budgets to impact women and girls. This has meant that, to date, the term 'women's budget' has gained the widest use. However, these budget exercises have recently begun using gender as a category of analysis, so the terminology 'gender-sensitive budgets' is increasingly being adopted. It is essential to recognise that women's budgets' or 'gender-sensitive budgets' are not separate budgets for women or men. They are attempts to break down or disaggregate the government's mainstream budget according to its impact on women and men, and different groups of women and men, with cognisance given to the society's underpinning of gender relations (Sharp, Rhonda, 2000).

Researchers and International Organisations like United Nations (UN), UN ECOSOC, IDRC and the World Bank defined Gender Budgeting. According to IDRC

"Gender budget initiatives analyse how governments raise and spend public money, intending to secure gender equality in decision-making about public resource allocation; and gender equality in the distribution of the impact of government budgets, both in their benefits and burdens. The impact of government budgets on the most disadvantaged groups of women is a focus of special attention." (Commonwealth Secretariat, IDRC CRDI, UNIFEM, 2002)

The objective of the gender budget talks about incorporating gender concerns in the existing budget—the concept of gender budgeting incorporated in the planning and policymaking process from the 9th five-year plan (1997-2002). Initially, few ministries were identified to implement gender budgeting. Ministry of Women and Child Development has become the nodal ministry for gender budgeting. The government allocated 30 per cent of the fund in the ministry to address gender concerns in the 9th five-year plan period (1997-2002).

Indian government presented the first Gender Budget Statement (GBS) in 2005-06, which covered only ten demands –for-grants comprise 2.79 per cent of the Union Budget. According to the Centre for Governance and Accountability, there are 25 demands for grants in Part A and 33 for Part B, consisting of 4.71 per cent of the total Union Budget as GBS in 2020-21. Part A detail schemes with 100 per cent provision for women, and Part B reflects schemes with a budgetary allocation of at least 30 per cent (Parvati, Pooja, 2012).

The existing studies (Castillo, C. T 1977; Boserup, Ester, 2008; Gopalan A & S. N. Saha, 2003) pointed out that women are an integral part of agriculture. Women possess vast knowledge on agriculture and food production. Their knowledge in these areas is noteworthy. The women's activities in rural areas revolved around the natural resources available in their areas. The land is a significant resource in rural areas. Land is used for agriculture and allied sectors predominantly in rural areas. Agriculture is a significant activity for rural households because it provides food security and monetary benefits. Indian agriculture systems predominantly use family labour, who are women. Women also play a crucial role in deciding to harvest crops, purchase and sell animals, choose crops on specific land, and even construct farm buildings. Among various cultivation operations, field operations, like sowing or transplanting, weeding, and harvesting activities involve and engage more women. For instance, women's agricultural labour engagement in rice production activities is high in transplanting, weeding and harvesting (Venkatram, Rengan, 2022). With this assumption, it is significant to spend enough amounts on the welfare of the women farmers. The present study has specifically chosen the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare and listed the existing policies and programmes. We have chosen the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare because it is a significant government ministry to address agricultural production, and sustainable use existing resources for food production. It will implement schemes and programmes for the welfare of farmers. As far as gender Budgeting analysis in India is concerned, feminist economics and development organisations do gender

budgeting for analysing the overall budgets of the government of India and State governments. They have not dome specific ministries to analyse their budgetary allocation for men and women to improve the status and position of both female and male. After going through existing literature, the authors have decided to take the ministry of agriculture and Farmers welfare because of women's significant contribution to agriculture and allied sectors. The chosen policies were analysed using gender budgeting to determine the allocation for women and other genders.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare of India is implementing 14 major schemes for various activities, including creating infrastructure and financially supporting farmers. This paper specifically looks at the allocation for pro-women and women-specific schemes.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 discusses women's labour force participation. The Women's Labour Force participation slightly increased from 19.67 per cent (1981) to 25.5 per cent in the year 2011, which includes all sectors.

Table 1 Work Force Participation in India

Census of India	Women Labour Force
1981	19.67
1991	22.27
2001	25.63
2011	25.5

Source: Computed from Census of India, various Issues and Pattnaik et.al, 2017 p6

Table 2 discusses women in Agriculture and Non-Agriculture sectors. Women in Agriculture were higher than women in the non-agriculture sector. Women in agriculture also came down from 862 in 1993-94 to 749 in 2011-12. At the same time, women in the non-agriculture sector have increased from 138 in the year 1993-94 to 251 in the year 2009-10. These data showed that the employment opportunities for women in agriculture might be shrunk. At the

same time, women may migrate to other sectors, especially the unorganised sector, in search of job opportunities.

Table 2 Women in Agriculture and Non –Agriculture sectors (per ‘000)

Year	Women in Agriculture	Women in non- Agriculture Sector
1993-94	862	138
1999-00	854	146
2004-05	833	167
2009-10	794	206
2011-12	749	251

Source: Agriculture Census 2015-16 and various Issues and Pattnaik et.al, 2017

p6

Table 3 below shows the total allocation and share for women in total allocation. Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has three departments, namely The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW), Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries (DAHD&F) and Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE) (<https://agricoop.nic.in/en/departments-glance>). In 2006-07, the allocated budget for women was 6.88 per cent. The share for women in total allocation is only 0.32 per cent for women in total allocation. The total allocation for women has reduced in the year 2007-08. It was only 5.30, which was merely 0.22 per cent in the total allocation. The growth rate for 2007-08 was negative, and it was -22.97. The allocated budget for 2008-09 has been reduced further and was only 0.12 per cent in the total allocation. The allocation was slightly increased in the year 2009-10. The allocated budget was 11.65. The growth rate for the year 2009-10 was 275.81. The growth rate was positive. The women's share for total allocation was 0.36 per cent in 2009-10. The last fifteen years of data regarding total allocation, allocated budget for gender and the share for women in total allocation showed that 2015-16 has the highest allocation (44.23) budgetary allocation, which was 0.70 in total allocation. The growth rate for 2015-16 was 195.85. Apart from 2015-16, 2017-18 was also allocated a notable amount (44.04) of 0.65 in total allocation. Even though the amount allocated in the year 2017-18 for gender budgeting was less than in

2015-16, it was higher than the rest of the years. The growth rate was highest in 2015-16. The growth rate was negative in most years (2006-22) except in 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, 2015-16 and 2021-2022.

Table 3 Women-Specific Schemes
Department of Agricultural Research and Education
(in Rs. Crore)

Year	Total Allocation	Gender Budgeting Statement		Share for women in total allocation (in per cent)
		Allocated Budget (in per cent)	Growth Rate (in per cent)	
2006 – 07	2160.00	6.88	-	0.32
2007 – 08	2460.00	5.30	-22.97	0.22
2008 – 09	2680.00	3.10	-41.51	0.12
2009 – 10	3241.40	11.65	275.81	0.36
2010 – 11	3818.05	12.01	3.090	0.31
2011 – 12	4957.60	14.32	19.23	0.29
2012 – 13	5392.00	16.67	16.41	0.31
2013 – 14	5729.17	24.29	45.71	0.42
2014 – 15	6144.39	14.95	-38.45	0.24
2015 – 16	6320.00	44.23	195.85	0.70
2016 – 17	6620.00	35.05	-20.76	0.53
2017 – 18	6800.00	44.04	25.65	0.65
2018 – 19	7800.00	21.74	-50.64	0.28
2019 – 2020	8078.86	20.84	-4.14	0.26
2020 – 2021	8362.58	13.04	-37.42	0.16
2021 – 2022	8513.62	13.25	1.61	0.16

Source: Gender Budgeting Statement of India, Various issues

Table 4 analysed Pro-Women* specific schemes implemented by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation. The allocation for the Pro-Women specific schemes has increased over the period and was highest (20.8 per cent) in 2015-16. The allocation for Pro-Women schemes is notable due to the Women Component Plan (WCP) adopted during the ninth five-year plan (1997-2002). The WCP was based on the principles of gender budgeting and was implemented by both central and State governments. The WCP directed state and Central governments to allocate not less than 30 per cent of the total fund for the women's welfare by the select ministries and departments of State governments of India. Accordingly, the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation in the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers welfare allocated not less than 30 per cent of the fund to the Pro-Women Schemes. The percentage share for women in total allocation was highest (20.8) in 2015-16, 11.35 per cent in 2016-17, and 10.26 per cent in 2018-19. It reduced to 3.91 per cent in 2021-2022.

Table 4 Pro-Women Specific Schemes
Department of Agriculture and Cooperation
(in Rs. Crore)

Year	Total Plan Allocation	Due to Women as Per WCP (30%)	Gender Budgeting Statement		Share for women in total allocation. (in per cent)
			Allocated Budget	Growth Rate (in per cent)	
2005 – 06	4589.83	1376.95	1.00	-	0.02
2006 – 07	5219.16	1565.75	1.50	50	0.03
2007 – 08	5947.21	1784.16	175.15	11577	2.95
2008 – 09	10734.45	3220.34	527.09	200.94	4.91
2009 – 10	11915.22	3574.57	555.30	5.352	4.66
2010 – 11	15647.97	4694.39	642.83	15.763	4.11
2011 – 12	17522.87	5256.86	728.10	13.265	4.16

2012 – 13	20530.22	6159.07	930.90	27.853	4.53
2013 – 14	21933.50	6580.05	917.60	-1.429	4.18
2014 – 15	22652.25	6795.68	750.00	-18.27	3.31
2015 – 16	17004.35	5101.31	3539.06	371.87	20.8
2016 – 17	35983.69	10795.11	4084.20	15.40	11.35
2017 – 18	52655.00	15796.5	4344.30	6.37	8.25
2018 – 19	46700.00	14010	4791.90	10.30	10.26
2019 – 2020	130485.00	39145.5	4472.80	-6.66	3.48
2020 – 2021	134399.77	40319.93	4772.18	6.69	3.55
2021 – 2022	123017.57	36905.27	4813.26	0.86	3.91

Source: Gender Budgeting Statement of India, Various issues.

Conclusion

We envisioned the present paper by asking two questions about women in agriculture in India. The first research question is whether Indian agriculture as a sector is viewed from a gender perspective. To address the same, we kept GAD approach as an analytical tool to look into the Indian agriculture system. According to GAD approach, it is pertinent to bring changes in the existing gender relations to bring equity and equality. The existing gender relation treats females as secondary citizens by not allowing them access to and control over resources and not recognising and valuing women's work. This was established in our research. We have collected data on female labour force participation in agriculture and other sectors.

Female Labour Force Participation in 1981 was 19.67 per cent. It increased to 25.5 per cent in the year 2011. It has increased by only 5.83 per cent in the last 30 years. India entered a market economy in 1991 by liberalising all sectors and inviting private players to invest in speeding up growth. The liberal market didn't bring intended results in the primary sectors, resulting in the loss of employment opportunities for both genders. The data further revealed that

women in agriculture in 1993-94 were 862. It reduced to 749 in 2011-12. Even though women's participation in agriculture was reduced, they still participate predominantly in the agriculture sector than in the non-agriculture sector, in which women's participation was 251 in 2011-12. It has clearly shown that women contribute to agriculture by taking up various activities. But their contribution was not recognised and valued. They were not included in the macroeconomic data. Public policies could not address the concerns of women in agriculture due to a lack of data. In most cases, women in agriculture are considered unpaid labour as their product is meant for the household rather than the market. This result in women's productivity in terms of economic indicators going invisible and unrecorded in the economy. Due to this, the role of women in economic growth remains misinterpreted.

The second question is if so? Does government allocate enough resources to address the needs of women in agriculture? To find the answer to the second question, we applied Gender Budgeting as an analytical tool to analyse the government of India's Budget. We have not developed a tool to analyse the budget of the government of India. Gender Budgeting itself is considered a tool for gender mainstreaming activities in India. We have applied the existing Gender Budgeting tool for our analysis. Our analysis showed that the share of women in total allocation is less than one per cent from 2006-2007 to 2020-2021. Even though Women Component Plan (WCP) proposed to allocate 30 per cent of the budget to women in the pro-women specific schemes, the Department of agriculture and cooperation allocated less than 30 per cent. The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation allocated 20.8 per cent in 2015-16. This was the highest allocation compared to other years. Based on existing available data, it was shown that the government had not recognised women's contribution to agriculture. Therefore, the GBS has also failed to translate women's commitments into budgetary commitments. The budgetary allocations for women-specific and pro-women schemes and programmes do not justify whether the budget benefits women directly or indirectly. GBS of agriculture also failed to show transparency in the accountability of budgets

since it does not present any statistics on the numbers of beneficiaries of women under the proposed schemes and programmes.

The existing studies documented those women take up various activities in agriculture, from sowing seeds to harvesting crops. The existing patriarchal institutions failed to recognise women's contribution to agriculture. The patriarchy operates in different ways in public and private spaces. The lack of employment opportunities in agriculture made males migrate to urban areas. A large per cent of women became part of agriculture activities. But the State fails to recognise the feminisation of agriculture. The same patriarchal attitudes reflect in the policymaking process, which failed to recognise women as farmers. We analysed the existing data sources to know the percentage of women as farmers. We are not able to collect necessary data related to women farmers. Thus, the present study proposes to bring necessary policies to collect gender-segregated related farming activities. Secondly, it proposed allocating necessary budgetary resources to address the women farmers' concerns in private and public spaces. Thirdly government must allocate necessary funds to the Universities to start programmes on gender and agriculture to sensitise all stakeholders in agriculture. The Indira Gandhi National Open University offers a Certificate level Programme Gender, Agriculture and Sustainable Development. The government may consider this a model to sensitise various stakeholders, including policymakers, to recognise women's role in agriculture to formulate appropriate policies and allocate necessary funds.

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Feminism and Spectrality in South Indian Popular Cinema

- Dr. Elwin John

“They claim men’s bodies and souls to be the measure of humanity. That is, man is the norm, the rule. Woman is a derivation, and as such is included in man. Men are granted the power to define, interpret, judge, and represent the world on their own terms, while women are to be defined, interpreted, judged and represented by men.”

(Geetha, 2002, p 12)

These lines from V. Geetha’s *Theorizing Feminism: Gender* is used as a prologue to this study, in order to condense the age-old privileging of the patriarchal order, to contextualize the representation of spectrality in popular culture and to challenge this cultural imaginary by doing a feminist analysis of spectrality in select popular movies in south India. Garbed in religious discourses, socio-cultural traditions, and medical practices, women have been relegated to occupy liminal spaces in various cultural contexts and narratives. This study tries to draw a parallel between the marginalized spaces occupied by women and the various spectral entities that are part of a cultural imaginary. The idea of a spectre may vary from religion to religion and it could have different meanings in various geospatial contexts as well. In popular terms, spectre stands for djinn, ghost, fairy, witch, *yakshi*, *pey*, and any metaphysical entity that bypasses mortal reasoning.

This study closely analyses such spectral entities through an intersectional theoretical framework within the Indian context. This study proposes that spectro-politics in the select narratives is in fact a politically charged discourse which underplays and misrepresents other pertinent issues like mental health and economic rights of women. Therefore, this study works along the conceptual potential of the spectre to align itself with the gruesome modality of history and memory that has generated ‘spectral’ narratives on

women. Spectro-politics is therefore perceived as a functional apparatus to make sense of the cross connections between gender and spectrality.

This paper progresses by tracing the position of women in South India during the pre-colonial and post-colonial period, in order to identify the context in which women were associated with the spectre in an Indian cultural imagination. After discussing some of the key features of this spectral turn of women's position in India, this paper will conclude with a feminist analysis of select popular South Indian movies on spectrality.

I

In the familiar epistemology of gender and social relations, all genders except the male species were portrayed with a lack and this depiction dehumanized their very existence itself. However, with contemporary post structural theories, such assumptions about gender and social relations are challenged and deconstructed. The philosophical writings of Aristotle present the female species as deformed male species,

Wherever it is possible and so far, as it is possible, the male is separated from the female. For the first principle of the movement, or efficient cause, whereby that which comes into being is male, is better and more divine than the material whereby it is female. The male, however, comes together and mingles with the female for the work of generation, because this is common to both. (Aristotle, 42)

As Book II of Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals* proceeds, the role of women has been destined to not go beyond child bearing and child rearing. Accordingly, the inability of women to use reason like men directed women to be subservient to the 'better' male species, while their physical and psychological incapacities marginalised them to the domestic sphere. Either way, women were identified with deformity, weakness, and irrationality. In the fifteenth century, Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* was a scientific depiction of nature's perfection through the male body.

In the Indian context, colonial enterprises have structurally systematized a patriarchal order in the country. Even when it is argued that colonial interventions enabled women's education, a close analysis of convent education in India, will prove that it also created good housewives who were taught and made aware of hygiene, child rearing and other domestic duties (popularly called as home sciences) during the colonial period. As Uma in Anita Desai's *Fasting Feasting* begs and pleads to the principal of her school that she should be allowed to continue her studies, the Mother Superior reminds her that girls should learn to be good mothers as well. Colonial interventions have clearly aligned itself with the expectations of the native society in terms of the politics of gender.

The Cornell Law School defines law of the land "as the whole body of valid laws, statutory or otherwise, existing and in force in a country or jurisdiction at a particular date. Every valid statute is the 'law of the land' with respect to its subject matter. The law of the land is constantly changing as new statutes are enacted and old ones repealed, or new principles evolved" (Cornell np). Several cultural and religious practices that can be categorised as laws of the land were practised in South India during pre-colonial period which were directed to ensure lawful and disciplined civic sensibilities. Some of those cultural practices are briefly introduced below in order to illustrate the way in which the position of women have changed during the colonial period in south India.

In pre-colonial south India there existed a matrilineal inheritance system which was known as *marumukkatayam*. In this arrangement of inheritance, hereditary land and fortune will descend through the women in the family along with the help of a *karanavan* (eldest male member). The Hindu Nair families in Kerala are particularly known to have practised this arrangement. Within this system, women enjoyed economic rights and they could very well manage their lives without a male support.

Marumakkathayam literally means descent through sister's children.

Nayars form an important group of castes known for their matrilineal

family organisation and it is hence best to start with them. The *marumakkathayam* family of Nayers is known as *tarawad* consists of all the descendants of the family line of one common female ancestor. (Puthenkalam 1)

This practice can be located historically, by identifying it as a natural response to the changing socio-economic challenges of those times. The pre-colonial times when dynasties were constantly in war with each other, it became a natural responsibility of the women to manage household and economic matters as men were at the battlefield. Hence, the involvement of women in the economic matters of the household was a natural response to the inadequacies of those times. In this manner, women rights over land, property and other related resources during this period.

This was the time of another infamous practice called *sambandham* where upper caste men would frequently visit women for sexual purposes. The children born out of such relationships would grow up under the tutelage of the mother who would also belong to the upper caste and by the then natural order of things, property inheritances occurred through the mother's line of descent. As Ashwathi Kartha observes,

Women possessed the unique ability to manage their affairs largely independent of male influence. Women were not dependent on their husbands and were not considered transient members of their families, as they had the security of their familial home (their mother's house) throughout their lives. They were further allowed a degree of sexual freedom, as displayed by the acceptance of polyandry and termination of *sambandhams*. (Kantha 2020)

This economic and sexual freedom of women in pre-colonial South India can be identified with the concept of a *tharavattamma* or the female head of a matriarchal household. In this context, women were respected and treated as preservers of family and culture. However, with colonialism, gender relations and social roles were undergoing a drastic transformation. The extremely fluid nature of social structures was systematized and in effect became very

rigid. Consequently, what is now called as ‘colonial modernity’ seeped into Indian imaginary in varying forms. One of the key transformations was the redefinition of a *tharavattamma* as a *veettamma* (housewife). As suggested in an earlier part of this study, colonial modernity generated better housewives within the garb of an economically independent and modern woman. Mithuraaj Dhushiya studies,

The figure of the *veettamma* is one that is created within Malayali modernity as the locus of feminine aspiration; however, it can be argued that the discourse of the *veettamma* carefully splits the woman who is at the heart of Malayali heteronormative nuclear familiarity from the *tharavaattamma* or female head of the matriarchal household. Where the *tharavaattamma* is a woman in whom both symbolic and economic authority vests, the *veettamma* is merely the symbolic centre of gravity stripped of any economic power. (Dhushiya, 2018, 176)

As argued very often, the popularity of colonial narratives reinstated the patriarchal model of family structures. Furthermore, the British colonial interventions and its direct byproduct which is, cultural imperialism enabled the Indian cultural sensibilities to adopt a patrilineal structure. Thereafter, the socio-economic, legal, and political manoeuvres of British rule changed the previously flexible and fluid practices in India into rigid and harsh systemic ordering. This turned out to be a systematic attack on the position of women and the economic rights that they had enjoyed. As Ashwati Kartha’s study on the consolidation of patriarchy in colonial Kerala proves,

Colonial influence in Kerala, in combination with the influence of other Hindus, constructed contemporary notations of morality and barbarity. By the end of the 19th century, the Nairs’ matrilineal kinship system began to take on negative connotations to the Nairs themselves. In line with the English ideology, Nair men too began to believe strongly in the importance of the family as a conjugal unit, characterized by control of female sexuality. Within the context of a newfound significance of women’s chastity and consecration of

monogamous marriage, women also supported a shift towards the patrilineal structure, asserting that this would improve the self-respect of the Kerala woman (Karthi, 2020, 7)

This change in sensibilities and ideologies can be collectively called as the phase of colonial modernity which had systematically established itself in the form of religious modernity, modern medicine, fight against social evils, popularity of education etc. All these different arenas endorsed structural violence against women in varying degrees. Any woman who fought against the changing socio-cultural norms were treated as an anomaly and in effect, a ‘problem’ that needs to be rectified. This juncture is where, as the paper argues, one can locate the spectral turn of women’s position in postcolonial India. The centrality of women was regarded as an unwarranted problem and they were naturally compared with other ambiguous, cryptic, and obscure entities from the existing, familiar cultural vocabulary. Spectral entities like the ghost, witch, *yakshi*, *pey*, etc were part of folklore and oral tales of Indian cultural imaginary. The inexplicable nature of these entities was superimposed on women and hence, their deviancy from the patriarchal norms and expectations.

As history has documented, such women have been punished and tortured senselessly. The western import of these ideas played a very important role in identifying and marginalising women in India through the lens of spectrality. Texts like *Malleus Maleficarum*, has narrativized the rules to identify witches and the torture practices that existed during the fifteenth century. This was an existing narrative which enabled Europe to victimise women and bracket women as the evil doers. Just like this rulebook on witch-hunting in the European context, there were oral narratives about women as spectral entities in the Indian context. In Helen Macdonald’s ethnographic study on Chhattisgarhi witches, she studies the relationship between witchcraft, women, and caste in India. She has written,

I showed that the ‘witch’ is an elaborating symbol in that it has both conceptual and action elaborating power. This elaborating symbol

operates in relay with a logic of the ‘witch’ as a summarising symbol which defines a form of human and of ‘witchcraft’ as an unusual kind of human agency known only by its social effects that in turn ‘crystallises commitment’ from participants to the very idea in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated manner. (Macdonald, 2020, 20)

Superstition combined with irrational imagination created the existence of spectres and possessed bodies in the Indian cultural context. On the other hand, the colonial tools of control created the binary of savage and civilised in India. Colonial narratives and the ensuing popularity of imperial ideologies in India appropriated itself within the existing anti-women narratives of spectrality. Consequently, one encounters a systematic scrutiny and victimization of women in India through the lens of spectrality. In other words, the European witch hunting got a systematised colonial makeover in the form of ghost, witch, *yakshi*, *pey*, etc by extracting stories from the Indian folklore and other oral traditions.

II

This section of the paper tries to negotiate with the various features that have crystallized the connection between women and spectrality in India and its representation in select popular cinema. The idea of spirit, ghost, *bhoot*, *preta* etc are generally coded within the mythological history and narratives of India. The rituals that are part of different religions and the prayers that are chanted redirect one’s imagination to the possible tangible existence of a supernatural energy that has departed from one’s body. What needs to be observed here is the fact that such an interpretation is not only a part of the pre-colonial Indian imagination but it co-exists with the contemporary Indian modernity as well. Therefore, the paper suggests that the existence of spectral entities have a continuity, which in fact gives a pan-Indian appeal and acceptance of such entities. A study by Rajarshi Bhattacharjee on spirits and possessions suggests,

It is this continuum which reveals the authenticity of the multiple kinds of experiences that people have of the ghostly, the pan-Indian practice of exorcisms, and the creations of rituals that cater to these entities and energies. (Bhattacharjee, 2021, 102)

Manichitrathazhu (The Ornate Lock) is a 1993 Malayalam movie which is very often discussed as a movie on spirits and possessions. It was a blockbuster which also bagged several awards. It was remade in four languages and all of them were commercially successful movies: *Chandramukhi* in Tamil, *Apthamitra* in Kannada, Hindi as *Bhool Bhulaiyaa* and as *Rajmohol* in Bengali. It is the story of a young and recently married couple Ganga and Nakulan who live in the city. For some work-related purposes, they had to briefly shift to their hometown. Although everyone tried to dissuade them from staying at the Madampalli *tharavadu* (ancestral home), which is clouded within narratives of bad omen or *dosham*, with the modern sensibilities of Ganga and Nakulan and to everyone's dismay, they decide to stay at Madampalli. Ganga is an outsider within that socio-cultural setting where consanguinity was practised as her husband Nakulan, should have married his cousin, Alli.

In the present, Ganga who is socially and culturally new to a village, hears triumphant stories about Nakulan's ancestors. Ganga who suffers from an undiagnosed personality disorder, superimposes herself over one of the characters from the past tales; a courtesan named Nagavalli who was killed by Nakulan's ancestor Shankaran Thampi. The myth at Madampalli is that the vengeful spirit of Nagavalli haunts the house and the entire lineage. There are several events like Ganga's sari catching fire, members of the family getting locked up in rooms, Tamil songs being heard from one of the locked rooms etc that reconfirms the presence of a ghost in the ancestral household. Therefore, there are periodical *mantras* and *pujas* that are done in order to keep the spirit at bay. The title of the movie, *Manichitrathazhu* (The Ornate Lock) implies how the spirit is locked by chants and charms.

As expected, the city bred Nakulan and Ganga do not believe these stories until a psychiatrist friend of Nakulan, Dr. Sunny comes to the scene. Sunny who diagnoses that Ganga has a personality disorder performs an elaborate performative exorcism to treat and cure Ganga. His *modus operandi* is quite unheard of where a practitioner of modern medicine relies on chants and spells. He tries to create an atmosphere of *mantras*, *pujas*, and traditional rituals in order to uproot all elements of doubt and disorder from Ganga. The real problem with the character of Ganga is identified only at the climax and we hear very little about it. The fact that she is mentally ill and her health is generally silenced in the movie, instead of creating awareness or having an open discussion about it. The fact that it is a female protagonist who is dealing with a mental issue in this narrative is significant as it echoes the long-standing association between women and hysteria.

The term ‘hysteria’ has been connected to women’s reproductive systems in its earliest written documents and thereafter, medical commentators and physicians like Galen, Hippocrates etc continued to pose hysteria as a condition of the womb or a disease of the womb. Andrew Scull writes,

In women, so one Hippocratic text read, “the womb is the origin of all diseases.” It was not just that the female of the species was differently constituted from the male; she was also fundamentally inferior: moister, looser textured, softer, with spongier flesh. Her body was more readily deranged- for example, by puberty, pregnancy, or parturition, by menopause, or by suppressed menstruation, all of which could impose profound shocks on her internal equilibrium (for her wetter constitution produced an excess of blood, which regularly needed to be drained from her system); or by the womb wandering about internally in search of moisture (or, later, sending forth vapours that rose through the body), disturbances that were held to be the source of a great variety of organic complaints. (Scull 13)

Such an understanding about hysteria was replaced by the seventeenth century when medical attention shifted to the brain instead of the womb. A recent

article by Trimble and Reynolds discusses how the different seventeenth- and eighteenth-century physicians identified that men can also suffer from hysteria. Thereafter, there was a crucial transition within the medical study of hysteria because hysteria was no more perceived as a gendered condition. It was proposed as a condition related to the brain and mind.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries hysteria was widely classified as one of the neuroses in the original sense of the word as a disorder of function of the nervous system. Increasingly ‘the mind’, in addition to the body, was also viewed as an important source or trigger of hysteric symptoms. (Trimble 3)

Even though *Manichitrathazhu* was made in the twentieth century, the same storyline remade in multiple Indian languages with a different cast, highlights the pan-Indian continuity, appeal, acceptability, and relatability of this story. As Anhiti Patnaik writes, “*Manichitrathazhu* inaugurates a singular intimacy between the human and the non-human through the female body” (Patnaik, 2021, 144). Even though there is no ‘real’ ghost in the movie, the spectral gaze of Nagavalli is visualised through Ganga’s character. It might have been easier for the audience to relate with a female spectre instead of a male spectre.

However, the story reveals towards the climax that Ganga is in fact suffering from mental health issues. At the end of the movie, Ganga is brought back to the folds of domesticity or the *veettamma* unlike the character of Nagavalli with whom Ganga likened herself with. As discussed in the first part of this essay, the transition to *veettamma* disrupts the freedom enjoyed by Ganga through the persona of Nagavalli. Probably because Ganga was just bored of being a housewife and hence, she tried to see herself through the lens of the vengeful Nagavalli. Nagavalli was an independent woman. She was a dancer and she chose her lover. The unrestrained zeal of Nagavalli is wiped out from the present-day Ganga who is ‘cured’ by the psychiatrist where she is made more docile and domestic. The film hence celebrates patriarchal authority, as Nakulan resembled the *karanavan* in a traditional setting.

The frightening aspects of this horror film are often drawn from threats to his (Nakulan's) safety. The film consequently depicts the female forces that seek to subvert patriarchal authority as villainous, which serves to enforce essentialized constructions of womanhood that value a woman's obedience and chastises a woman's independence. The fear of the supernatural figure of Nagavalli in *Manichitrathazhu* reflects a deeper anxiety over femininity and control. (Menon 2009, 296)

Nagavalli has questioned the prescribed gender roles in the past. And in the present, Ganga is repeating that. She is opening rooms in the *tharavadu* that are restricted from use and every act of Ganga is treated as a deviation from the normative gender role in the movie. Nagavalli is seeking vengeance in the present as she was unable to fulfil her desires. Therefore, she has returned with a murderous rage and her mannerisms are relatable to the other blood-sucking *yakshis* and ghosts that are part of the local folklore. As suggested earlier, the pan-Indian acceptability and relatability with the existing stories about female ghosts have made systemic violence against women possible.

Horror cinematic experience has been in the rise in all Indian languages during the 20th and the 21st centuries; *Bulbbul* (2020), *Stree* (2018), *Pari* (2019) etc to name a few popular recent titles. To continue the discussion on feminism and spectrality through contemporary South Indian popular cinema, a recent Malayalam movie *Kumari* (2022), will be of help, as it exhibits a distinct correlation between gender and spectrality. The narrative is heavily loaded with folktales. The frame narrative is that of a union between an immortal goddess and a mortal human, briefly reminding one of Leda and Zeus. In the folktale, the union between the goddess and a human created two children, Chathan and Gari Devan, who looked neither like gods nor humans. They were associated with monstrosity for their looks and violence for their general conduct of affairs. Both were at loggerheads with each other and their fight had very often interrupted the general wellbeing of the villagers. With the interventions made by the gods, Chathan was restricted to the hills and Gari Devan below the earth in order to maintain peace and order in the land. Unlike *Manichitrathazhu*, the supernatural entities (Chathan and Gari Devan)

in *Kumari* are hinted to be of the male gender. However, the external manifestation of the human and non-human occurs through the female body, which is the eponymous protagonist of the movie *Kumari*. *Kumari* does not become the ghost but she becomes a medium or a channel through which, both Chathan and Gari Devan come out of their hiding.

The village is set in the feudal times with a castiest landlord named Thuppan. In the same village there lived an orphan kid Chokkan who became friends with the Chathan of the hills. On a fateful night he encounters Chokkan taking bath in the family pond and an outraged Thuppan ends up killing the boy. This paves way to a new cycle of disruption where Chathan started torturing the villagers with a shower of rocks and skin diseases. In order to prevent this, Thuppan seeks the help of Gari Devan at the cost of sacrificing his only son. The tale goes that this transaction between Thuppan and Gari Devan will protect the family only for twelve generations. Years have passed by and in the present year, an orphan named *Kumari* is married to Thuppan's family. She is married to a twelfth-generation descendant of Thuppan, named Dhruvan. According to the folktale, Gari Devan will have to be appeased again by sacrificing a child after twelve generations.

Dhruvan is caricatured as a mentally ill person. There is a constant struggle/crisis among the male members of the family in this story. The masculine crisis develops within the narrative especially due to the lack of an heir who will have to be sacrificed in order to appease Gari Devan. Dhruvan is ill and hence treated as a nincompoop, his brother Achuthan is sleeping with the village prostitute as his wife could not bear a child, their uncle or the *karanavan* Velyachan is distraught as he is unable to figure out a way to appease Gari Devan. Their masculine crisis comes to light through their treatment of the women in the family. Velyachan kills Achuthan's wife as she reveals the family story to *Kumari*. A pregnant *Kumari* is locked up when she challenges the control of Velyachan and Dhruvan. There is a normative urge to control and discipline the women in the story when they tend to go beyond the rules of the ancestral home.

In *Manichitrathazhu* also, it is the uncontrolled femininity of Nagavalli that ignites the male crisis in the movie. Nagavalli's ghost speaks through Ganga who reveals that she will be at peace only when she drinks the blood of the *karanavan*, that is Nakulan, in the present. There is a point in the movie where the audience could wonder whether it is Nagavalli's or Ganga's repressed anxiety and anger that are expressed in the storyline. Somewhere in the narrative, the audience will be able to identify that the desire for female independence by both Nagavalli and Ganga merges, while simultaneously pushing the masculine crisis into limelight.

III

Even though these two movies are seemingly incomparable, there is an underplay of spectrality and gender that links both these narratives. When *Manichitrathazhu* ends by curing Ganga who is brought back to being normal or to being an ideal housewife who will continue her domestic responsibilities, *Kumari* ends with Kumari killing Dhruvan and taking over responsibilities, as the landlady of the village. While in the former there is a misrepresentation of mental health, in the latter, there is a restoration of economic independence which was once stripped away.

In both the narratives, there is an adoration for exorcism, chants, and a general atmosphere of *pujas* and *mantras*. Whether it is the ill health of Ganga or Dhruvan or the wrath of Gari Devan or Chathan or Nagavalli, the cure for these conditions emerges from extremely Indian practices which anthropologist Sarah Pinto addresses as the cultural encounter of medicine. Hysteria or multiple personality disorder or other identity crises might be diagnosed by modern medicine but a more localized strategy to navigate these conditions is the practice of exorcism as depicted in these movies. The US educated psychiatrist in *Manichitrathazhu* diagnoses Ganga's condition but he seeks the help of a local exorcist to continue with his treatment. Such a cultural appropriation can be argued as a product of colonialism which interestingly takes a unique turn in *Kumari*. In this movie, the female protagonist herself (without an external agent) is sort of rectifying, purifying, and curing the problems of the *tharavadu*. She transforms into a useful

conduit through which the Indian tools of chants, spells, and the daggers of goddesses are used to cure the curse of Chathan.

It is also pertinent to read these narratives as politically charged and not merely based on religion and culture. *Manichitrathazhu* released in 1993 identifies with a liberal Indian economy, an economy that encouraged the idea of independent women, which as the paper has argued was a skewed way to repeal economic independence from women (as elaborated through the trope of *veettamma*). Whereas, the more recent release 2022 *Kumari*, reflects the evolving pattern of feminism and female representation in Indian popular culture. It suggests alternative ideologies that can be posited against castiest and patriarchal feudalism, which as depicted in the movie was a landlady taking charge of the ancestral *tharavadu*.

Consequently, as proposed in this study, spectro-politics within the select narratives is the manifestation of a certain malady that lies within individuals and society. Despite the changing times and its ideologies, certain socio-cultural tendencies are so ingrained in human sensibilities that it is quite laborious to opt for an alternative. Therefore, the hatred towards women gets a beneficial makeover with the help of spectrality. Whereas, on the other hand, issues like mental health or economic independence of women remain misrepresented and even silenced. Furthermore, as contended through the select movies, spectro-politics has been identified as a passageway to identify the context of male anxiety and its related issues. Patriarchal discourses have demonized female sexuality from time to time and the spectral turn can be treated as one of the phases of the structural violence against women. The existing cultural myths and metaphors have probably facilitated such a structured violence as seen in the association between spectrality and gender.

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Experiences of Transnational Migrant Women in the Eastern Himalayas: A Case Study of *Bharias* in Darjeeling Hill Town¹

- Ambika Rai

“The women porters of Darjeeling could carry a piano to the top of a hill.” - Mark Twain, 1890s

Introduction

Surely, Mark Twain may have witnessed someone like Sita Chettri when he made this statement. Chettri, a migrant *bharia*² from the neighbouring Himalayan country of Nepal has been labouring for more than three decades, carrying loads in the stiff hills of Darjeeling. The BBC’s one-hour long documentary (2010) titled ‘The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway’ which was awarded the UK’s prized television honour, and the Royal Television Society Award for Best Factual Series³ showed the everyday life and struggle of many individuals who are directly dependent upon the DHR for their survival. Chettri’s story is one of many that were captured in the documentary. Sita, a widow, has been working as a *bharia* in Darjeeling town for several decades⁴, and she believes that head portering is a “man’s job”. However, she has to carry the load to keep the household running and bring food to the table as she is the sole earner and the only hope for her five sons. Her husband also worked as a *bharia* before he died in 1997, leaving all the responsibilities of the family upon her shoulders. With no choice left, she had to succumb to reality and start working soon after her husband’s death.

The story of Sita does not stand alone. Hundreds of women like Sita have migrated along the porous borders of the eastern Himalayas. They usually come from the villages of Nepal and work as *bharias* in the towns of Darjeeling hills. This work is highly gendered, as it is still seen as the job of a man since it requires physical prowess. Though there has been a shift where migrant women are taking up this work, people still believe that it is a masculine job and women are incapable of carrying heavy loads as they are the weaker gender.

It has been estimated that more than 90% of the *bharias* in Darjeeling are migrants from Nepal.⁵ Labour migration from Nepal to different parts of the globe is not a new phenomenon. However, the nature of *bharia* mobility in the region is unique in the sense that their mobility is not towards ‘mainland India’ i.e., to the metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore where the migrants work as security guards, waiters, and domestic workers, which have been the focus of several studies (see Bhattarai 2007; Brusle 2007; Thieme, S et al., 2003, etc.). The migrants that this paper brings into focus migrate to Darjeeling, which is closer to home in a diverse sense. The local population residing in the region and the migrant population share similarities in terms of their language, culture, physical appearance, etc. because of the history that these two spaces share.

The migration of people from Nepal hill villages was critical in transforming Darjeeling into a hill station to meet the British needs (Bhattacharya, 2012; Pradhan, 2017 etc). The evolution of Darjeeling that suited the colonial imagination required labour that the local population could not suffice. For the establishment of tea plantations, construction of roads and buildings required labourers, and the British were highly depended on the populace of Nepal. The migration process that was initiated some two hundred years ago still continues, albeit the changed pattern of mobility. The paper aims to understand the migratory journey of women *bharias* through the memories that are engraved within them, as there are hardly any written records that talk about the history of their mobility across transnational borders.

The paper unfolds as follows. A brief history of labour migration from Nepal to Darjeeling has been presented in the first section. The second section engages how the eastern Himalayan towns and their residents are depended upon the migrant *bharias*, and it is followed by the pattern of *bharia* labour mobility in the study area. The next section deals with the aspect of gendered migration and work, and hints at the lower representation of women in migration though being an active agent in the process. The final section is based on the primary data collected from the field which brings forth the

narratives of the women migrants about their migratory journey, struggles before and after migrating.

Labour Mobility from Nepal to Darjeeling: A Brief Overview

This section deals with the development of Darjeeling as a space best suited to fulfil the needs of the British for which they highly depended upon the labourers from the neighbouring countries especially Nepal. Therefore, it becomes imperative to revisit the colonial history of the formation of the space and that of the history of labour migration from Nepal.

Deeming the Darjeeling tract ‘almost uninhabited’ when the British arrived, the then superintendent Dr. Campbell turned to neighbouring Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal to secure the needed labourers (Middleton et al., 2018: 34). To provide Darjeeling with the labour force required to establish the tea industry and development of a hill station, people from the eastern Nepal migrated along the porous and the fluid Himalayan border. The influx of migrant laborers to the Darjeeling hills has continued unabated since the late eighteenth century, when the great wave of migration from the Kathmandu valley began (Chettri 2013: 42–43). The inhabitants from eastern Nepal moved along the porous and fluid Himalayan frontier to meet the demand for a labour pool in the developing Darjeeling (Pradhan, 1991). Nepali labour from the adjoining districts started to be attracted to Darjeeling in the 1850s with the establishment of tea gardens (Gellner 2013: 141).

The capitalist plantation enterprise, recruitment in the British army, and the establishment of numerous other industries were instrumental in attracting different ethnic groups, primarily from eastern Nepal, who were fleeing indebtedness and economic suppression under the neighbouring Gorkha monarchy (Chettri 2013: 54). Once people knew about the possibility of wage work in Darjeeling hills, the flow of labourers started rising. Hutt (1998) points out that Nepali peasants, enslaved, landless, overtaxed or indebted, long sought better prospects in ‘Mugalan’ (meaning India, literally, land of Mughals) (cited in Sharma 2018: 86). Subba highlights the direct as well as indirect pressure of state taxation upon the common masses as an important reason for out-

migration from Nepal. With the rise of the Ranas (1846 -1951), revenue was required for the upkeep of the unproductive elite classes, as evident in the massive palaces dotting the Kathmandu valley to this day (2002:122). The burden of governmental taxes on the general populace is also regarded as a main reason for emigration of populace from Nepal.

Sharma further highlights that people wanted to flee a difficult agrarian economy and most importantly the semi-feudal exploitation in the hilly tracts of eastern Nepal (2018: 86). Apart from the internal problems of economic suppression, external factors were also important that favoured migration from Nepal. Barring its northern borders, all neighbouring regions around Nepal were under the influence of the British colonisers, whose commercial and military ventures created opportunities for those who had been alienated from their land or wanted to escape exploitation (Ibid. 42).

As, the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950) allows free movement of people and goods between these two countries, every single day, hundreds of migrants cross the Indo – Nepal border in search of work. The number is always on the rise as no work permit is required for crossing the border, and above all, it is because of the inexpensive travel cost in comparison to the exorbitant travel cost that is required to migrate to other international countries.

Dependency of the Eastern Himalayan Towns on the *Bharias*

Inside the bustling space of the hill towns, men and women can be seen with *namlos* (tumpline) wrapped around their hands, slung over their shoulders, and sometimes hung on the railings and walls of their workspaces, waiting for their customers every day. They walk around the *bazaars*, trying to find their way through the crowded streets while carrying loads on their backs. The *bharias* have been labouring in the towns of Darjeeling hills since several decades but the absence of data on their mobility because of the informal nature of migration makes it difficult to understand the genesis of their mobility.

Prior to domesticating animals and the invention of wheels, humans were employed to transport goods. However, even after centuries of the scientific

revolution, some labourers like the *bharias* are still being employed to carry loads in the eastern Himalayan spaces,⁶ and the dependency of the locals as well as tourists cannot be overlooked. Sharma highlights that on steep Darjeeling streets, everyday conveyance of everything from people to goods depended on subaltern human bodies, in the virtual absence of wheeled and animal transport. European women, children, and sometimes men, rode in a type of a sedan chair called a *dandee*. She further explains that *dandee* was a simple chair, to each of which a porter's pole was affixed and a board was contrived as a foot-rest (2018: 81). The practice of transporting people on *dandee* has become less prevalent in Darjeeling over time. It could, however, still be used in areas where contemporary mechanised transportation is uncommon or not feasible. The use of porters to carry goods can be found in high-altitude mountainous terrain, and in places that have non-motorable roads. The Himalayan towns like Darjeeling, though well connected with roadways and railways, have places inside the urban space that vehicles cannot reach easily. In such cases, the *bharias* are considered to be the only option for transporting goods. These labourers are the land- poor thrown out of the agricultural economy. The majority of them have come from different villages of Dolakha district, located in Bagmati province in the lower Himalayan region of northern Nepal. The work of portage is still male-dominated and a gendered division of space is clearly visible at the workstations.

Bharia Labour Mobility

Labour migration from Nepal to Darjeeling began in the 18th and 19th century, however, it is difficult to verify the precise dates and routes of migration for different groups, but what remains clear is that British colonial rule triggered significant migration into the area (Middleton et al., 2018: 7). Since, permits are not required to cross the border; there are no official records on the influx of Nepali migrant labourers to India, as per Sijapati and Limbu (2012). Due to the dearth of literature on the unregistered migrants, it is challenging to locate the exact timeline of *bharia* labour mobility, in contrary to the migration of tea labourers in Darjeeling, which has been the focus many literature (Bhowmik, 1981, 2009, 2012; Khawas, 2006; Sharma, 2008; etc.).

On average, the *bharias* work for over six months. After which they return to Nepal during the month of *Ashadh*.⁷ Depending on when the agricultural crops are sown and harvested, they coordinate their movement patterns. This does not apply to all migrants from Nepal. Some move on a seasonal basis, while others stay and work in Darjeeling for over a year or more. The seasonal migrants are always the male members of the family, who rarely move with other family members. Gartaula suggests that seasonal migration in Nepal is widely regarded as a purely male phenomenon (2009: 14). The men leave their families in Nepal and visit them once or twice a year. Pedraza in the context of seasonal migrants highlights that the flow of temporary migrants is by and large movements of males in the productive years who intend to make money and return home (1991:312). When their spouse is away from home, it is typically the women that tend to the farm. Nonetheless, during the past several decades, there has been a rise in the number of females crossing border in search of work. Due to the poverty in their native countries, they are drawn to Darjeeling by the possibility of employment, however tenuous it may be. One of my respondents, T. Thami (32), the mother of two daughters, had to migrate to pay the loan of Rs. 10-12 lakhs (in Nepali rupees). She had taken out a loan for her husband's employment in Malaysia. The family could not pay back their debts and the increasing interest, so the couple, along with their children, moved to Darjeeling and started working as *bharias*.

Although economic concerns continue to be the primary driver of *bharia* labour mobility in the eastern Himalayas, political unrest in Nepal has also forced many people to relocate and search for alternate means of subsistence. Choudhury's article on the transnational migration of workers from Nepal to Sikkim highlights that the migration between these two spaces was fuelled by the Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), which triggered low rates of development and a high rate of unemployment and underemployment for an inordinately long period (2016: 5). Subba (2002) posits the rise in the number of Nepalis fleeing Nepal's mid-hills due to the fallout of the Maoist 'People's war.'

Gendered Migration and Work

Migration has undeniably become a prominent reality in the modern world and the feminisation of migration is an even more significant although the less explored aspect of reality (Agarwal, 2006:10). Generally, migration is viewed through a gendered lens, predominantly focusing on and giving priority to the mobility of men over women. Men are considered the principal immigrant while women and children are mere ‘dependants’ (Castles et.al. 2014:61). As a consequence, women remain invisible in migration studies. Women are only considered to be those who accompany their husbands to their destination, where they cook and care for their spouses, or who stay behind to care for the children and the elderly.

In the context of emigration from Nepal, Gartaula highlights that the ‘general social expectation from men in Nepal is to manage resources and make available a livelihood while women are expected to maintain the family and household by allocating resources for the benefits of members’ (2009: 50). This is the accepted gender role not only in the Nepali society but a reflection of many other societies around us. Pedraza (1991) has also highlighted this very issue of gendered understanding of migration and has argued that women are neglected and side-lined in migration studies despite their overwhelming presence in migration flows. They are rarely seen as agents in the process of migration, and therefore issues related to them hardly get discussed. However, in the last few decades, the scale of female migration has outnumbered dramatically. Agarwal highlights that women account for 46 percent of overall international migration from developing countries (2006: 9). According to the recent World Migration Report 2020, the total number of international migrants is estimated to be almost 272 million, with nearly two-thirds being labour migrants and nearly half being female (Candeias et al., 2021: 2).

Kharel’s (2016) work has entirely focussed on this gendered aspect of emigration of Nepali women to the Gulf countries. He points out that “Nepali women are often barred from going abroad through discriminatory state policies, and the women engaging in foreign employment are generally perceived as ‘loose’ women in Nepalese society.” Here, restrictions on

women's migration are considered a norm as they are viewed to "protect their dignity" (2016: 10). The female migrant workers are often represented as lacking 'agency' as the media represents them as "minor," lacking the ability to think and act independently. Independent female migration is generally discouraged, not only due to the possibility of exploitation and abuse abroad but also out of concern for the sexual "impurity" of female workers travelling to a foreign land (Ibid:2). It is worth noting here that, Nepal Labour Migration Report of 2020 states that labour migration from Nepal is a predominantly male phenomenon, with the share of female migrant workers accounting for a little above 5 per cent in the last decade (2020:12). This is also to be kept in mind that these reports only take the registered migration into account neglecting the unregistered migration especially to India. Labour mobility from Nepal is gendered that does not consider women as an active agent in the process. But it would be wrong to say that women do not migrate. The underrepresentation of women in labour migration process is because of state policies that make women hidden from the histories of migration.

Along with it, there is a prevalence of a stereotypical equation of women and labour. A presumption of women being weaker, less competitive, and less adaptable to harsh environments outside their homes is rather very common. Sharma (2018) mentions the shock of the Euro-American visitors on seeing the women porters carrying luggage in Darjeeling. She mentions it as a matter of shocking titillation for them because of the high visibility of female load-carriers on Darjeeling's streets. Such images as the stereoscopic views of labouring women porters by the American globetrotter James Ricalton served to underline the alien-ness of these frontier people, and the exoticism of the imperial space, which their labour constituted (Sharma 2018:82). Nonetheless, a large number of women have been working in the Darjeeling hill town, contradicting traditional gendered assumptions about labour mobility and gendered work.

Study Area and Methodology

Darjeeling is located in the northern part of West Bengal, India. It lies in the lesser Himalayas at an elevation of 2,045 metres (6,710 feet). To the west of

Darjeeling lies the easternmost province of Nepal. Darjeeling shares two border checkpoints with Nepal, i.e., Panitanki- Kakarbhitta near Siliguri and Pashupatinagar near Mirik, through which the migrants travel. For the present study, I have selected the Darjeeling Municipality town as it is the only town where the number of female *bharias* is higher in comparison to other towns in the region. The paper is based on ethnographic research and is purely qualitative in nature. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through observation and face to face interviews using an open-ended interview schedule and the participant observation method. Interviews were documented through photography, video, and audio recordings with consent from the respondents. Stratified random sampling and snowball sampling were employed in choosing the respondents. Interviews were conducted at the workstations, on the streets, and at their residences from December 2021 to April 2022. The migrant women belong to different caste groups like Thami, Chettri, Tamang, and Rai. The majority of them have come from the Dolakha district of Nepal. Unmarried women do not migrate to work as *bharias*, therefore, all the respondents were married and had migrated along with their husbands and children. The age group of the migrant women under study varied from 22 years to 60 years while the working period in Darjeeling varied from 2 months to 40 years. There were two women who had separated from their husbands, and two were widows. Secondary data was collected from books, research articles, newspapers, YouTube videos, etc.

Memory of *Dukkha*⁸ and *Daar*⁹

The migration journey of these women began with their husbands, who were already working as *bharias* in Darjeeling. All the female *bharia* working in Darjeeling town are married and none of the women had migrated independently before marriage. They are the first generation of female migrants from their families. The movement of single unmarried Nepali women of Nepal is substantially more restricted than that of the married women.

The migration journey was initiated because of the economic hardships back home. The women stated that they wanted to earn a livelihood and be an active

participant in the family's economy because employment opportunities are rare in Nepal. Back in their villages, they usually worked as agricultural labourers, mostly in their own small fields, or were occasionally hired by their neighbours as wage labourers. However, they did not consider this "real work" because it did not provide a consistent source of income for the household, and working in one's own agricultural field was regarded as a *kartavya* (duty) of the woman of a household.

The lives of these women have changed in many respects as a result of transnational migration. It not only offered them freedom of movement but also made their involvement in the economic realm of the household more visible. However, it has also brought a shift in the nature of the physical space to which they belonged. They have come from the high-altitude mountainous villages in Nepal to the bustling urban space, cramped rooms that they call 'dera', where at times they barely find space to move freely. S. Thami (34) remembers a stark contrast between her village in Nepal and Darjeeling. She stated that her village is located at '*Himal ko fedmuni*' i.e. 'right below the mountains'. This indicates the nature of space that has changed for her, i.e., from an open and wide mountainous region to a crowded surrounding, a small room that barely fits a family of six. The struggle to fit in a new environment is the reality for many migrant families.

Now, here I will present some of the narratives of the migrant women that delve into the aspect of mobility and engage with the aspect of memory of *dukkha* and *daar*.

Story One, SK. Thami

SK. Thami (34) is a migrant and a mother of four children. Thami's family is from Alamphu which is located in Dolakha district of Nepal. She studied up to standard 4 in a Nepali medium school in her village. Her parents were not concerned about her studies, as both were alcoholics. She mentioned that the overall perception of female education among the older generation was much different during that time. People used to say that, "*Chori haru lai parayera k garnu, inharu ta bhitta talnay ta ho, chora parayo bhanay ta hamro maan*

samman barcha.” This suggests that the older generation believed that there is no need to provide education to the daughters as they are meant to do the household chores, but if they educate their sons, then they would be respected and appreciated. However, this perception is changing among the migrants as many stated that they want to provide ‘good education’ to their children and it is one of the reasons for their migration to Darjeeling.

Further, Thami recalled that some of her friends used to go to school in clean school uniforms, but her parents could not afford it, so she used to go to school wearing the same clothes that she wore at home. While the other students wore shoes, she used to be barefoot. She used to go to school just ten times a month. She had two close friends who used to help her by tearing papers from their own copies and lending them to her so she could write notes on them. She did not go to school regularly because she did not want to look miserable and seek help from her friends every time. Therefore, she could not complete her education further, which, according to her, became an important reason for her not getting a good job to secure her future. She said, “*Table ma basera kaam garney yogyata ko chuina, bhari boknay kaam garnu nai paryo*” which means, “I am not eligible for a desk job. So, I have to be involved in the work of carrying loads.”

Later, after getting married and giving birth to two children in Nepal, she migrated to Darjeeling in 2012 with her husband. Though her husband was already working as a *bharia* here, she had never been to Darjeeling before that. Her husband worked as a seasonal migrant, constantly moving between Nepal and Darjeeling. Thami started working as a *bharia* in the *bazaar* area, right after she arrived in Darjeeling, as it was the only job that was easily accessible to the migrants.

Thami’s husband was not keeping well at the time of the interview (March 2022). Her husband even had to visit a hospital in Bangalore twice because of cardiovascular disease. Though he was suggested to undergo an operation, he could not do so as he was unable to produce his Aadhar card. Even though her husband is sick, he has to work as there is no other alternative. The *dukkha*

(sufferings) of her family does not end here. Her eldest son, because of weak eyesight needs to be taken to Siliguri¹⁰ for a checkup every 6 months and constantly needs assistance. Thami states that their *dukkha* is ongoing as she has two ill members in her family and the money that the work brings is not sufficient for the upkeep of the family. She said, “*Jun dukkha mailay pako chu, tyo dukkha chai nani haru lay napaos.*” She hopes that her children will not have to work as hard as their parents and endure the same *dukkha* that they have gone through and she believes that her sufferings would end only if her children will find “good jobs”.

Though she described that her life was filled with miseries in Nepal, a certain sense of happiness could be seen when she talked about her village. Her memory of the snowfall in her village brought a smile to her face. She said that she misses the snowfall, which is a rare phenomenon in Darjeeling. Even if it snows here (Darjeeling), it cannot match the dense snow that can be witnessed at her home in Nepal, which is in abundance. Then a sudden sadness engulfed her when she talked about her everyday struggle and *dukkha* (hardship, struggle) in Darjeeling. She said that there is uncertainty about work as there are days when she fails to find any work and have to return home empty-handed. There is also no certainty of staying in one rented room and have to constantly change rooms owing to several reasons. Thami’s family has changed at least six rooms in the span of 10 years, due to several problems they had to face in the previous rooms where they resided.

This story of SK. Thami shows how she had to suffer (*dukkha*) right from her childhood, having alcoholic parents who made her drop out of school. Later, she had to live a life as a migrant and a life fraught with uncertainties. She hoped that her *dukkha* would cease after coming to Darjeeling, but the condition of her ailing husband and her elder son has added more to it. The hardships come in different form and the migrants have to suffer in Darjeeling which Thami also agreed upon like many others. She added, ‘*Hamilai dherai dukkha cha Darjeeling ma, pani dekhi liyera sabai kura ko paisa tirnu parcha,*’ i.e., we (migrants) have to suffer a lot in Darjeeling, we have to pay money for water and every other thing.

Story two, D. Sharma

D. Sharma, a 48-year-old *bharia*, has been working in Darjeeling for the past 10 years. She was born in Bigu, which is also in the Dolakha district of Nepal. She was 25 years old when she arrived in Darjeeling with her children. Her husband was working as a security guard at a hotel. Later, he quit that job due to low wage and started working as a *bharia*. Sharma migrated to Darjeeling not only because of the economic hardships but also because of the political upheaval that was rampant in Nepal during the 1990s. The *daar* (fear) of Maoist insurgency was the main reason that compelled her family to migrate. She recalls the widespread *daar* of the Maoists in her village. Maoist cadres used to visit them to seek shelter in their homes at night. The villagers had to oblige without resistance. Sometimes, they (Maoist) used to ruin the crops of the villagers, kill fowl for meat, and happily devour the hard work of the innocent villagers. She recalls the atrocities of the Maoist cadres, “*Maarpit huney, manchay uthaunay, lanay. Rati gharma aayera keta haru, group-group maowadi haru aaunay, ghar ma baas basna nadi nahunay. J bhanyo tei garnai parnay. Daily 7-8 jana maowadi ko group aayera sabai pitho-chamal khaidiney.*” People used to get beaten up and taken away. They would come during the night in groups. The villagers had to do what the Maoists demanded. 7-8 Maoists used to visit the village daily and consume the harvest.

It was getting difficult for Sharma as she was the only woman at home with young children to look after. She left her village in order to protect herself and her children from these atrocities and the widespread *daar* of the *Maowadi*. She further added, “*Mo eklai aaimai ghar ma, bura pardeshko thau. Jyaan jogaunai muskil lay hideko mo teti bela. Tei daar lay nai mo ta niklayko,*” i.e., I was the only woman at home; my husband was away in a foreign land (in Darjeeling). It was getting difficult to save our lives, and because of that fear, I had to leave. Conflicts between the government and the Maoists intensified during the 1990s, leading to the rising number of reported deaths in the conflict regions. The common inhabitants of the villages were subjected to atrocities on both sides. The rate of migration from rural, conflict-affected areas to larger towns, especially Kathmandu and Nepalgunj, or across the border to India, was

extremely high during this period (Sharma 2010: 75). People tried to flee their villages to save themselves from the atrocities of both sides.

Like many other migrant women, she had never been to Darjeeling before marriage. She had only heard about the place from her father and husband, who used to labour in this Himalayan town. After arriving in Darjeeling, Sharma started working as a domestic help in *Kothis* (Marwari households). She used to work shifts at different houses. She worked for 2 hours in the morning and 1 hour in the evening and received Rs. 300 per month. Sharma said that it was not enough compared to the amount of hard work she had to put in. So, she left that work and started carrying loads in the *bazaar* area. Though this new work had its own challenges and was filled with uncertainties, it provided her with some flexibility, particularly the ability to negotiate and work when it was convenient for her. She reaches her workstation by 10 in the morning and works till 6:30 in the evening. The weight of the commodities varies, and the payment is made by the customers accordingly. She can carry a load of up to 70-80 kilograms. During the time of the interview (March 2022), Sharma and her husband were both working as *bharias* in an electric appliance store in Darjeeling town. She is relieved to be in Darjeeling as she feels safe here.

Story Three, S. Thami

The 38-year-old S. Thami is the mother of three daughters. She was born in Nepal's Charikot, in the Dolakha district. Her husband also works as a *bharia* in Darjeeling town. I met her many times during my fieldwork. I remember that during our second interview, she invited me to her house. I readily agreed and followed her. She lives in a small room with her family. The room was located on the ground floor of a local hotel. There was a small passage of stairs that went down the building, and there was hardly any natural light to see the flight of stairs. The passage was so narrow that only one person could pass through at a time. There were many tiny rooms along the way, down the building. There were jars of water lying around; clothes were hanging on ropes; toilet pipes were on one wall of the adjacent building. The surrounding buildings were so closely built that there was hardly any space to let the fresh

air in. At one point, I got lost on the way and stood there for a few seconds. Then I heard a voice say, “*Ajhai oralo didi,*” i.e., “further down, sister”.

The room had two beds and a window. The bedroom had an attached kitchen that could fit one person at a time. A thin curtain separated the kitchen from the bedroom. Above one bed were books of her daughters, while a framed photograph of Thami, her husband, and their daughters, taken at Chowrashta was displayed over another bed. This photograph serves as a memory for her, as it was the first and only picture that was taken three years ago when she arrived in Darjeeling. It was the first and last time that she went around the town as a tourist and not as a labour.

Back in Nepal, her husband had borrowed money from some people to travel to the Middle East. However, because of the unfavourable working conditions, he was unable to continue with the work and eventually returned to Nepal, leaving the family deeply in debt. They could not clear the debt by working in Nepal. So, they planned to migrate to Darjeeling with the hope that they could clear the loan by working here. Thami highlighted that this ‘hope’ was the reason for their migration and said, “*Uta (Darjeeling) gayera rin tirnu sakcha ki bhanera eta aayeko.*” She later mentioned that more than half of the debt has been cleared, but there are still 2-3 people left to be paid. She has to pay around Rs. 1-1.5 lakh (in Nepal’s currency) to each of them.

Before working as a *bharia*, Thami had also worked as a house help in two households. But the monthly salary was just Rs. 3000, which was not sufficient to run the household and provide education to her daughters. So, she gave up that work and started working as a *bharia*. The work of head portage is not easy. She says, “*Kohi bela ta kei kamai hudaina,*” which means some days go by without earning anything. Sometimes she earns around Rs. 500-700 in a day. This indicates the uncertainty of getting work every day. She then recalls the *dukkha* that her family had to endure after the horrific earthquake that struck Nepal in 2015, which completely destroyed their house. Their lives became miserable due to the mounting interest on the loan

and the earthquake's devastation, and to seek refuge from all of this, she migrated to Darjeeling.

Working as a *bharia* in Darjeeling was the only alternative for many of them, and it alleviated some of their hardships, as seen in the case studies above. Many *bharias* said that the work has helped their families pay off their debts in Nepal. However, it came at the expense of being separated from their loved ones. Some women had left their eldest child with their grandparents as they could not afford to bring all the family members with them. The struggle of adjusting to a new environment was also palpable, especially the problem of fitting the whole family in cramped rooms with scarcity of water and proper sanitation facilities. It was also found out that some women under study have worked as domestic help in a Marwari household but gave up the work at some point because of the poor salary they earned in comparison to the workload. The women preferred to work as *bharia* because they would not be working under any particular employer, which gave them a sense of liberty. A *bharia* can go to work according to her wish, which is not feasible if she works as a domestic helper for a particular family. The majority of the women also said that getting paid at the end of the day was preferable to getting paid after waiting for a month, and therefore working as a *bharia* was a much better option. But there were women who could not carry load because of old age and poor health, so they opted to work as domestic helpers.

Amidst the *dukkha* faced by these migrant women, it is interesting to note how street becomes a space of liberation where they find new friendships and camaraderie. "*Hami ta kaam chaina bhanay pani aauchau, eso time pass ko lagi*" several women were heard saying, "*Sathi haru sanga bhet ghat huncha.*" Even if they do not get work, they gather at their workstation and spend their time talking to each other about their everyday lives. Therefore, the migrant women are not only vulnerable being but they are also finding their own space amidst the busy and crowded streets of Darjeeling. Here, transnational migrant woman's lives shows many phases of the woman in a single lifetime, right from never leaving their villages before marriage to crossing borders and working on the streets outside the four walls of their homes, in a completely new

environment, earning their own money and finding new acquaintances, hoping for a future where their children would not labour like they do on the streets.

Conclusion

The narratives presented in the paper have provided glimpses of the lives and struggles of the marginalized migrant women both at the place of origin and destination. Prominent in each of the narratives is the presence of *dukkha* (Story one and three) and *daar* (Story two) which compelled these women to migrate in search of a livelihood and a safe space far from the atrocities. It was found that the women had rarely left their village before marriage, and now they are working on the streets of the urban space, in a completely new environment. It is worthy to note that the stories narrated by their fathers were the first medium of knowing and understanding a new space that made it easier for them to adjust after their arrival, making these women as the first generation of labour migrants from their respective families.

The paper has focused on the transnational movement of female *bharias*, the motivation for their migration, their lives that reflected the *dukkha* in Nepal and the continuity of the same *dukkha*¹¹ in Darjeeling. *Dukkha* here refers not only to the sufferings caused by migrants' economic vulnerability but also to the difficulties and uncertainties that place them in precarious situations. Each day brings with it various forms of precarities and uncertainties in their lives. It could be in the form of the uncertainty of getting a customer every day, the uncertainty of staying and returning to Nepal, and the uncertainty of their children's future, etc. Here *dukkha*, therefore, is the entanglement of the realities of both suffering and hardships and its continuity wherever they move.

Out of many, the example of Sita Chettri could be a befitting one to understand the idea of *dukkha* in the lives of the migrants. A decade had passed since the release of the BBC documentary, and she was still working as a *bharia* when I encountered Chettri near the Darjeeling Railway Station during my fieldwork. She had earned just Rs. 100 that day. Prior to this work, Sita had also worked in a *kothi* without the knowledge of her husband, as he forbade her to work. It was, as she said, provided just a 'supplementary income' for the family. Now,

her sons do not allow her to work on the street; they tell her, “*Sadak ma najau, bhari boknu najau.*” However, she cannot even think of staying at home as she has been working for so long. Unfortunately, her eldest son died in 2015, and the memory of her son made it impossible for her to be by herself at home. Tears welled up in her eyes when she said, “*Tyei chorako (eldest son) pir lay gharma basnu sakdina.*” Therefore, to lessen the *dukkha* of losing her kid, she thus comes to work. Working, above all, helps her to alleviate the pain of losing a son and a husband. The streets of Darjeeling are where she started earning for the family, a space where she has the memory of her loved ones whom she lost and, where she found new friends amongst the locals and other migrants.

Labour mobility of women from the periphery to the centre, especially from the developing countries to the developed ones, is being taken into consideration to some extent, but women migrating from Nepal to India, especially Darjeeling, are given little heed as they fall under the category of undocumented migrants. Indeed, a more detailed analysis according to regions and types of migration reveals a strong variation regarding the level of female migration (Timmerman et al., 2015: 9). There is still a dearth of representation of women in migration studies in the eastern Himalayan region. The aim of this paper is to understand the migratory process of the women who have remained at the periphery despite playing a significant role in the process of labour mobility. The experiences of the migrant women over time and space, coming from a heterogeneous background that has its own intricacies and most importantly, many years of silence, have been explored here. With this paper, I hope to bring the conversation to the table so that the narratives of the marginalized women can find the place they deserve.

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See: https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/programmes/2010/03/100315_outlook_hilltop_railways.shtml)
5. Vivek Chettri, 'Nepal porters leave, hill life hit', The Telegraph, 5 May 2015.
6. One can also look into the history of 'Kaalo Bhaari' a forced labour during the era of Namgyal Dynasty of Sikkim. See, Upadhyay (2015).
7. It is the third month in the Bikram Samvat, Nepali calendar. This month coincides with June 15 to July 16 of the western calendar. It is the month of planting crops in the fields. Also see, Rai 2022.
8. Hardship, suffering, pain
9. Fear
10. Siliguri is a major tier-II city in West Bengal. The distance between Siliguri and Darjeeling town is 76 Km.
11. Pradhan, 2022 has talked about the idea of *dukkha* in the process of migration.

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The Missing Case of the *Bagdi* Women: Excavating Lost Voices through Oral Culture

- Srijita Naskar

'Dravidians' is how British ethnographer and colonial administrator HH Risley described *bagdis* among a host of other caste-communities in his 1891 seminal work *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*. The then Bengal government had appointed Risley to carry out an ethnographic survey for two years during which he wrote this handbook. In the beginning of the handbook itself, Risley argued that the ultimate origin of caste lay in racial hierarchy and that the evolution of division of labour could not adequately explain the caste system (Risley, 1891*b*, 1: xix-xxxviii). He used anthropometrical measurements, like the shape of a nose, etc, to illustrate racial distinctions among modern Indians and strongly correlated that with social status. A few years before Risley came out with this handbook, the British government had already commissioned the first Census reports under William Hunter and JC Nesfield. These reports have been dubbed as colonialist, orientalist and full of gross misrepresentations by many scholars such as Nicholas Dirks, Bernard S. Cohn and Christopher John Fuller. Fuller notes that majority of the staff that Risley appointed to conduct the ethnographic study belonged to the *bhadralok* class who had an elitist view of caste and tribal system in India. Added to this was Risley's own English upper-middle-class prejudice, which together created a skewed colonial representation of caste (Fuller, 2017, p. 606). Critiquing colonial anthropologists is a separate scope of historical research altogether, although the modern census has a more sordid tale to offer. Following the latest Supreme Court judgment in 2021, there is now no legal binding to have a caste census. The last *Socio-Economic and Caste Census* (SECC) came out in 2011 which focused on caste distribution and is the last official government report that acknowledges Scheduled Castes and Tribes as two social groups requiring affirmative action. Women, though, were kept out of the purview of data collection and analysis of caste composition. This bias against women has a historical basis and their absence can be stretched from the colonial census reports to the modern caste census. But it is not the focal point of the paper.

What this paper seeks to do is to foreground the *bagdi* community, and in particular the women, from their presence in postcolonial works of social history and mainstream literary representations, and offer as a form of corrective, the need to excavate their voices through oral culture.

Postcolonial works of social history on caste had predominantly centered around Maharashtra and the South. But with historians like Sekhar Bandopadhyay, regions like Bengal began to gain prominence as no study had been done before from the point of view of caste. He endorsed the findings of historians of ancient Bengal, Niharranjan Ray and Hiteshranjan Sanyal, to suggest that caste status did not have a stranglehold over society in pre-colonial Bengal as the process of Aryanisation began as late as 5th Century AD and even after it started, the liberal indigenous tribal culture diluted the orthodox *varna* culture. Since the Gupta period, all those who possessed land were called *uchhjati* (upper caste) and from quite early on, class and caste were terms that were used interchangeably in Bengal (Bandopadhyay, 2004, 18-25). During the colonial period, the *bhadralok* which mainly comprised Brahmins, Kayasthas and Baidyas retained their dominance by co-opting the upwardly mobile section from the trading, middle peasant and Dalit castes. Sumanta Banerjee had corroborated this point much earlier when he wrote about the *abhijata bhadralok* (the big zamindars and city nobles) in 19th Century Calcutta being surprisingly multi-caste with affluent members from castes including *Tilis*, *Kaibartas*, *Sadgops*, *Subarnabaniks*, apart from the three higher castes. They controlled institutional city politics and social life in Calcutta, were the backbone of the political leadership in the state and also had complete control over religious textual knowledge. They ensured that the public-political arena be suffused with class rhetoric while the private-mental world remained consumed in caste differentiation and endogamy. This is how they made caste survive in its essence in Bengal with some adjustments to its form (Banerjee, 1989). But among all lower caste communities in Bengal, Bandopadhyay went on to specifically study the *namasudras* and how they formed the bulwark of the refugee movement in Bengal. Historian Dwaipayan

Sen, who is popular for his work on Jogendranath Mondal, the only anti-caste icon in Bengal, has pointed

his unpublished article titled *On the Peculiar Absence of Dalit Politics: Punjab and West Bengal* that unlike equally numerically strong caste-communities like the *rajbanshis* or the *bagdis*, *namasudras* enjoyed most attention because of class and occupational differences. While *rajbanshis* were internally differentiated into *jotdars* (rich peasants) and *adhiars* (poor peasants), *bagdis* remained mostly landless and among the poorest groups. *Namasudras* were the only lower caste community who were employed in the boats (*bajra*) hired by the Europeans during colonial rule owing to their bravery and superior knowledge of river transport. In divided Bengal, they accumulated wealth through cultivation and trading of jute in northern Bakarganj and southern Faridpur, and also turned out to be the most significant political entity spending initial decades of independence in relief and rehabilitation work as refugees.

There is no documentation or analytical work on the *bagdis*. Not only have they eluded the scope of postcolonial socio-historical research, what also emerges is a dominant pattern of reading caste, one that aids in an integrated approach to understanding class in India. Postcolonial scholars have mostly tried to gauge the material aspect of caste. Except for Bandopadhyay's works on *namasudras*, caste has barely been studied in itself. With regards to the question of gender, in the absence of any documentation on *bagdis*, nothing really is known about their women either. And, Bandopadhyay's reading of caste and gender point to a reductionist view of *namasudra* women where they are shown to be equally affected by religion, patriarchy and social reforms of Rammohun Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar as upper caste women. There is a lack of intersectional approach. The only separate mention *namasudra* women have is when Bandopadhyay writes of how certain women of the Matua sect have broken normative structures of a man-woman relationship by being both their partner and *guru* although mainly out of their inclination towards Hinduism.

The only academic study undertaken on *bagdis* has been the 1986 socio-anthropological work conducted in the 24 Parganas district by professor Satadal Dasgupta from Bengal. Mostly found in large numbers in central and western Bengal, the *bagdis* have been studied in a Parsonian context in his book titled *Caste, Kinship and Community: Social System of a Bengal Caste*. Taking cue from Talcott Parsons' study of social systems wherein each social unit must seek goal attainment, adaptation, integration, pattern maintenance and tension management to survive and persist, Dasgupta studied the *bagdis* by focusing on kinship patterns and community formation. The caste structure finds ways of integrating with the kin and community to maintain a regional hierarchy. The many ways in which this integration happens is through recognition of the patrilineal lineage, exogamy, territorial solidarity and through economic terms. But what is problematic is that Dasgupta reduces the caste-community as possessing characteristics that are reflective of the process of Hinduisation. This could be arising from taking a Parsonian approach to caste, wherein too much emphasis has been laid on the functionalism of social units to survive the system. It erases the role of consensus in the formation and development of the *bagdi* community. Writing at least fifty years earlier, the characteristics that have been dubbed as Hinduisation following the structural-functional approach of Parsons had already been invalidated by Dr Ambedkar in one of his earliest essays titled *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* published in 1917, following sociologist Gabriel Tarde's laws of imitation theory, by stating that it is the 'infection of imitation' of the higher by the lower, often under coercion, that the 'closed-door system' of the caste order gets perpetuated.

Interestingly, in the only available socio-anthropological study on the *bagdi* community, the *bagdi* woman is absent. Dasgupta does not delineate her role in the functional analysis of the caste order of the *bagdis* vis-a-vis kinship and community. Caste therefore becomes integrative in such a society without the consensus of the woman. Both caste and gender when studied through a Parsonian sociological approach, which in any case had also given rise to a certain understanding of a theory of culture too, ends up assuming that the

conditions of their integration in a social system is quite naturally fulfilled; with actors, in this case, the *bagdis*, having free and equal access to the larger cultural ethos of the place they inhabit. That the shared cultural tradition may largely be an outcome of means of external control gets overlooked. Such an approach often rules out divergent cultural interpretations.

A look at oral history and literature may open a window to lesser-known cultural makings, and subsequently, interpretations of the *bagdi* community. In literary scholarship, oral literature as a concept has always been relegated to the position of the unfamiliar and the mystic, its form considered non-literate and therefore less widely understood and appreciated. Eric A. Havelock's *The Preliteracy of the Greeks*, published in 1977, became a major intervention as it for the first time gave some semblance to what may be understood as oral literature. Havelock has stated that it is untrue that no structure existed before the period of written literature. What existed is what he calls 'rhythmic structures'. We now understand it as performance. For other scholars like M Ngal (1977), the oral performer is bound to his or her tradition and the oral performance becomes a marker of his or her culture. Ngal locates the ontological status of a work of oral art in tradition where tradition itself becomes the structure or basis of the form of oral art prior to its acquisition by the performer who uses memory that leads to a new form of discourse and gives it a distinctive quality of oral literature. Memorisation plays an important role here. It is 'relative' in nature and opposed to the 'fixed text of written literature'. But it may have variations, and that has often been criticised as crude and artistically underdeveloped (Ngal, 1977, p. 337-338). And yet it is this 'relative memorability' of oral literature that allows for an artistic communication of words, which William P Murphy has outlined as the reason for various verbal sub-genres to develop, like myths, legends, songs, proverbs and so on. Not only must they be understood from an aesthetic perspective but should also be located socio-historically (Murphy, 1978, 113). In international folklorisation scholarship, the Finnish school of thought, pioneered by Julius Krohn, had developed a 'historical/geographical method' (HGM) which focused more on empiricism rather than philosophical questions and believed in

unearthing the tradition of a place and culture by studying the 'Ur form' or the original form of a particular folklore and its variants. It is a way of uncovering the lost meaning by tracing the original. But it dangerously alludes to the fact that meaning is unconflicted and singular even when variations of the same oral art form are iterated in different cultures. HGM borders on being Eurocentric as it obliterates the journey of an oral art form, thereby undermining the influence of non-western cultures.

In India, most folktales, legends, myths that have been orally transmitted are widely accepted to communicate man-nature relationship and patterns of interpersonal behaviour within and between families within ethnic communities. Caste is an important sub-set of this ethnic community. The folk mind, if we go by Jungian psychoanalysis, constructs an image of the ideal or the 'collective unconsciousness' where the meaning is hidden in the unconscious. Folklore therefore becomes not only experiential but also a kind of norm which needs to be practised and in which is embedded a certain sense of social justice. It also defies universalism as meaning-making varies from one culture to another but binds the caste entity of a community through a shared belief system. In the absence of documentation of community histories, for reasons such as illiteracy, that have stemmed from imposition of caste roles in society, it was always easy to enslave marginalised communities. This realisation laid the foundational brick of anti-caste movement led by leaders like Phule-Ambedkar and formed the episteme of Dalit history, culture and even literature. Oral culture, memory and a shared sense of assertion, dignity, solidarity, and self-respecting values played a huge role. While brahmanical religious scriptures governed over and treated Dalits as a despicable community, in their memory they were fighters. Soon their fractured oral histories began to find space in textual memory. The reclamation of Mahar history at Bhima Koregaon is an apt example in this regard. Scholars like Badri Narayan argue that during the heydays of the Bahujan Samaj Party, the party had soon realised that linkages between Ambedkar and Buddha were not arousing popular interest in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Hence, they began to capitalise on the mythicisation of historical figures, specifically the myth of

Jhalkari Bai and how she is remembered only as a maidservant to Jhansi Bai and not for her bravery, to garner votes and political mileage in UP (Narayan, 2006). Construction of historical memories has been a way of seeking validation for rebellion in the anti-caste discourse. It is a challenge to popular public memory where the idea of justice is often selective and skewed. A look at *bagdi* folklores will help one in realising a different cultural memory that they have created for themselves but which has sadly failed to translate into mainstream textual memory.

In a self-published Bengali book on a collection of folkloric articles edited by Bangla Dalit feminist writers Swasti Acharya and Kalyani Thakur Charal (2008) titled *Lok Sanskritik Probondho Sankalan (Anthology of Folk Narratives)*, they claim that caste names have come from folklore, folk proverbs in particular. In 24 Parganas, parts of Bankura and Birbhum districts of Bengal, among certain communities, migration from forest lands to villages and ultimately to suburban territories had left with them an aftertaste of memory rooted in the life they lived amidst nature, birds and animals. The tiger was a fond part of that memory. And they began to create tales of love, chivalry and fear surrounding the tiger that began to resonate in their daily social activities; in few games that they developed which came to be called in local parlance as *bagh bondi khela* (caged tiger game), *bagh kumir khela* (the tiger and the crocodile game) etc that today are popular household games for every child growing up in Bengal. This deep familial feeling for the tiger manifested into family names as well, like the *bagh mama* (tiger uncle), *bagh bor* (tiger husband). One of the greatest writers of children's literature in Bengal, Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury has humanised and immortalised tigers with the aim of advocating 'ultimate fellowship' in popular stories such as *Charaiar Bagher Kotha* (The Story of the Sparrow and the Tiger), *Bagh Bor* (The Tiger Husband), *Bagher Randhuni* (The Cook of the Tiger). Apparently, the surname *Bag* and the caste-community name *bagdi* have come from the folk memory of the tiger. *Bag* and *bagdi* are different though. Surname does not necessarily reflect one's caste. *Bag*, under current West Bengal caste enumeration, is said to belong to the *Mahishya* caste. Whether

there is any semblance between the surname and the *bagdi* caste identity is not exactly known as there is no such statistical evidence. But the folk memory reveals that surnames with *Bag* could also be Scheduled Caste.

Acharya and Charal have compiled a few commonly spoken folk proverbs which they claim are characteristics of the *bagdi* community derived from the tiger; like, the ability to not easily be tamed, being stubborn and brave, not the ones to easily give up, and so on. Here are a few:

Baagh bagdi horiyal pakhi

posh maanena e teen jaati (commonly spoken in Bankura); meaning: the tiger, the *bagdi* community and the yellow-footed green pigeon, none of these three can be tamed.

Baagh haare toh bagdi haarena (commonly spoken in South 24 Parganas); meaning: the tiger may lose but the *bagdi* community won't.

Baagh bagdi mosh teen k shoto-hosh (commonly spoken in Birbhum); meaning: the tiger, the *bagdi* community and the bull, salute to them all.

The *bagdi* folk has slowly seeped into the lexicon of their religious life as well. The tiger is the mount of almost all their local gods and goddesses, namely, *dokkhin rai*, *shona rai*, *borkhnagaji*, *bonbibi* and *bon durga*. In Hindu religion, Durga burst into the cultural imagination as the buffalo-demon slaying goddess or *mahishasur-mardini* as portrayed in the *Puranic* text, *Markandey Purana*. Any other epithet through which Durga may be understood, namely in indigenous religious and cultural traditions in Bengal, is hardly talked about. Not only is Durga a local goddess for the *bagdis*, in a popular street theatrical performance in North Bengal called *Shonkho Porano Pala*, Durga is referred to as *Bagdini Durga* (a *bagdi* woman) who wants to wear a *shnakha* (a conch-shelled bangle), but Maheshwar (her husband) says that he can't afford to buy her that and that angers Durga and she goes back to her maiden home. Maheshwar then seeks Naradmuni's advice to win her back home to which the latter says,

Mami holo bagdini tumi ho'o бага

boro boner бага shajya ghataidyao she dyakha; meaning: if Durga can be a *bagdini* or tigress, you be the tiger. Just like a tiger who demands respect in his habitat, you must demand the same in yours.

This little known *bagdi* folk memory of locating not only one's caste identity but also behavioural identity in the non-human, the tiger, is if one may notice largely gendered. From commonly spoken proverbs to daily social activities to the familial and the religious, the characteristic similarities of bravery, free-spirited and untameable nature between the tiger and the *bagdis* are reserved for the male. The female gender of the tiger, the *bagdini*, finds utterance in the oral literature of the *bagdis* only when the feminine is a holy figure. It is no wonder then that when this oral memory gets translated into textual memory in mainstream vernacular literature, in its twisted portrayal of the *bagdi* community, the *bagdi* woman too is either absent or a mute object or relegated to the religious realm stripped of socio-political agency.

The second phase of modern Bengali literature that is said to have begun with Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay in early 20th Century, and who is said to have championed the causes of the underprivileged and women in his novels, has portrayed the *bagdis* as either the king's commander-in-charge or as the zamindar's groundsmen. There is complete erasure of the *bagdi* woman in his writings. In his 1931 novel *Dena Paona* (Debts), *bagdis* are an arrogant and brutal male gang of dacoits who have cases registered against them in many police stations. Writing during the same time and in a similar vein, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay's famous play *Dwipantar*(1945) too has fearless *bagdis* but the narrative treatment meted out to them is one of virtuous rebellion. The voice of such a *bagdi* community is that of a male, Kalicharan Bagdi, who refuses to bow to a God in whose eyes one is a brahmin and the other a *bagdi* and under whose constitution, zamindars can steal poor people's lands and pass it on to their progeny as inheritance.

From mid-20th Century onwards, the progressive literary movement started in Bengal and the literary ethos during the time was one of socialist realism,

where class perspective would be regarded as the basis of creative writing, both linguistically and thematically. Most of the writers and critics were Communists and one of the most revered writers of the time, Manik Bandopadhyay's literary world of marginalised rural communities, peasant insurgencies and post-famine urban ghettos had a passive space for the *bagdis*, with the *bagdi* woman being a mute spectator with no agency amidst the socio-political events unfolding during that time. In his 1956 novel, *Holud Nodi Shobuj Bon* (Yellow River Green Woods), Ishwar Bagdi is a poet-turned-hunter who is loved and scorned at the same time by colonial officials like Sahib Robertson for his rebellious nature as he is the only one from his village who can challenge even a hungry tiger. But a rebel like Ishwar Bagdi cannot fathom the pangs of his pregnant wife Gouri. Gouri has been portrayed as the ideal wife who does not protest even when there is not a morsel of rice at home to feed herself and her unborn baby, and often uncomplainingly attends to her drunk husband's demands, failing which she gets beaten too.

By the end of the 20th Century, writing in the post-Rabindranath Tagore period, one of the greatest modernist poets in Bengal, Jibananda Das while composing his famous long poem on Partition riots titled *1946-47*, locates the life-force in the times of mass killings in the state in *bagdi* women in rural countryside who have been described as *ishwori* or goddess-like. Das sees *bagdi* women through the eyes of zamindars who would travel to the countryside mostly for licentiousness reasons, but whose love language was also very platonic and religious. Das believes that despite all the corruptions under the zamindari system, it was still a better time to be in than Partition.

Bagdis have been denied a place in history. As one traces their oral culture, one can locate this absence in postcolonial academic scholarship, and its misrepresentation in mainstream vernacular fiction. Their folk history provides us with an ethics that emphasises the interconnectedness of all life. It evokes a culture of survival amidst nature, spirituality and a communitarian living system. This culture becomes their literature, where 'history becomes both subject and instrument', as scholar Wendy Singer (1997) puts it in *Creating Histories: Oral Narratives and the Politics of History-Making*. While history

becomes a part of their past, it also becomes an instrument to find mainstream acceptability by demystifying its origins, challenging representations that often associate their social status with criminality and fail to contextualise their stories of migration and assimilation with Brahmanical stratification. The potential of oral history as a feminist practice that identifies women as producers of knowledge where their lived realities become the center of historical analysis is also something that this paper is trying to look into. Sadly, in the sparsely available oral records of the *bagdi* community that I have been able to gather for the purposes of this paper, women's voices are not only missing, but also fetishised into religious emblems. The oral narratives of the *bagdis* are masculinist and it is the need of the hour to assemble more accounts that will not only document the community better but also fill the large gaps in existing knowledge about its women.

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Gratitude List

Thank you for insulting me.
You helped me see how much I was worth.
Thank you for overlooking my humanity.
In that moment I gained power.
To be forgotten by the wider world
and the righteous religious
and the weaponized soldiers
is not the worst thing.
It gives you time to discover yourself.

- Naomi Shihab Nye, 1952
(Palestinian American poet)

BOOK REVIEW

Irene Heredia (2015), *It's Been a Long Day: A Nonagenarian Remembers, Goa: Golden Heart Emporium.*

Pp. 207. ISBN:978-93-80739-89-2. Price: Rs. 200/-

- Dr. Cicilia Chettiar

A memoir is a collection of stories, remembered in a particular order and a narrative that is entirely based on the authors reality. The editors of this autobiography are the children of Irene Heredia, a Goan, an Indian, a woman. As the back cover specifies, the book spans two centuries and four generations. The title of the book, *It's Been A Long Day*, very naturally brings all kinds of songs and emotions to memory. The cover page showing a young dark-haired Irene and a white-haired experienced Irene, placed next to each other visualise the caption *A Nonagenarian Remembers*.

The book is two hundred and seven pages long. The memoir is covered in the first 88 pages covering eighteen chapters. An appendix with nineteen articles act as a continuation of her narrative and map the evolution of her thoughts and ideals as she voiced them in newspaper columns. There are eighteen pages of black and white pics covering her life, her family and highpoints in the history of India that she was a visible part of. The book is a second edition, reprint of the first with the appendix covering her nineteen articles from different publications.

There are so many points of familiarity – names, locations, events, food, that will make any Mumbaikar identify with the narration. The major part of narrative is based in Bombay and the Mumbaification of this beautiful city also finds its place in the narrative.

The first chapter, just two pages long paints a very vivid picture of the person who Irene was. The establishing of honesty as a clear path due to the life led by her father is the highlight of the chapter though allusions are made to the Great War, the Asian flu and the loss of her father.

The second chapter establishes another essential aspect of her family values – the emphasis placed on the Catholic teachings and the religious instructions. These two aspects show up throughout the narration of her life story where her guiding principles are derived by her faith and her adherence to honesty. It also points out some very current issues pertaining to religion – the understanding of how Christianity as a religion was practised alongside traditional Hindu beliefs that may have been the original religious practice. Throughout the book interesting nuggets of information are provided that clarifies so many questions raised to this day regarding the original religion of this land and the ancestral history of its residents.

Chapter three is a more detailed explanation of the family and how they grew up. The responsibilities borne by the older siblings, the unpleasant loss of two brilliant minds, stories of her niece and elder sister. All points to a life lived quietly, with dignity, through hardship and a strong emphasis on education while at the same time assimilating the fabric of local culture.

Chapter four races along with time and the story of moving to Bombay, learning new skills, the British based training and schooling. Points are made to specify how women were also evolving away from traditional ideas and the safe working environment for women in those days. St. Xavier's pictures prominently in her narrations as it was an institution that reflected the national and the Catholic ethos with equal justice.

Chapter five marks the entry of Jimmy Heredia and the transition from Irene the carefree college girl to Irene the daughter-in-law of the Heredias and moved into Asian House, her home for the next fifty-four years. Chapter six continues with tales from the days just following the wedding. A journey to Karwar and back, meeting relatives and stopping in Goa on the way back, all of them take the reader on a journey of a newly wedded couple fulfilling social obligation while discovering themselves and the world.

Chapter seven is an endearing reminder of how a woman with brains was considered a novelty and continues to be so even today in some quarters of society. Chapter eight is a detailed description of the life of Dr. A.M. Heredia,

father-in-law to Irene. Their life in Divar, the family history, accomplishments and the life journey of Dr. Heredia is precisely described up to the point that Irene begins her life as a married woman in Mumbai.

Chapter nine marks the beginning of World War II and very delicately describes India's position as a British colony during the war. The challenges faced by Indians, the high points of the Indian freedom movement and how their lives continued during the war. Chapter ten establishes the routine of the next thirty-five years of marriage and the routine of being a couple who shared their lives with each other through social and professional requirements.

Chapter eleven discusses some political realities of the time where Catholics faced injustice. It also introduces the public face of Irene as she addressed a public gathering that was meant to protest government policy. It ends with the sad story of another migration on foot that not many Indians are possibly even aware of, the bombing of Burma leading to the exodus of the Goan community out of the country.

In chapter twelve, Irene paints a somewhat sombre picture of India's independence and the celebrations on the streets of Bombay. The partition cast a heavy cloud across the country, and this shadowed the Independence Day celebrations. For those who came much later into a crowded, polluted Mumbai, this eyewitness account of a time that was at the same time celebratory and tragic serves as a reminder that freedom came at a very high price.

Chapters thirteen and fourteen are a quick rewind into the forties and fifties describing her life as a mother and the wife of a prominent citizen of Bombay. The Goa Liberation Movement was a part of the struggle of Independence that happened much after 1947 and something that a lot of the youth today are unaware about. Irene's active participation in the movement, the actions of Goans in Mumbai that led to generating greater awareness among the citizens of Bombay, seeking support for the Goan movement, the visits to Delhi have all been described and Irene's involvement shows how she balanced her roles as a wife, mother and a Goan seeking freedom for Goa.

The loss of her husband is described in chapter sixteen as a complete U-turn for Irene. The journey planned as a team now held only a solo traveller. Chapter seventeen describes her public life as a member of the Central Film Censor Board. She enjoyed watching the movies before they were made available for public display. Through the book, Irene peppers her experiences by connecting them to movies watched. As Chairperson of the Civic group, she used her powers to make lights available for those studying under streetlights through the night. Changes in the family with some members moving out, some joining the family are recorded in this chapter.

Chapter eighteen ends with Irene in the twilight of her life, at ninety-five summarising her life story, as a memoir, a t-shirt that one brings back from one's travel and a prayer for peace and rest at last.

The appendix has a collection of nineteen articles penned by Irene in different publications between the years 1956 and 2009. Fifty years of recording and sharing stories, thoughts and emotions in publications like Goan Tribune, Goa Today, The Times of India and the Navhind Times. It also includes her talks on special occasions.

The Appendix

The articles begin with her article in The Tribune from 1956 highlighting women of the Indian revolution. She has highlighted how the status of women has received a leg-up only because of the Freedom Movement. The chapter concludes with a shout out to Goan women and their role in the Goan movement for freedom.

Her 1957 article again speaks of women and their freedom to vote. This was an article in the Goan Tribune where she highlighted the role of Gandhiji in providing electoral power to women in India. The rest of the world did not afford such an easy walk to the voting booth to women.

A short story published in Goan Tribune in 1959 also finds mention here. A heart-rending story of a middle-aged woman trying to give birth to a son after seven pregnancies, three living daughters, three aborted ones, who finally gives

birth to a male, still born. Two important characters in this story are the doctor and the old woman who acts as a nurse, midwife, medicine woman, fortune-teller, all rolled into one. The story highlights the demand for a male heir in most Indian families and the hard choices made by women as they try to produce the inheritor of the family's wealth. The story, although short, provides detailed character descriptions allowing the reader to infer the reasons for each character's behaviour. An interesting parallel between two women, one educated the other not much, both skilled, helping a third woman in their own respective ways, gives an insight into Irene's understanding of the realities of life as a woman in India at the time.

Irene's 1960 article in the Goan Tribune describes the joy of browsing through bookstores, immersing in the classics, jostling for attention with modern magazines and the final selection which is based more on modern needs than in the fulfilment of a bibliophile's desires. The 1961 article in the Goan Tribune was on the Goa Gate, a memorial for all those who suffered for Goa's freedom. The struggle to collect funds, the unexpected support from BEST and other well-wishers is highlighted with as much detail as possible. Another 1961 article in the Goan Tribune is about the need for a Park Estate of Goan clubs. Irene's far-sightedness is displayed as she considers the suburbs as a viable alternative to young Goans so that they unlike their forefathers do not transfer all their wealth to Goa, in the hope that someday they will retire in their land.

The Goan Tribune article titled *The Parting* written in 1962 describes the painful finality of saying good-bye to the son who chooses the path of the Lord and rejects the path of domestic bliss; a man of God, Fr. Rudi Heredia S.J. An undated short story in the Goan Tribune titled *And then victory came* describes the challenges of priests who try to lead the flock but are attacked with allegations of conversion, are constantly struggling for funds and yet miraculously, the Lord creates a path. Many times, the aggressor becomes the benefactor, the villain of the piece comes through as the hero. This short story is about one such villain who turns into a backer and supports the priest in the story.

A 2005 article in Goa Today describes the trauma young parents face as they try to seek admission for their young children in kindergarten. Such articles serve to act as a reminder of Irene's knowledge and how accessible she was to new information coming her way. As a parent who also endured hardships while bringing up her children, she recognised hardships of young parents. Times have changed, parental responsibilities haven't.

Irene's 2006 article in Goa Today was a strong statement on the corruption, political chaos and the legal lapses at the state and national levels. She named the various scams and also praised the victories. Her wisdom in assessing the realities of the nation as we choose chaos over order, instability over stability and the consequent path ahead is clearly visible in this article.

In 2007, as a ninety-year-old, Irene continued to write and comment. In the article published in Goa Today, she reflected on her nine decades on this planet. Her descriptions of the various epidemics at the start of the century resonate with the current population that has lived through a pandemic. She reminisces about the freedom struggle and Gandhiji's concepts of ahimsa and satyagraha. Her narration is far more interesting and riveting than any other history text-book. Individuals like Aruna Asaf Ali, who made a significant difference to the freedom movement, receives an honourable mention. Here again she highlights the plight of Goans who were settled in Rangoon and had to find their way back to Goa on their feet, is a reminder of the thousands of migrants who had to walk back to their villages once the government announced a lock-down during the pandemic. Seasons may change, but the human propensity for callousness towards other human lives, doesn't change.

The next article is a 2008 piece written for Goa Today. It tugs at your heartstrings as you recognise the once strong vibrant go-getting personality is now the child being parented by her grown-up children. The article is described as coming to terms with old age. The fact that this article was written when she was in her nineties, makes you wonder at what point she ever really started recognising herself as old. Perhaps as she was made to submit to well-meaning instructions, do's and don'ts that reflected care and nurturing

from her children, maybe then it was that Irene started accepting her age and began the wait for the next leg of her journey, the final one.

In 2009, she wrote a short story for the Goan Tribune, a short love story. It's a sad love story, where two people who were deeply attached do not end up with domestic bliss but are fortunate to meet later in life. The story has some elements of Indian cinema, especially where the boy helps the girl catch the running train. It's wistful, nostalgic and probably reminds every reader about some deep attachment they may have had to leave behind in the past for any number of social reasons.

The next article again from Goa Today was about the fateful day that Gandhiji succumbed to an assassin's bullet. Irene weaves a taut narrative about the events beginning from the Quit India and leading up to the current state of the nation in the third millennium. She acutely felt the need for Gandhiji and his precepts of *Satya*, *Ahimsa* and *Dharma*; the three pillars of life that humans could ignore at their own peril.

The next two articles from the Navhind Times are both a very strong commentary on the need to present a social image while having unhealthy and harmful agendas for the public. One was an article highlighting the religious intolerance in the country. The second was a short story about a fox that tried to fool people and take advantage of his own wife. Eventually he gets beaten up and chased away. Curiously while the article talks about the problem, the story seems like a wish for those who create the problem. Her Times of India article from 1998 again highlights the challenges of the religious minority – this time Christians. Emphasizing the Indianness of a community that she belonged to, while at the same time reinforcing the need to build a stronger social presence, her article was a prophesy of things to come.

The last two articles are the talks she delivered in 1989 and 1990. The former is about the cultural heritage of Goans and describes in detail their food habits, their tastes, their dress and their customs. The second talk is at the Indian Association for Promoting of Adoption and describes how citizens can play a crucial role in the upbringing of adopted children. The highlight is specifically

on the Christian value for life, their approach to abandoned children and the value placed on the nurturance of family towards the well-being of the child, biological or adopted.

The many articles described here, present a multi-faceted, multitalented, and progressive woman who moulded, adapted, challenged herself and the environment around. Her family and her colleagues, her friends and her peers, all have moulded her into a person who recognises pain in others and aims to make life better for everyone. They could be children studying on the streets needing better lights, or family members facing hardships and needing a hand of guidance and support.

Irene, a strong and devoted woman, gracefully embraced her role as a supportive wife to Jimmy Heredia, a prominent figure in Mumbai's upper-class society. While Jimmy engaged in various professional and social endeavors, Irene stood beside him, providing unwavering support, and playing an integral role in their shared journey. This journey as a supportive wife is reflected in multiple chapters highlighting the importance of a partner who complements through life's journey.

As a wife, Irene skillfully navigated the intricacies of Mumbai's society, exuding elegance and charm in social gatherings and events. She cultivated meaningful connections with influential individuals, effortlessly blending with the elite circles that Jimmy was a part of. Irene's grace, intelligence, and warm personality made her a respected figure within their social circle.

Throughout Jimmy's career, Irene became his confidante and advisor. She offered wise counsel, a listening ear, and a strong foundation of emotional support. Irene recognized the challenges that came with Jimmy's position and the expectations placed upon him. She provided a sanctuary of understanding and solace within the private realm of their home, ensuring that he found respite from the demands of his public life.

Irene's role extended beyond being a supportive presence. She actively contributed to Jimmy's endeavors, utilizing her own talents and insights to

enhance his professional pursuits. Whether it was providing valuable input during business discussions, assisting in networking efforts, or discreetly offering her perspective on matters of importance, Irene was Jimmy's trusted partner in both personal and professional affairs.

Amidst the challenges and demands of their privileged lifestyle, Irene and Jimmy remained grounded in their shared values. They recognized the importance of giving back to society and actively engaged in philanthropic endeavours. Together, they supported various charitable causes, championing initiatives that aimed to uplift the underprivileged and create positive change in their beloved Mumbai.

While Jimmy faced different challenges and responsibilities within their social sphere, Irene supported him with grace and unwavering dedication. Her ability to navigate the complexities of their privileged lifestyle while maintaining humility and compassion earned her the respect and admiration of both their peers and the wider community.

Throughout their journey together, Irene remained a steadfast partner, providing love, support, and encouragement to Jimmy as he navigated the highs and lows of his professional and social life. She nurtured a harmonious balance between their private and public worlds, ensuring that their home was a sanctuary of love and tranquility.

Irene and Jimmy Heredia's partnership symbolized the strength and resilience that comes from a deeply supportive and loving relationship. Together, they faced the challenges and triumphs of their complex lives, leaving a lasting impact on Mumbai's society, both through their personal contributions and the example they set as a couple committed to making a positive difference.

She embraced the vibrant and diverse atmosphere of Mumbai, forming lasting friendships with people from various backgrounds. Over the years, Irene witnessed Mumbai's transformation from a post-independence city to a thriving cosmopolitan hub. She saw the rise of iconic landmarks like the Gateway of

India, the development of the local transportation system, and the cultural fusion that Mumbai became famous for.

As the years passed, Irene witnessed Mumbai's rapid development, along with its accompanying challenges. She saw the city face social and economic changes, witnessing the highs and lows that come with urbanization. Through it all, Irene remained resilient, adapting to the shifting dynamics while maintaining a strong sense of identity and community.

Deeply passionate about Goa's history and cultural identity, Irene joined local organizations and participated in talks and discussions for Goa's independence. She recognized the importance of collective action and worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the Goan Freedom Movement. She believed in the power of education and empowerment, advocating for access to education and raising awareness about the historical significance of Goa's struggle for liberation.

She recognized the privilege of being a woman with a degree at a time when most women had no identity of their own, and she made sure it was well taken advantage of for the benefit of all around. Her non-invasive nurturance, her sharp mind, and the smoothness with which she played all her roles have contributed no doubt to the family's abundance in every way. Having a powerhouse for a mother or a grandmother set the bar pretty high for the young ones who followed her.

The book takes the reader through an India that most may not know about, an India from the lens of an educated woman striving to find her place and make her peace with whatever life has offered her. While most narratives of the era may speak only about the conventional stories of freedom and liberation, this memoir talks about the struggle faced by a community as they fought for their place in the Indian sun. It's a journey that most Indian weren't even aware occurred and that's what makes it so important. The book ends with poetic tributes by her son Rudi Heredia SJ.

As one reads through the book, one does feel a sense of awe at the accomplishments, of a woman who gracefully accepted what life offered and found poetry and beauty in everything around. Even her descriptions of painful events, whether personal or social, are rendered through quoting of the classics of which she was an obvious fan.

Irene, whose name means peace, has left behind a legacy. Her thoughts, ideals, vision have not just shaped the children born into her family, but also touched the many lives affected by systemic social concerns. Her willingness to openly challenge existing social and political issues, her recognition of the social evils that threatened to challenge the ideals of equality and justice, her pride in her Goan heritage all of these are expressed in her articles.

Sheetal Kamble (2022) *Dalit Women: Emerging Patterns of Caste Based Violence*, New Delhi: Alter Notes Press. Pp. xviii +244.
ISBN:9788194993131. Price: Rs. 800/- Book

- **Vibhuti Patel**

This book provides an honest effort of reflexive exploration about caste-based violence (CBV) in rural Maharashtra, a state that has had a glorious legacy of anti-caste Bhakti movement by Saint poets and poetesses from 12th century onwards and social reform movement initiated by Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule during 19th century. Based on the foundation of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's prophetic statement, 'The woman is the gateway of the caste system.'; this qualitative study provides a nuanced insights into life-worlds of Dalit women of Maharashtra and their collective agency for a dignified life. This study is based on interviews of Dalit women over the age of 50 years to focus on structure and system of exploitation of Dalit women in India. The author states that she, herself being a Dalit woman and a granddaughter of a survivor of sexual violence, has an experiential knowledge of agony and dilemmas of Dalit women when they are robbed of their dignity and bodily integrity by the upper caste men. Narrative of the book is highly engaging despite being theoretically

dense and emotionally intense. The author elicits historical context to caste based violence, quotes report of Dr. *Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute* (BARTI), Pune to convincingly show how caste based violence is based on social stratification based on foundation of religion and caste ideology of layered hierarchy.

Conceptual framework

The book not only conceptualises caste-based violence (CBV) in the backdrop of traditional socioeconomic role of Dalit women and assertions against it, but also documents Dalit women's heroic struggles against three-pronged onslaught on their existence- class-based exploitation, caste-based dehumanisation and segregation, and gender-based discrimination and exclusion. The mainstream academia has totally neglected these aspects even after boasting about 'universality of knowledge'. The author rightly reiterates the conviction of feminist standpoint epistemology that knowledge is not universal and deconstructs unequal power relationship between dominant caste men and Dalit women. She adopts Foucauldian framework of discourse analysis to bring centre stage the voices from the margins. The unequal power relationship between dominant caste men and Dalit women.

Dalit women's resistance during post-Kharilanj tragedy

Dalit women's agency in challenging caste-based exploitation and dehumanisation was witnessed when a mob of about 40 *Kunbis* in Khairlanji, Maharashtra entered the hut of the Bhotmange family and dragged-out Priyanka, her mother Surekha and her two brothers, Rakesh and Sudhir on 29 September 2006. They were stripped naked and paraded through the village, and then taken to the square where both, mother and daughter were gang raped. One of the sons was asked to rape his sister in front of all the onlookers, and when he refused, his genitals were cut off. Later, all of them were killed in cold blood. Showing amazing courage and tremendous resilience throughout the state Dalit girls and women, students and youth put up brave struggles to extend solidarity with the lone survivor in the Bhotmange family and demand justice and accountability from state agencies for its deliberate bureaucratic bungling to weaken the case. This struggle resulted in emergence of the Dalit

women's leadership that challenged multi-pronged patriarchal onslaught by external and internal patriarchies. The way black feminists assert that race-hierarchy and patriarchy are intertwined, the author avers that caste-hierarchy and patriarchy are inextricably linked. That makes it imperative to struggle against caste patriarchy.

Dynamics of relationship of Dalit rights and Dalit women's rights

The author has provided several illustrations of Dalit women who faced neglect by the malestream Dalit movement and mainstream women's movement. She avers that when the dominant caste men violate bodily integrity and dignity of Dalit women, the mainstream women's movement is silent. The author tries to provide an intersectional gendered perspective to unfold a layered hierarchy that determines responses to violence and brutalisation of Dalit women. The book focuses on 3 crucial aspects of existential struggle of Dalit women.

- Institutionalised sexual exploitation of Dalit women by men of dominant castes at a relation of production levels and around access to basic survival needs such as water, fodder for domestic animals, fuel and food.
- Political conflict around material issues at micro level culminating into caste-based atrocities against Dalit community, burning of homes and farms, destruction of sources of life-support, sexual and sexist violence against Dalit girls and women.
- Dalit women of all age groups getting self-mobilised and gaining foothold in the public spaces.

In-depth case studies

The major strength of this book is detailed case studies based on extensive field work to provide the institutional political economy backdrop to capture valiant fight of three Dalit women survivors of sexual violence in three different regions of Maharashtra state. Shantabai from Matang community who converted to Buddhism from Bargaon village of Latur district was violated by the local vested interests who wanted to grab her house; Sakharbai Khobragade in Gondiya District, who had to faced multi-pronged onslaughts and barbaric

violence in connection with BuddhaVihar land dispute and who did not get justice; and Radhabai Jadhav, 80 year old, lost all family members in the massacre in Ahmednagar district as her grandson Sunil Jadhav had a love affair with a Maratha girl, Mira Wagh. In all three tragedies, the common features are- victims and perpetrators were/are known to each other, primary stage of violence by non-state actors resulting in terrorisation, humiliation, degradation to command total loss of self-esteem and rob the Dalit community of their dignity; a use of weapon of character assassination of the survivor of sexual assault, victim blaming by police, misogyny and bigotry of Kangaroo courts and caste-based humiliation.

An Elusive Road to justice

The author rightly states that 'Prevention of Atrocities Act' is a powerful tool to fight against caste-based violence. She has also referred to 1993-United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Declaration of Elimination of Violence Against Women as an important instrument that can be used for gender justice. But the casteist attitude of the decision makers in the criminal justice system subverts the democratic value of social justice. The author rightly declares that only answer to male dominated politics of money, muscle and mafia power is to channelise our collective efforts to the mission of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar towards annihilation of caste through the narratives of Dalit women who have survived the caste-based violence in rural Maharashtra.

Laudable Effort of Amplifying Collective Wisdom of Dalit Women

The book exemplifies emerging narratives of Dalit women backed by robust empirical evidence, vivid description of the unfolding saga rooted in upper caste arrogance, misogyny, bigotry and Dalit women's defiance of the oppressive order. It also shows importance of fact finding by Dalit Adhikar Manch for making evidence-based arguments in the court proceedings. The book acknowledges the role of Dalit media in providing support to Shantabai (Latur), Sakharbai (Gondhia) and Radhabai (Ahmednagar). The author has expressed her gratitude towards Ambedkarite movement and the feminist co-travellers in the collective struggles for Dalit women's rights resulting in their socio-cultural, material and political empowerment. The book captures power

of resistance by unbroken women among 'Broken Men' and Dalit women's quest for spaces for justice. The author shows way forward to building multisectoral interventions-from global to local by institutionalising strong community-based support system by forming local intervention centre, livelihood support to the survivors, exposure visits, judicious fact finding, representation of Dalit women in the State SC/ST Commissions, public hearings, global campaign around Dalit women's concerns in UN CEDAW discourses.

Vibhuti Patel (2022) *An Intersectional Gendered Discourse on Empowerment During Pre and Post COVID-19 Pandemic*. New Delhi: IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute, Pp. iii+99.
ISBN:978-81-951260-0-2. Price: Rs. 200/-

- Nikita Pathak

"An Intersectional Gendered Discourse on Empowerment During Pre and Post COVID-19 Pandemic" by Vibhuti Patel is a timely and thought-provoking exploration of the intersectionality of gender and empowerment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Patel delves into the complexities of gender dynamics, shedding light on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by individuals, particularly women, during these unprecedented times.

One of the strengths of this book is its emphasis on an intersectional approach. Patel recognizes that individuals' experiences of empowerment are shaped not only by their gender but also by other intersecting factors such as caste, class, geography, and more. By adopting an intersectional lens, the author brings attention to the multifaceted nature of oppression and therefore opens new pathways for empowerment and provides a nuanced understanding of how various forms of discrimination and marginalization intersect and influence one another.

Patel's exploration of the pre and post COVID-19 contexts adds another layer of significance to the analysis. The book examines the ways in which the

pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities, particularly for women. It highlights the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on marginalized communities and offers insights into how these disparities can be addressed through inclusive and gender-sensitive policies and interventions. Divided into 12 chapters, each chapter provides crucial insights into challenges left by the COVID-19 pandemic in its wake, and how we can mitigate and re-emerge from them.

Throughout the book, Patel presents a rich blend of theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and real-life narratives. This interdisciplinary approach not only strengthens the arguments but also makes the book accessible to a wide range of readers. By weaving together personal stories and academic analysis, Patel effectively bridges the gap between theory and practice, creating a compelling narrative that resonates with readers at different levels.

Moreover, "An Intersectional Gendered Discourse on Empowerment During Pre and Post COVID-19 Pandemic" offers practical recommendations and strategies for fostering empowerment in the face of the pandemic's challenges. From policy implications to community-level interventions, Patel presents a comprehensive roadmap for individuals, organizations, and policymakers to promote gender equality and empowerment during a crisis.

"An Intersectional Gendered Discourse on Empowerment During Pre and Post COVID-19 Pandemic" is a significant contribution to the field of gender studies. Vibhuti Patel's exploration of the complex dynamics between gender, empowerment, and the COVID-19 pandemic offers valuable insights and actionable recommendations for scholars, activists, policymakers, and anyone interested in understanding and promoting gender equality in times of crisis.

Gender, Informality, Labour and Sustainable Development Goals

The book focuses, across chapters, on the South-Asian state of gender, informality and labour through a lens of the Sustainable Development Goals, which borrowed from the Millennium Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their relationship with gender are crucial for promoting equality and advancing sustainable development. The SDGs,

adopted by the United Nations in 2015, consist of 17 interconnected goals aimed at addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges to achieve a more sustainable and equitable world by 2030.

SDG 5 specifically focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. It recognizes that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary foundation for achieving the other SDGs and creating a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Gender equality is essential because it promotes equal opportunities and rights for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity. It encompasses empowering women and girls, challenging harmful gender norms and stereotypes, eliminating discrimination and violence based on gender, and ensuring equal participation and decision-making power.

Vibhuti Patel analyses the provisions of SDG 5 in an Indian context which includes assessing various parameters to advance gender equality, such as ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, eliminating harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation, ensuring women's full and effective participation in all spheres of life, promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, and enhancing women's access to economic resources and opportunities. In chapter 1, she focuses keenly on the child sex-ratio, reproductive rights, gender gap in education and other important indicators, and gives a clarion call for commitment to the tents of SDG 5. While the SDGs recognize the importance of challenging harmful practices and norms, such as child marriage and gender-based violence, there is limited emphasis on transforming deeply ingrained gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate inequality. Changing social attitudes and norms is essential for achieving long-lasting gender equality outcomes.

In chapters 1, 10, 11 Vibhuti Patel highlights a plethora of concerns that demand action from various CSOs, NGOs, Government Bodies, as well as the UN as gender equality has profound impact on the development of society. Promoting gender equality has wide-ranging social, economic, and

environmental implications. When women and girls have equal opportunities and rights, societies experience numerous positive outcomes.

Firstly, gender equality is strongly linked to improved education. When girls have access to quality education, it leads to better outcomes for themselves, their families, and their communities. It helps break the cycle of poverty, reduces child marriage and early pregnancies, improves maternal and child health, and promotes economic growth. In chapter 2, Patel makes the case for accelerating gender sensitization across schools and various educational institutions to create a more gender-just world, where women experience the world as individuals and not subordinates. She claims, “Only platitudes of gender equality will not do, but all proclamations of gender responsiveness must translate into equal opportunities, equal treatment and equal rewards for men and women through the creation of structures and mechanisms” (Patel, 2022), thus presenting education as a powerful way forward to achieve SDGs and outcomes related to gender equality and empowerment.

Gender equality contributes to better health outcomes. When women have access to sexual and reproductive health services and information, it leads to improved maternal health, reduced maternal and child mortality rates, and healthier families. Gender equality is also associated with increased awareness and prevention of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, including vector-borne diseases which have proved to be fatalistic in developing countries across the world. In chapter 3, Patel mentions that immediate attention needs to be brought to the health outcomes drawing from the poor working conditions in informal economy. She says “The rising costs of private healthcare and the systematic dismantling of the public health system in these times of liberalisation are a major reason for the huge indebtedness of households in the unorganised sector. There is a pressing need to provide insurance, especially health insurance cover to the workers.” (Patel, 2022). Measures like these can prove to be crucial vantage points to further the holistic development agenda in countries like India, where the structural adjustment policies led to cuts in funding in soft sectors such as health, education, nutrition etc.

Gender equality promotes economic growth and poverty reduction. When women have equal access to economic resources, including land, finance, and employment opportunities, it boosts productivity and contributes to economic development. Studies have shown that gender equality in the labour market leads to increased GDP and enhanced business performance. Vibhuti Patel expounds in chapter 3 and 5, the massive impact of SAPs and globalization on the developing economies across the world, presenting the dismal statistics on feminization of poverty. On top of this, almost 120 million Indian women are a part of the informal sector. India's notoriously low female labour force participation rate (LFPR) seems to have stagnated, data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS July 2021-June 2022) shows. 29.4% of women (aged 15-59) were part of India's labour force in 2021-22, as compared to 29.8% in the preceding year. In contrast, men's LFPR improved from 80.1% in 2020-21 to 80.7% in 2021-22 (Dhamija & Chawla, 2023). The overall impact of SAPs and Globalization on women informal workers present a gloomy picture of the state of affairs.

Gender equality is critical for achieving environmental sustainability. Women play a vital role in natural resource management, climate change adaptation, and sustainable agriculture. By including women's perspectives and knowledge, we can ensure more effective and sustainable environmental policies and practices. Moreover, gender equality strengthens governance and peacebuilding efforts. Women's participation in decision-making processes and leadership positions leads to more inclusive and effective policies. In post-conflict situations, promoting women's rights and empowerment is essential for peacebuilding and preventing future conflicts.

To achieve the gender-related targets of SDG 5 and promote gender equality throughout all the SDGs, collaboration and partnerships are essential. Governments, civil society organizations, businesses, and individuals all have a role to play. Efforts should focus on implementing laws and policies that protect women's rights, addressing discriminatory social norms, investing in girls' education, ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services, promoting women's economic empowerment, and supporting women's

participation in decision-making processes. Patel speaks to this sentiment evocatively through chapter 11. As a peek into the upcoming decade, she mentions “to ensure stronger economic and human development, each government must assess how to mobilise funding using instruments that help the poorest proportion of the population to meet this gap for children and frame these as the most powerful investments a society can make. But investments are not just monetary: citizen participation and community action, including the voices of children themselves, are powerful forces for change that must be mobilised to reach the SDGs. Social movements must play a transformational role in demanding the rights that communities need to care for children and provide for families.” (Patel, 2022).

COVID-19 and its Gendered Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed gendered implications and impacts, affecting individuals and communities in different ways based on gender dynamics. Pandemics and outbreaks have differential impacts on women and men. “From risk of exposure and biological susceptibility to infection to the social and economic implications, individuals’ experiences are likely to vary according to their biological and gender characteristics and their interaction with other social determinants. Because of this, global and national strategic plans for COVID-19 preparedness and response must be grounded in strong gender analysis and must ensure meaningful participation of affected groups, including women and girls, in decision-making and implementation” (WHO, 2020).

Vibhuti Patel eloquently argues the case for gender, development, and empowerment in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, where the pandemic itself becomes an investigative tool to assess the disruptions and disparities that earlier did not meet the eye. Gender-based violence, which Patel calls a “shadow pandemic” in the book has proven to be one of the biggest emerging trends in the lockdown. She writes “In India, the lockdown of more than a month has also forced women to bear the burden of unpaid care work, both, in terms of housework, home-schooling of children and enhanced care burden of sick, children and elderly and unprecedented domestic violence. The National

and State Commissions of Women have already received over 1 lakh desperate calls on their helplines in the last 30 days from women and children. Newspapers are reporting incidents of rape and child sexual abuse in the places of forced confinement of women and girls who tried to go back to their native places.” (Patel, 2022). Women and girls face heightened risks of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and other forms of abuse. Restricted access to support services and reduced social networks have further exacerbated the challenges faced by survivors. Addressing GBV and ensuring access to support services such as One Stop Centres, Mental Health support and helplines are crucial during and after the pandemic. Patel also analyses functioning of various government services and entitlements across chapters, that are crucial to fare the onslaught of pandemic induced aggravation of existing differentials.

The pandemic's economic fallout has disproportionately affected women, particularly those in informal sectors and low-wage jobs. Within this informal workforce with its persistent gender-based occupational segregation, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection. The immediate economic impact of the pandemic induced lockdown is already being felt by informal workers. Women bore the brunt of job losses the most, given that the pre-lockdown significant and widening gender gaps in workforce participation rates, employment and wages were expected to intensify during the post-lockdown period (Chakraborty, 2020). Across the chapters in the book, Vibhuti Patel stresses on the demands made by feminist groups across the country such as SEWA, MAKAAAM, and others to the government, and provides pathways to execute the changes that have been demanded. Many governments and policymakers do not explicitly address the issue of unpaid care work, which disproportionately falls on women and limits their participation in other areas of life, including education, employment, and leadership. Recognizing and redistributing unpaid care work is essential for achieving gender equality and empowering women.

COVID-19 has highlighted existing disparities in access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services. Lockdown measures and overwhelmed healthcare systems have led to disruptions in reproductive health services, including access to contraception, safe abortion, and maternal healthcare. Patel writes “The lockdown has had dire implications for the vulnerable populations; women-headed households, people with disability, pregnant women and homeless people lonely elderly, socially stigmatised transgender community, sex workers, prisoners and inmates in overcrowded shelter homes and makeshift tents.” (Patel, 2020). Ensuring continuity of essential healthcare services, including reproductive rights, is vital for safeguarding women's health and rights.

Way Forward Through Gender-Responsive Budgeting

Understanding the gendered nature of COVID-19 is essential for developing effective and inclusive response strategies. It requires addressing gender inequalities, promoting women's leadership and decision-making, addressing gender-based violence, recognizing the care burden, and ensuring equal access to healthcare and economic opportunities. By incorporating a gender perspective, we can build more resilient and equitable societies during and after the pandemic. Addressing the shortcomings highlighted by Vibhuti Patel in her book, she advocates for sustained efforts and collaboration among governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. It is crucial to enhance data collection and disaggregation, promote intersectional approaches, strengthen policy frameworks, allocate adequate resources, and ensure meaningful participation and representation of marginalized groups.

Patel expounds upon elaborately upon the requirement and merits of gender responsive budgeting. Having worked extensively in this field, Patel brings out the economic aspects of the pandemic as well as structural adjustment policies (SAPs) and presents a cross sectional analysis of the same. Usually, it is a norm (especially in government policies and governance structures) to address gender as a binary concept, focusing on the disparities between men and women. However, they often overlook the complexities of intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity, class, disability, and sexual orientation.

Intersectionality is crucial for understanding how different forms of discrimination and marginalization intersect and affect individuals differently. Patel's book highlights this intersectional nature through the lens of informality, gender, caste, class, occupation, disability. However, the book only briefly touches some of these positionalities. It would add more depth to the narratives if there was more incisive focus on the LGBTQIA communities, persons with disabilities, indigenous and Dalit women.

In chapter 10, Patel lays out the intricacies of policymaking and budgeting exercises and how they clearly lack participation from various marginalized groups. Her incisive and crisp remarks on the existing state of affairs, as well as her lucid pathways to achieve a gender responsive budget proved to be one of the most compelling essays throughout the book. Patel brings out the best of her acumen while writing extensively on the merits of a gender responsive budget, and how it is a powerful tool for the state to actually realize the goals highlighted in the SGDs. Insufficient funding, inadequate policy frameworks, weak institutions, and limited political will can hinder progress in achieving gender-related targets. It is crucial to address these gaps and ensure effective implementation, monitoring, and accountability. Therefore, it is crucial to a nation's progress to make sure it pays attention to this issue.

While the SDGs include specific targets and indicators for gender equality, they may not capture the full range of gender-related issues and complexities. Some indicators may be difficult to measure, monitor, and assess accurately, leading to challenges in tracking progress and identifying gaps. There is a need for more comprehensive and nuanced indicators that capture the diverse experiences and realities of different groups within gender. Patel propounds that the governments must engage with good governance practices. She feels that it makes good economic sense to use the gender responsive budgeting exercise as a blueprint to create further disaggregated, intersectional budgets. She boldly claims "Hence, the budgetary policies need to keep into consideration the gender dynamics operating in the economy and the civil society. Budgets garner resources through taxation policies and allocate resources to different sections of the economy. Budget impacts women's lives

in several ways. It directly promotes women's development through the allocation of budgetary funds for women's programmes or reduces opportunities for empowerment of women through budgetary cuts. There is a need to highlight gender-responsive participatory approaches to pro-poor bottom-up budget budgeting, child budget, Schedule Caste budget, Scheduled Tribe budget, environment-sensitive green budgeting, disabled-friendly budgeting, budgets for transgender communities and their local and global implications on the marginalized communities."

The book was an impressive feat to bring together a historical narrative of women's agency within the rapidly globalizing world, while intersecting with various identities and positionalities of caste, class, gender, geography, informality, and others. The book also cements the ideas of a holistic, well-rounded development agenda through affirmative action and adoption of best practices, especially in governance. Patel weaves together the travails of COVID-19 and skilfully used the pandemic as a critical lens to examine the existing inequalities with much more nuance and sensitivity. Her formidable scholarship makes for an engaging and moving read, replete with data as well as pathways to overcome the challenges that she has highlighted.

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Pp. 368. ISBN: 9781991016034, ESNB: 9781991016324. Price: \$55

- Dr. Anurag Hazarika
- Dr. Mandakini Baruah

With a particular focus on globalization, technological change, sustainability and population dynamics, the book covers a wide range of topics like the challenges facing women, their families and communities working in 10 Asia-Pacific countries: Aotearoa, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, China, Cambodia, India, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Pakistan, Philippines. In addition to the four main themes mentioned above, the authors of each chapter explore challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and offer suggestions for future practices and policies. A cross-country analysis is added to the editorial introduction, followed by recommendations and cross-level impacts. The book is divided into ten broad research-based chapters on the theme of Gender equity in Work Life Balance across Asia Pacific Region.

Chapter 1 entitled, “Working women in Aotearoa New Zealand” by Jane Parker and Noelle Donnelly discusses about the women workers in New Zealand who are prone to being under-utilized, carry the burden of unpaid care work and even earn less than their male counterparts which leads to lower long term earnings, pension gaps and a higher level of poverty among the older women. This leads to less skill as compared to their male counterparts, insecure employment which makes women susceptible to job losses and economic losses. Noteworthy to look at the evil effects of Covid-19 which catalyzed the entire scenario to the pre-Covid era leading the New Zealand Govt. social stakeholders to face significant challenges in ensuring women’s employment prospects. Through a national gender-based employment action plan, the government has pledged to address the disproportionate economic and social effects of the pandemic on women, but it is unclear how the unique needs of marginalized women will be met. Greater comprehension of the connection

between women's paid and unpaid work, access to flexible work and funded childcare, providing fair pay and pay transparency, education and training in STEM, and clearer pathways into and through traditionally male-dominated industries appear to be the key, particularly in the mutating context of Covid-19. These factors are linked to demographic shifts. The government of New Zealand has a critical opportunity now to change away from low-paying, low-skilled labour and towards the supply of more secure, higher-paying jobs in order to mitigate the effects of the epidemic on women. Stressing sustainability issues, more legislative changes are urgently needed to address the high rates of physical and emotional violence experienced by women in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly Mori women who experience higher incidence levels. Recent legislative reforms have helped some women who have experienced domestic violence and have raised awareness of gender-based violence in general. A greater level and coalition of multi-party and -level responses involving the state, employers, workers, unions, and community groups need to be strategically and practically connected to the linked challenges presented by globalisation, technological advancements, demographic change, and sustainability. This includes replicating the successes in New Zealand's public service in the private sector.

Chapter 2 entitled, "Working Women in Australia" by Marian Baird, Rae Cooper, Daniel Dinale discusses about Covid-19 and the natural disasters of 2019 and 2020 which were a major setback for Australia and gave them a glimpse into what lay ahead. The pandemic made many things more obvious, including the necessity of providing care for the elderly, children, the sick, and those with disabilities, the closure of borders, schools, and some workplaces, forced working from home and the use of new technologies, and the crucial role of the state. Discussions regarding the economy, the future of employment, and climate change had hitherto centred on humans and machines. The authors contend that an overhaul of government policy in the areas of work and family that is seamless and more gender fair is required to handle Australia's fertility and ageing population challenge. This calls for expanded maternity leave for parents, universal child care, and better senior

care. In order to guarantee and secure flexible work, changes in workplace regulations are required. This would benefit society economically and give stability for those of childbearing age who are taking on the obligations of family formation. We must carefully plan for the desired as opposed to unintended and bad effects these technologies may bring in order to enable women to benefit from new technologies, such as the possibility to increase their hours, for example through technology-enabled remote working. We don't want to make matters worse for women by ghettoizing them into a class of labour without a career path while men profit from advancement in highly "presenteeist" working cultures. The authors have identified numerous, yet interrelated, problems in the areas of population, globalisation, technology, and sustainability. Stress is put on providing care, both paid and unpaid, as women contribute more to the work market. The conventional roles of men and women are being questioned and disrupted as societal norms change, industry is reorganized, and new technologies are introduced. Women's careers, families, and personal life are affected as a result of climate change. The authors in this chapter have argued that all policy responses—including those relating to labour market regulation, work and family, skill development, and adaptation to climate change—need to embrace a gender lens and take a multifaceted, integrated approach.

In the chapter 3 entitled, "Working Women in Japan" authored by Shingou Ikeda and Kazufumi Sakai analyze on Japan's government needs to address employment shortages caused by demographic shifts due to the country's population which is shrinking. It is imperative to motivate women to enter the workforce and advance their careers, even when they are providing child for long-term care. Particularly, atypical workers like part-time or fixed-term employees need to receive more help because they experience unstable employment and lower pay, which are direct causes of women's poverty. In order to eradicate gender disparities in the Japanese labour market, it is crucial that socioeconomic policy in Japan prioritizes the development of women's treatment and employment prospects as well as promotes their economic independence. Regulation of part-time or fixed-term work with low pay and

benefits is extremely important. In order to further their professional careers and manage work and family life, it is crucial for women to acquire information technology abilities. Without technology, personal service work is still frequently performed by many women, but telework needs to be developed to support women's balancing of work and care giving. Some women have been able to work from home while caring for their kids whose schools are closed as a result of Covid-19, but others have been forced to work outside the home (e.g., in hospitals, shops, and restaurants). Remote labour has the potential to alter men's work habits and dedication to housework.

Therefore, it is crucial to create technology that supports all aspects of family and work life for women. The Japanese government should create more comprehensive policies to support working women. The government and others, including trade unions, community groups, women's groups, and employer bodies, must coordinate their efforts and concentrate on both the labour market and other contexts to realize a gender-equal society due to the pervasiveness of gender discrimination in Japan, both at work and elsewhere. The government has worked to end workplace discrimination and promote the empowerment of women employees over the years. Overall, though, the reach of regulation has been constrained, and progress has been sluggish.

In the Chapter 4 entitled, “Working Women in China” authored by Huiping Xian has provided a clear scenario where they suggest that gender equality and economic/family planning strategies in China are in conflict with one another. Gender discrimination still exists in the workplace and other areas of the economy, even if market reform, technology advancements, and globalization have given Chinese women new job and employment options. The production-reproduction conundrum is once again highlighted by the two-child policy's failure to raise China's birth rate since 2016 which has not been adequately addressed in socio-economic discussions in China. The recent three-child policy's effects have not yet been fully determined.

Due to their vulnerability during the Covid-19 outbreak, many Chinese women have been forced into low-paying, unstable jobs like as self-employment and

contingency work. Thus, the authors suggested that a transformation of Chinese society towards one that is sustainable, egalitarian, and inclusive will necessitate a clarification of competing objectives for economic growth, sustainability, and women's empowerment.

Chapter 5 of the book entitled, “Working Women in Cambodia” authored by Kristy Ward and Michele Ford analyses with a conclusion that since 80% of Cambodia's workforce works in the unorganized sector, policy reform is urgently needed to give women working in precarious jobs some access to social safety until this situation changes. Better social protection is necessary to offer a social safety net for rural and extended homes in order to reduce the burden of remittances on women workers. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have once again shown that a significant change in care giving responsibilities is required for women to engage in fulfilling careers. This requires giving males greater duties while also providing low-cost, high-quality state or market care in order to promote a more equitable division of labour in the household. The authors have finally concluded on the necessity to consider potential multiparty solutions involving workplace parties like employers, employees, unions, the state, and community organisations to make sure that the methods used are adaptable and long-lasting.

Chapter 6 of the book entitled, “Working Women in India” by Vibhuti Patel argues that India has undergone significant demographic changes over the past forty years, frequently associated with urbanization due to the country's rapid population expansion and economic development. Its fertility rate has significantly decreased, and the proportion of women enrolled in educational institutions has increased, notwithstanding the continued gendered subject segregation. Women's involvement in the labour force in India has not increased as a result of these structural changes; it reached a record low of 15.5% in April-June 2020, indicating the effects of the pandemic and an expanding job crisis. The author discusses the different issues related to the livelihoods of Indian women and how they have been constantly struggling in the post-colonial period. Dr. Patel rightly pointed out how the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns impacted both the paid and the unpaid works of

women in India. She also highlighted the key challenges as well as opportunities of these situations such as demography, globalisation, technology, sustainability etc. she has also recommended a few suggestions for women's equal opportunities such as women should be economically and technically empowered, women's asset right should be protected, women should be provided education with skill development and also, they should get legislative protection. Dr. Patel has raised a very pertinent suggestion that women's knowledge and social practices could be used for community resilience. She concludes with her remarks that it is important to consider some of the anticipated effects of recent technology advancements on women in India will have a gendered impact on the future of labour and workers in India.

Chapter 7 entitled, "Working Women in Sri Lanka" by Kasuni Weeraswinghe and Thilini Meegaswatta finds the possible solutions the private sector can better support working women by addressing concerns related to safety, equity, and work-life balance. Improvements to maternity leave and the implementation of paternity leave could be steps in this direction as well as to alleviate the gendered constraints on working mothers and the discrimination they suffer during workplace recruitment after taking up special education, as well as to assist respect the responsibility of both parents for raising their children. The authors have suggested from their findings that the implementation of crèches in workplaces and the introduction of state-subsidized childcare services could prevent well-qualified women from leaving the workforce due to family obligations, thereby increasing the retention rate of female workers and decreasing the levels of underutilization of female labour. In Sri Lanka, policy support for flexible work arrangements may also be crucial for enabling women to thrive in the workforce. This is especially true in the pandemic scenario. In this sense, the authors are of the opinion that state-led initiatives to guarantee that women obtain credentials and skills that are in demand on the job market may be helpful. The authors argue that women must upgrade their skills if they are to fully profit from the transition to a green economy. Similar to this, more assistance is needed to encourage female

entrepreneurship; current programmes could be strengthened so that they offer timely and relevant knowledge, information, technology, equipment, and financial assistance to women who wish to found small-scale businesses and industries.

Chapter 8 entitled, “Working Women in Fiji” authored by Natalia D’Souza analyzed that Fiji’s effort on tackling gender equality and other sustainable development goals continues to be hindered by the continuing global epidemic. However, it has also been asserted, if rather overly optimistically, that the pandemic offers a chance to rethink policies and practices both within and outside of beyond the office, such as a revision of women's responsibilities in other fields. She has attempted to provide a policy solution to the issue through the creation of decent-quality jobs, improved opportunities for group organization and social interaction, particularly for those in the informal economy, increased investments in technological infrastructure and skill-upgrading, and support for women's roles outside of the workplace are all components of a sustainable recovery strategy. The question of whether this reflects a desire for equality versus a desire to have women's distinctive roles, knowledge, and contributions valued on par with those of their male counterparts may also need to be re imagined within the Fijian context and in light of iTaukei worldviews.

The 9th Chapter entitled, “Working Women in Pakistan” authored by Fatima Junaid and Afia Saleem has suggested that for women to attain decent work and gender equality, Pakistan will need to take an array of macro-, meso- and micro-steps. He argues that in Pakistan, recommendations have centered on starting with 33% female representation and fostering young women's leadership on boards of local government, the public sector, and the business sector. The government's commitment to digital literacy, as well as to the safety and empowerment of women, intends to close the gender wage gap and the current digital gender barrier. Globally, because to COVID-19, some gender-based injustices have gotten worse for women, but in the digital age, everyone, including women, has access to previously unheard-of opportunities. The governmental and business sectors of Pakistan must create programmes to

up skill women and connect them to these opportunities. For women, the Pak-China Economic Corridor offers a wealth of employment options at all levels and across a variety of industries, including online work opportunities. Micro-financing, especially Islamic micro-financing, could help women run small, sustainable companies (such owning a home-based beauty salon or catering service). People who are less educated and unable to handle or access online business efforts may have opportunities thanks to these activities. In order to become economically independent, many women in Pakistan need home-based employment alternatives that cause the least amount of interruption to their daily routines and the least amount of contact with men outside of their homes. The situation of women in Pakistan won't change unless the dominant socio-cultural narratives are changed. In Pakistan, there are opportunities for women, especially in the context of systemic and policy transformation. Women can access the economic, entrepreneurial, and social networking possibilities they need for their own personal growth and empowerment through education and training.

The 10th chapter named, “Working Women in the Philippines” by Daisy Arago, Jane Brock and Peter Brock suggests urging the government to create and strengthen a clear legal framework with which to end discrimination against women with regard to their right to employment. The authors are in favour of the broad strategies adopted by the UN CEDAW and Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) on solving the problems of neo liberalism to worker protection worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic backdrop. In addition, steps must be taken to maintain gender equality in the workplace, especially given the persistent gender pay gap and the difference in retirement age between men and women. Employers are required to conduct spot checks, without notice, for labor law violations to see if there is a wage gap between men and women. Flexible workers should receive the same protection as full-time and full-time workers. The government must investigate how gender plays a role in development and the effects of technology improvements on workers, in addition to environmental issues. For there to be equality of opportunity at work and elsewhere, coordinated workplace, social,

and other protections are required. In order to bring about social change and an equitable distribution of money, resources, and social support, women in the Philippines must continue to oppose oppressive measures taken against women's and workers' organizing and improve the level of consciousness to do so. Initiatives that aim to eliminate sexual harassment, exploitative employment practices, and subpar or harmful working conditions in the workplace are possible. Women employees are particularly vulnerable to each of these issues.

In a summary, the authors of this edited collection present suggestions for coordinated and context-sensitive actions unique to each country to enhance the working lives of women and girls, drawing on this wide variety of qualitative and quantitative information. All of the chapters emphasized the significance of the care giving job done by women and the necessity of giving care a financial value, rewarding women for their care giving work, and creating systems that more fairly share care resources. Strong messages on the value of sustainability to women and the necessity of taking action to stop climate change and environmental damage are present. Additionally, the authors of the book demonstrate how gender plays a significant role in technological progress and how it manifests itself unevenly. While technological advancements have created new paid employment options for women in some nations, we also observe the imprinting of gendered inequality and division in other nations, which ultimately hurts women. I strongly recommend students, research scholars, and academicians to refer to this thought-provoking, thoroughly researched, and factually based real scenario data facts based on firsthand surveys conducted by the diverse authors cutting across Asia-Pacific to portray Gender based Equity at work and beyond to understand Gender based work life dimension with more clarity.

Lata Pujari, *The Position of Women at Vijayanagara (1336-1565): A Study on Art and Epigraphy*. New Delhi: Writer's Publications, ISBN: 978-93-93082-45-9. Pp.xxv+248. Rs. 1250/-

- Prof. Vina Vaswani

The book “*The Position of Women at Vijayanagara:1336-1565: A Study on Art and Epigraphy*” from Writer's Choice Publications, authored by Dr. Lata Pujari, Coordinator of the Sophia Irene Heredia Centre for Women Studies and Development, Mumbai, makes for a very interesting read. It belongs to the genre of history and is set in the period from 14th to 16th century AD. It is a well-researched book with clear descriptions, extensive referencing, and keeps the reader interested through the interspersing of maps, and pictures. The book informs the reader about the status of women in Vijayanagara from 1336 to 1565, thereby attempting to bring to light the status of women from South India, in a bygone era.

The book offers an intellectual foray into the glorious years when the southern part of India prospered and had greater freedom from the invaders. This golden period was marked by an appreciation of art and dance forms as well as a culture that was inclusive, as was perceived by foreign visitors and their narratives. Lata Pujari portrays the context of the Vijayanagara Empire through the lucid description of the three dynasties: Sangama, Saluva, and Tuluva along with their inter-dynastic, social, and geopolitical milieu. The book fills the gap in understanding the status of women during those years. The tools used for understanding and interpreting the status of women during the period between 1336-1565 are the art forms and epigraphs along with an immersive understanding of the author visiting the sites, the research libraries, and the discussions with the scholars. Lata Pujari has shown her mettle by portraying history in the right perspective without inclining towards any ideology. The inferences drawn from the epigraphs are well-balanced and bring out a professional endeavor to present the facts, as they are. The six chapters build step-by-step providing insightful experiences for the reader.

The first chapter on introduction sets the tone for the text, art, descriptions, maps, pictures, and epigraphs, which when considered in tandem bring out the planning, administration, development, inclusive gender roles and social hierarchies. The descriptions of the architecture, roads, and temples offer insight regarding construction skills and governance that was inclusive. The description of Mahanavami Dibba brings into the mind of the reader, the splendour of the *Navarātrī* festival (festival of nine nights culminating in the destruction of the evil power – asura - by the Goddess Durga). The details of the religiocultural and social interweaving of practices from traveller's descriptions bring out the past splendour.

Chapter two provides a detailed description on how women came to live in the palace, while being offered (or received) in wedding by royal or ministerial class of people or into the service of king or queen or as a part of expanding kingdom, by marrying the neighbouring king's daughter. The author describes in detail about the art and music of the times, that included singing, playing musical instruments, as also about leisure time which included taking bath in the tanks. Such social events suggest some degree of freedom bestowed on women. The use of the palanquins by royal women specially bringing out the hierarchy in type of palanquin i.e. the gold palanquin by the queen and silver palanquin by other wives of king, shows the hierarchy within queens and their status, depending on their closeness to the king. While describing life in the king's harem, the author muses if joining harem assured women of sustainable income - like in government jobs - all this at the cost of their personal freedom, as they could not have perceived a life outside the palace. The chapter describes the literary works of royal women. The author describes the context when the works were written. In order to gain insight into literary works by non-royal women, she describes a lady who wrote in eight different languages and in four different styles. The literary skill of the royal women gained expression through their writings in Sanskrit and a few in Telugu, regarding the wars, and expeditions led by the kings, and their sons. It speaks not only of royal life but about the education and scholarship enjoyed by the royal women. The royal women as well as few common women offered donations, *mahādāna*

(generous donations on auspicious occasions) in various forms like gold silver, pearls, livestock, trees and villages. Women also made a mark in history through donations and endowments. Interestingly not all of these women were from noble backgrounds but were appreciated for their dedicated services hence endowments were announced in their names.

Chapter 3 is all about courtesans and performing artists, which flourished in those times. The descriptions do not just come from the existing Kannada literature alone but also from the narrative of the foreign travellers then and more importantly from the sculptures on the walls of the temples which artistically depict women performing dance, playing musical instruments or discharging their duties. The significant role played by women in the social religious and economic spheres is well captured. The currency of respect to human persons could be drawn from the descriptions of nearly 64 types of talents the courtesans were expected to master which equated them to performing artists. The author relates the significant talent of courtesans referring to Laksmisa's *Jaimini Bharata* which also vouches for the same. The layout in the city and the quarters of the courtesans and the decorative thrones and chairs where the courtesans sat themselves, provides a glimpse to the reader that prominence was given to courtesans and stresses on the fact that it was considered auspicious if they were to be sighted. The chapter is replete with different games the courtesans mastered, the role played by them in courts and entertainment through music, playing of musical instruments, dance and witty dialogues. It is interesting to note that they were well respected and many left their property to the kings when they died, if they did not have an inheritor. Besides courtesans, the description of roles played by women from maids to swordswomen, wrestlers to human bearers (carrying women), bailiffs, judges and watchwomen brings out the employability of women and recognition of the fact that women were trusted to perform the tasks. May be that is one of the reasons where they were exchanged in war. But certainly, the descriptions challenge us to think that the women were allowed to flourish and were not discriminated.

Chapter 4 describes women in temple rituals/festivals. Women's role in religious and non-religious functions is brought out with clear description of different roles of priestess, entertainer (through song, dance, playing of musical instruments), scholar and other roles like cooking and upkeep of the temple. The author elaborates on the concept of temple women and from different descriptions by different authors, one overarching description of dedicated service to the temple becomes evident. The method which brought a woman in temple service is described as by birth or at some point, promised by parents for fulfilment of a wish - the condition of fulfilment being dedicating the daughter to the temple, widows were entered into temple service as were children born to ladies in service of temple. Sometimes kings donated the services of a skilled entertainer or dancer to a temple as a part of service to temple. *Raṅga puṇā* i.e. service to God through devotional music and dance and entertainment was looked up as a religious service or *sevā*. That probably was the reason art was encouraged and so also women's participation giving women the self-worth. Thus, entertainment of deity as *seva* was the principal focus and maintaining artists through donation continued the practice of religious aspect of music in temple, using women which also acknowledged positive role played by women in cementing religion and socio-economic life.

While chapter 4 focusses on women and their role in festivities, it brings to fore, the marital status of the woman who took part in such religious and non-religious celebrations. The women who took part in such festivities were designated as *Sumangalī* (auspicious women) - so designated by the status of being in marital ties with a husband who was alive and by virtue of being *sumangali* got invited to all social functions. In Chapter 5 on *Satī*, starts with introduction to status of woman after the death of her husband. From some inscriptions on *Satīkal* (*Satī* is the process of immolating oneself, *Kal* means stone), rich literary sources describe the practice of the wife immolating herself heroically after the death of her husband. The sources are not clear on whether the practice of *sati* was socially sanctioned, or subject to individual decision or indirect coercion was the trigger. A wife who immolated herself attained a deity like status and was declared virtuous. The practice was based on the

belief that wife is a part (body, mind and soul) of her husband and it was believed that he could not go to heaven minus some part of his body, mind and soul.

Conclusion on the life and times of women in that period is drawn in Chapter 6. The chapter neatly pieces together and establishes linkages with chapters 1 through 5, drawing inferences on the position of women in the Vijayanagara. The space available to the women during the three dynastic reigns, spanning from 1336 to 1565 shows the dynamics of gender with reference to religio-cultural and social life and participation of women. The concluding chapter brings out the relationality of the gender and the interplay of social status and the respect for occupation that was upheld, including that of the courtesans. The author brings caution while sourcing literature from international travellers, as their cultural embeddedness and sensitivity could have been limited. Also going by historiography, the actions were portrayed from a man's lens, it could lack perspectives from female gender, because most of the actions portrayed, are in the service of men and narrated by men.

Nevertheless, they do bring to light the unoppressed nature of participation of women in celebrations and the shared happiness of women during festivities like *Vasantotsava*, celebrating love and *Mahānavamī*, celebrating victory of good over evil. Women had freedom to do what they wanted, as was inferred from her status. If she belonged to royal family or was a married lady - in these two settings their freedom was limited - when compared to unmarried women and courtesans. On the other hand, those girls who entered the King's harem had to sever relations with their family, which certainly would have brought some mental agony to the women in harem.

The scholarly contributions came from some royal women on some limited topics and earned recognition from kings and palace residents. Today they also serve as valuable resources, as they portray the lived experiences from female perspectives in those situated times, informing the reader first hand. Women also contributed to the societal developments albeit through religious functions

by donating lands, cattle, gold silver coins including making provisions for daily *prasadam*s.

Polygamy practice would have made it challenging to the wives, although the drudgery of the household chores would get divided. The patriarchal society favoured the birth of a son, yet the practice of eliminating girl child at birth was not observed. While the mother was honoured on giving birth to a son, the practice of penalizing the mother for giving birth to a girl child was not a norm. The Sati practice, although believed to add spiritual benefit to her husband and the family by remaining *sumangalī* (auspicious) forever. The book concludes, bringing in to focus, a comfortable space for women, even as courtesans, the respect prevailed for the fact that they were talented. They brought more travellers to the empire, and thereby more economy. This mutual respect for everyone probably was one of the reasons for providing space for women to grow and flourish. Although, men took the primary role of being in military or administration or even as temple priest, the women were satisfied with secondary roles relegated to them, like courtesans and temple dancers.

All in all, the book makes a valuable contribution to the existing historical texts with dual aim of being descriptive and analytical bringing out the position of women based on epigraphs, descriptions on temples, extant literature as well as narration of foreign travellers and visitors who enjoyed patronage of kings and were privy to inside information which very few had access to. The maps and black and white pictures add context to the temporality of the book. Another aspect of the chapter is the celebration of festivals, specially centred around *Vasantotsava* (celebration of spring festival) in Chaitra seen by temple carvings of happy women, sometimes with men splashing coloured water which is also correlated with travellers and historians writings which also indirectly brings out the happiness quotient in women and considering occasions that bring about such merriment was encouraged also depicts the unoppressive nature of the king towards women in general and queens in specific. It steps into the gap in the literature and does justice in bringing out the status of women in Vijayanagara empire during the golden period.

Ann Smith and Claudia Mitchell, Editors (2023) *Girls in the Pandemic: Transnational Perspectives*, USA: Berghahn Books, Pp. 224, ISBN 978-1-80073-807-2, Price: Rs. 11162/-

- Nischint Hora

‘Girl in the Pandemic: Transnational Perspectives is an important publication for the period and its focus area. The different chapters are about the early pandemic, and its ongoing impact. The editors Claudia Mitchell and Ann Smith are from McGill University.

The concept of time acquires a new meaning, by the authors and the editors themselves as is described in the Introduction. Time was changing even while they were writing the chapters. Some chapters are two months into the pandemic, some in the second wave, the immediate past and constant changing present, events unfolding as they were writing and an unknown future staring back are present in this book. They emphasise the importance of ‘time’ during crisis in a girl’s life. There is a sense of immediacy and identifiability as we have all lived through it and share common experiences.

It covers eight countries from four continents, that is Argentina, Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Thailand, Poland, South Africa and Uganda are represented in this book. The authors are from the global south. The adolescent girls and young women are from schools, colleges, urban and rural areas, hospitals and from the streets and homes.

The methods used by the researchers: document analysis, telephone interviews, social media, reflexive writing, ethnography from a distance. Secondary data was largely used. Food security and safety and Collective care took precedence as is reflected in most of the writings.

The major Ebola epidemic, in many parts of Africa, just preceding the COVID-19 pandemic is referred to throughout the book. Nidhi Kapoor in the first chapter ‘5 lessons from past Ebola epidemics’, uses learnings of the Ebola 2018 epidemic in Eastern Democratic region of Congo as the basis of her chapter. She uses available data and conversations from Ebola survivors.

She points out to the further risks faced by girls and women of the ‘shadow pandemic’ of sexual and gender-based violence. She brings to focus the secondary harms faced by women and girls, as homes become places of violence. This is reiterated elsewhere in the book.

In the Ebola epidemic there was an increased spike in adolescent pregnancies mainly from out of school girls. 56% women were affected compared to only 9% men the rest were children. She says that though there were more men than woman fatalities in the COVID-19 pandemic, which doesn’t mean that COVID-19 has had and will have lesser effect on women and girls in terms of their safety issues. Ebola served as a warning to prepare for what can happen. She stresses on the need to apply a gender lens to COVID-19 public health analysis. Child protection and the awareness of gendered norms and practices must be factored in future plans, with appropriate resource allocations.

The next chapter ‘How to Build “Meaningful Bonds” with Poor Young Women? State Interventions during the Lockdown in Argentina’ by Ana Cecilia Gaitán. The geographical location is the suburban area of Greater Buenos Aires, a poorer more densely populated area with more incidents of COVID-19. The author analyses the state interventions and challenges faced when the shelter centre for girls had to shut down in the pandemic.

Argentina had come up with a programme ‘the neighbourhood helps the neighbourhood’ in which national, provincial, and local governments, in coordination with the social organizations in the communities, worked on solutions including creating a Hotline for the protection of people’s health and access to food. They found that the neighbourhood was more effective in building bonds. Gender based violence was given a priority to be attended to. In Argentina, the protection of women and girls’ rights in the pandemic situation, depended more on arrangements within the society, social organisations, and the neighbourhood rather than formal structures.

‘What It All Means Young Rural Women in South Africa Confronting COVID-19’ by Nokukhanya Ngcobo, Zinhle Nkosi, and Ayub Sheik.

Their study is based on eight South African University students aged between seventeen and twenty-six. They write about an increase of ‘intimate terrorism’ that the lockdown created. Since protective aspect of universities was lost, interaction with friends were limited, it led to domestic violence. There were earlier and forced marriages, increase in teen pregnancies and transactional sex. Dropouts increased, so did child labour and there was greater food insecurity and malnutrition. The economic stress made them feel shame. They were often trapped with their abusers. This has been reported in other chapters as well. The closures of hair salons caused distress because in their community a good hairstyle is of prime importance. The stigma attached to being recipients of government aid and of contracting the virus put their health and relationships more at risk.

This chapter has a certain sincerity as the authors say they now have more empathy, and are concerned not only about their academic but overall health of the students in COVID-19.

The next chapter moves on to Uganda, ‘Women Teachers Support Girls during the COVID-19 School Closures in Uganda’ by Christine Apiot Okudi. It focuses on the association SWT (Senior Women Teachers) in Uganda whose role it is to protect girls, see to their retention and attendance, provide information, on sexual and reproductive health, besides being their mentors. They are also responsible in promoting gender equality.

They study an urban and a rural district of Uganda. The SWT members are their research assistants to reach out to the girls in their study on the effects of COVID-19.

Their found that amongst other material things the girls asked for sanitary pads. Some early marriages took place in rural areas because of the lure of bride price. A poignant case study is reported where a young girl gets pregnant, has a baby but the baby dies. The SWT comes to her rescue to support and guide her and her family, to continue her education. This human-interest story emphasises the role of organisations like the SWT’s in a girl’s life.

We now move on to Poland where a group of young feminist students, activists who met at a feminism class, initiated the group ‘Diners in the Time of pandemic’ this chapter ‘Experiencing Care Young Women’s Response to COVID-19 Crises in Poland’ by Anna Bednarczyk, Zuzanna Kapciak, Kinga Madejczak, Alicja Seǳikowska, Natalia Witek, and Faustyna Zdziarska is about their experiences in response to the hunger crisis in Poland. These five students created the group to facilitate supporting people who needed food with those who were in a position to share supplies. This chapter was written in the 4th month of the pandemic. As care givers they were involved in the gathering and distribution of food deliveries in the first few months and later, looking for jobs for them. They were critical of the part played by the Polish government in care giving. Interestingly, the concept of care for them was characterized by the two features of voluntarism and reciprocity as different from care forced upon women by the gender-based division of labour. They narrate how one of the donors organized a box for people to donate food in her store, with information about the initiative. The success made the group expand the idea to more shops and grocery stores where people could donate their excess. They also felt this might work post pandemic as well for neighbours who need it.

They were dealing with 300 people a day, those who needed help and those willing to help. They worked on mental health issues as well. The relationship between care and feminism is constantly touched upon. Throughout the chapter there is a large emphasis on feminism and its role in what they are doing. A bunch of students taking action is highly relatable in our context as well.

They conclude by saying the pandemic made visible the academic community’s role in providing care for students, not only in the form of financial and emotional support but more importantly in teaching social responsibility in a crisis. It also relooked at the sources of support and care in a crisis.

The next chapter is from Ethiopia, 'COVID-19, Education, and Well-Being Experiences of Female Agriculture Students in Ethiopia' by Hannah Pugh, Eleni Negash, Frehiwot Tesfaye, and Madalyn Nielsen'. In this chapter they present their findings on the pandemic increasing the preexisting gender inequalities among young women between the ages of 18 to 24 studying in agricultural (ATVET) colleges of Ethiopia. These were supported by Agricultural Transformation through Stronger Vocational Education project of Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia women are largely unpaid workers making them the main caregivers. In the various multi ethnic and cultural groups the impact was felt differently. Those doing mainly care work were more impacted as observed in other chapters as well. Here too like elsewhere the students feared the unknown, were bored, feared for their safety and stressed at not being able to socialise. Almost all the students were impacted by sexual gender-based violence. One of the participants told the researcher that her mother wanted her to marry soon and also live near her. They mentioned the increase in sexual based gender violence, rape and early pregnancies which led to early marriage and often these cases were not reported to the police.

The researchers recommend that the government increase the funding to these agricultural colleges to look after the needs of the students including their mental health.

Coming nearer home, 'Exploring the Psychosocial Experiences of Women Undergraduates in Delhi, India, during the COVID-19 Pandemic' by Richa Rana, Poonam Yadav, and Shreya Sandhu. Their chapter is based on qualitative research of the social experiences of undergraduate students from lower socioeconomic background from Delhi university when colleges closed down. Confined to the house and taking on the role of care givers, they faced more restrictive practices. There were new stress factors in their academic, economic and social fields which added to the existing gender inequalities and difficulty in accessing education. Here too, the fear of early marriage lurked large.

For these students, college is a place of temporary freedom. The formation of college-based friendship as part of their girlhood, travelling alone, participating in other activities are major attractions in an otherwise mundane life, but parents see college education as a bridge to girls' marriage. Education is also thought to be improving the girls' lives. Some also earn on the side, to sponsor their own higher education this also stopped in the pandemic affecting their future.

‘Lockdown and Violence against Women and Children Insights from Hospital-Based Crisis Intervention Centers in Mumbai, India’ by Anupriya Singh, Sangeeta Rege, and Anagha Pradhan.

In this moving chapter, the authors recount case studies of those who sought support of the centre. Girls and women who were gender-based violence survivors were more impacted as access to facilities were closed. However, the Mumbai Municipal Corporation had declared Dilaasa centres (public hospital-based crisis intervention departments) an essential emergency service. At Dilaasa centers, amongst other things, the counsellors liaised with other support agencies to assist children in need of care and protection. The Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes (CEHAT) also operated a twenty-four-hour helpline for survivors across India.

They wrote this chapter from March to June 2020. In this period, Dilaasa centers were approached by 180 women and girl survivors of gender-based violence aged between 10 -24. There were sad cases of incest also reported. They recount the case of a 16-year-old who was sexually abused but her mother refused to believe her till Dilaasa intervened and got her police support. Another 20-year-old rape survivor needed an abortion and as such facilities were not available despite instructions of the government, the intervention of a councillor made it available to her and to others. Shelter homes access and release was difficult in these times. Quarantine, isolation, restrictions on mobility, lack of social support, and exposure to uncertainties caused restlessness, boredom, frustration, and, at times, violence among children and adolescents this too has been described elsewhere in the book. The location of

Dilaasa centers in hospitals, they being able to get help from the listed services and government agencies, along with the dedicated helpline, made them a very important service for those in distress. The authors recommend the need to create a readiness plan of all systems and departments, with clear guidelines of the working of support services during emergencies and better monitoring of the services.

In the third chapter on India, ‘The Impact of COVID-19 on Child Marriage in India’; by Gayatri Sharma and Ayesha Khaliq. This chapter specifically focuses on child marriage. They enumerate the reasons for increase in child marriages in vulnerable communities like Dalits Adivasis and Muslims who have already faced the brunt of socio-economic fallout of COVID-19.

Migrants’ who have lost jobs, for example, in Jharkhand with men returning and girls were at home, marriages were arranged with the returnees, also expenses were low in lockdown marriages. Social and economic instability as in some cases both parents had died, there were also natural calamities like the cyclone, these lead to more child marriages.

Child marriage is seen as a way of reducing costs in education, the existing low quality of education, does not equip them for jobs which also leads to early marriage. Another major factor is control over girls sexuality and the fear of violence against women, making it feel safe to marry early. Since schools were closed and education disrupted, and access to digital learning being limited for girls they were more likely to drop out and get married.

With less access to health system, reproductive health and other services the girls often feel marriage is a better option than living in a violent house. The second wave of covid reported an increase in elopement, the fear of trafficking and abandonment also increased the possibility of early marriage. Though government schemes were announced, but implementation was difficult as there were many loopholes in the system. The marriage age for girls was raised to 21, unfortunately more stress is on enforcement rather than care.

The authors stress the importance of identifying those most at risk for example children of migrants, whose income has anyway reduced, like in UP and Bihar, Bengal because of the cyclone, faced an added disadvantage, and importantly removing the stigma attached to Muslims. The government's policy should be based on non-discrimination, social justice and equality distribution and rehabilitation to reduce child marriage.

The next chapter is from Ethiopia, 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Child Domestic Workers in Ethiopia' by Annabel Erulkar, Welela Tarekegne, and Eyasu Hailu.

In this chapter they discuss Ethiopia's Biruh Tehsfa ("bright future") for All, a poverty alleviation programme for the education and mentoring of marginalised girls. It was suspended during the pandemic. The mentors are also from low-income project communities. Ethiopia Labour law allows girls to work from age 15 but are covered under labour laws from age 17 till then they are 'young workers' governed by their 'employers conscience.'

They undertook a descriptive qualitative study of the programme of both mentors and mentees. They found that many had continued working because they were poor. Some had lost their jobs or their incomes were reduced. Those who had just migrated from rural areas felt isolated as they lacked social support. Domestic workers lost jobs because their employers lost jobs. Employers showed less concern for the safety and health of their employees.

They were often in areas where they were vulnerable to the virus as the marketplace and public transport. Some preferred to go home, others decided to risk marriage as those who return to rural areas are anyway looked as carriers of the virus. The authors highly recommend the Biruh Tehsfa programme. It provides the girls with a network, gives them access to facilities and most importantly it engages the employers and mentors as well. Most importantly it gives them hope. There are 8475 girls in this programme. Practically all the girls wanted their safe space the Biruh Tehsfa to restart.

The last chapter ‘The New Normal for Young Transgender Women in Thailand Unspoken Gender-Based Violence in the Time of COVID-19’ by Rapeepun Jommaroeng, Sara Hair, Cheera Thongkrajai, Kath Kangbipoon, and Suda Bootchadee

The authors conducted this research with transgender women in the age group eighteen to twenty-five. All the researchers involved in the study were members of the LGBTIQ community.

The aim of this study was to explore how the transgender women were impacted in their employment, access to facilities, and decision making specially regarding sexual relationships. Most of the participants were students from middle class families and a few were from the lower economic social background who were facing economic problems because of losing jobs. There were students, cabaret dancers, those who worked in the night entertainment industry in Pattaya. Some of the students from middle class some were supported by their families, others parents too were without jobs, were unable to offer additional support. They could not access their hormonal treatment. Like students elsewhere they too faced problems financially and otherwise. Some were not welcomed back home. Dancers were seen as potential carriers of the virus.

There were relationship issues. Some were jilted as long-distance relations were difficult to sustain. The authors ask policy makers to understand the resilience of transgender women. As the authors say ‘impact of this outbreak has put them in a more difficult situation, since they have gone from economic independence to economic desperation’ which makes this chapter quite different from the others.

The book is very informative and readable. The various associations who worked with girls and women like the SWT, Biruh Tesfa, Dilassa, Diners in Time of Pandemic. AVTT College teachers are positive markers. The geographical range of the chapters covered is also commendable. It is an important document of the history of a critical period in our lives.

STATEMENT

To,
The President of India,
Rashtrapati Bhawan,
New Delhi,

Date: 26/09/2022

Sub: Request to frame laws regarding misuse of social media platforms against women

Respected President,

Members and supporters of the National Alliance for Women's Reservation Bill, which is a collective of movements and organizations seeking for greater representation of women in policy making, would like to draw your attention to the abuse and harassment faced by women on social media platforms. There is rampant misogyny and sexism that is affecting the physical and mental health of women of various ages, who try to connect with the world on social media platforms. The growing problem of digital threats making their way into the physical world is worrisome.

Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and others are some of the means for women to interact and voice their opinions to the rest of the world. Unfortunately, when the government allows these platforms to operate without proper filters to check hate speeches, misogyny or abuse towards gender, class, caste or religion, we have multi-layered problems.

Your attention is sought to the abuse women face on social media platforms. Misogyny and sexism, along with casteism and abusive language cannot be allowed to be the norm. Disparaging women, making threats, assault on our identity based on gender, caste, class, religion or any other criteria cannot be brushed under the carpet under any pretext. Nearly all women who are on social media platforms have faced, and continue to face threats and abuse. Women are tagged in posts to humiliate them, there are open threats of rape and violence, there is slut-shaming, insults, cat-calling and many more forms of abuse that degrade and humiliate the identity of the woman. If the woman is a social worker or has strong opinions on a subject, slurs like feminazi, and other expressions of insult are used, with impunity.

Constant harassment of women online deprives them of integrating with the rest of the world. The escalation from online trolling and abuse has also resulted in physical targeting and harm for women, offline. Grooming, gaslighting, bullying and stalking are some of the forms of intimidation and abuse that the legalservices.com identified. Studies have identified most crimes being committed by bot accounts, or fake accounts that hide behind anonymity. It is not just students, activists, or ordinary women who face patriarchal misogyny. Union Ministers, elected representatives of Parliament from various political parties, administrative officers, every woman has had to face abuse online.

Culprits who abuse, gaslight or harm women on social media platforms should not be allowed to get away from committing the crime. Regrettably, the silence of the social media platforms on the abuse results in shielding the culprits. It gives them impunity to graduate from verbal abuse to stalking, giving rape or murder threats, selling them online, and commit even more heinous crimes.

Be it Instagram, Twitter, Facebook or any other social media platform, the shielding of abusers is gravely affecting women on the social platforms. The gravity of the situation can be gauged from the fact that a lot of women have been forced to change their setting so that they do not receive direct replies.

We would like to point out that the platforms do not have filters to sift accounts for sexism, gender-based abuse or even simple abuse to women. We would like to bring to your attention that the platforms earn millions of dollars as profit, and do not invest any bit of it to safeguard the weaker sections of society from abuse or assault. Neither the platforms, no the Government of India have taken note of the human trafficking committed online through such platforms in the form of Sulli deals or Bulli bai apps. The selling of identities forced the weaker women to disconnect from the world of social media altogether. The physical threats of stalking and potential assault, have also not been investigated. Available laws allow women to reach out to the police and the judicial system only 'after' the crime has been committed, thus negating the space for 'freedom of expression' for over 50% of the population in this digital era.

This letter is to urge you to enforce filter systems so that social media does not become an added platform for abuse of women.

As the President of India, we urge you to get the government to look into the issue of online abuse of women in the country. We ask you to consider the following suggestions while talking to the concerned ministries and officials:

1. All social media platforms be made accountable for the online abuse happening based on gender and its intersections. Their filters are updated to sift out abuse and address the same immediately. **Failure to comply with the clauses of gender-based filters, these platforms are not given the permission to operate in the country.** The stringency of permits to operate in the country needs to be stronger. India would not be the only country that stops such toxic platforms to influence its' youth and society.

2. All platforms need to be made liable for gender-based abuse on their platforms. **Their ignorance of the language of the users or any other lame excuse is unacceptable.** As companies that earn huge profits, it should not be difficult for them to hire content developers from the different languages in the country. We find it ironic that they have enough staff that can allow software to type and communicate in every regional language of the country, but do not have the ability to hire people who can sift out abusive language. When abusers find a loophole and continue to abuse, it is the responsibility of the platform to plug the leaks. Asking women to block their accounts and change settings is being restrictive and telling them that their complaints are baseless according to their filters, is unacceptable.

3. The Ministry of Law must frame regulations for the operation of these platforms within the country. The alacrity with which porn sites are blocked, is the same alacrity that is required to block platforms, to curb gender-based abuse. The ministry needs to understand that stopping crimes at the earliest would safeguard women and children of the country from physical and mental trauma.

4. The Government of India must take up the issue of online abuse, based on gender and awareness about patriarchy and misogyny with governments from the countries where the platforms originate. GoI needs to cooperate with other countries to stop the abuse of women on social media platforms. There needs to be comprehensive global legal accountability of the companies that design these platforms.

5. Social media platforms must review their filters regularly based on the above mentioned criteria (gender, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, culture or any other) and the responsibility must lie with the platforms. Waiting for the victim-survivors, NGO/CBOs to complain to take action is unprofessional on the part of these platforms.

Respected President, we call on you to work with government agencies that deal with safeguarding the rights of citizens, to ensure that the internet services of the country do not become a space where women and other marginalized groups are rendered more vulnerable than they already are.

Looking forward to a positive response from you.

Regards,

National Alliance for Women's Representation Bill

Justice for Women Wrestlers Calling upon Organisations and Citizens for Solidarity

We, the undersigned representatives of women's organisations and concerned citizens, extend our solidarity with the women wrestlers who have been fighting for dignity and justice. We strongly condemn the sense of entitlement and impunity with which crimes are committed and the accused are allowed to go scot free; this must be called out and put an end to.

We call upon all concerned citizens and organisations to come out and protest the injustice, in any manner they find suitable, be it joining the sportspersons at Jantar Mantar or taking out protest marches in your own areas. There is an urgent need to amplify our demand for a fair trial, the arrest of Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, and his immediate suspension from all offices that he is holding.

The barbaric repression of the protest by cutting off civic amenities, and then attacking those who were joining the protests in solidarity is suppression of democracy and highly reprehensible. The assault on the players and media

personnel will not stop either the wrestlers or the citizens in struggle from seeking justice.

A complaint of sexual harassment by India's star women wrestlers of international fame, who have brought laurels to the country is dealt with contempt by the police, administration, the state government and shockingly by MHA too. Delhi Police brazenly displayed their bias for a political person belonging to the current ruling dispensation –prevaricated on filing an FIR, as is mandated by both the POCSO and POSH until the honourable Supreme Court intervened.

The women wrestlers had last protested in January 2023 in Delhi but ended the protest on the assurance of investigation that turned out to be anything but transparent. They, therefore, had no choice but to return, to ask the police to do their duty, and make the report of the Oversight Committee that had probed the wrestlers' allegation, available to them. The IOA has refused to share the report of the Committee, while its members have openly belittled the women wrestlers, accusing them of politicising their complaints.

The reported sexual harassment by the WFI chief, the then sports minister of Haryana and some other coaches employed by WFI is outrageous. It is not as if the top echelons of the government were unaware of the corruption and sexual misconduct of its members. Unfortunately, all appeals to justice fell on deaf ears. We have no compunction in saying that the current ruling dispensation - BJP government at the Centre - is providing the accused political patronage and protecting them - Mr Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh is an MP representing the ruling BJP in Parliament. Also, Mr. Sandeep Singh continues to be a minister in the BJP government of Haryana. (He has been a cabinet minister with sports and other portfolios; after much protest by women's organisations, the portfolio of sports has been taken from him but he continues to be a minister.) As if all this was not enough, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh has reportedly been intimidating and threatening the wrestlers - the wrestlers say they fear for their lives.

We, therefore, demand the following:

- Arrest BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, without any further delay, and suspend him from all political and government positions
- Dismiss and arrest Minister Sandeep Singh in the BJP government of Haryana
- Ensure supremacy of rule of law with a fair, scientific and time bound investigation followed by a chargesheet.
- Respect the right to protest against injustice. In this case it means immediate restoration of electricity at the protest site, along with provisions of drinking water and security for all who are joining them in solidarity.
- Let the investigation of all charges be led by a retired Supreme Court or High Court Judge.
- Provide security for the protesting wrestlers
- Initiate action against police officers and the concerned DCP for brutal assault on protestors and journalists.

Appeal by –

- All India Democratic Women's Association: PK Sreemathy, Mariam Dhawale, Maimoona Mollah, Asha Sharma
- All India Mahila Sanskritik Sangathan: Keya De, Chhabi Mohanty, Ritu Kaushik, Sita Singh
- ANHAD: Shabnam Hashmi
- Indian Christian Women's Movement, Delhi Chapter
- National Federation of Indian Women: Aruna Roy, Annie Raja, Aruna Sinha, Deepti Bharati
- Organization Unity in Compassion (UIC): Minakshi Singh

Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, Vimukta anti-caste feminists condemn the Hathras case judgement

On the remembrance day of anti-caste crusader Savitri Phule, we the daughters of Savitri from Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi-Vimukta communities strongly condemn the judgement of the Uttar Pradesh special court which acquitted all four accused –all dominant caste Thakur men – of a heinous gangrape and murder of a 19-year old Valmiki (oppressed caste) woman, in the Hathras district that took place on 19th September 2020.

This recent judgement delivered on 3rd March, 2023, two and half years after the brutal violence, convicted only one of the four accused, Sandeep of culpable homicide not amounting to murder and offences under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (“SC/ST Act”). This is despite the dying declaration of the victim where she clearly named some of the accused of ‘*zabardasti*’ i.e. forcibly sexually violating her. The entire process has been marred by injustices and is steeped in Brahminical patriarchy.

The family of the victim suffered insurmountable hurdles and threats right from getting the case registered to getting the medico-legal examination of the victim done in time. The police were complicit in burning the mortal remains of the victim without her family’s consent. The judgement comes merely days before the International Women’s Day, but there is nothing for us oppressed caste women to celebrate on this day, we are instead routinely reminded that our womanhood will not be respected in this caste ridden society. This is also a bitter reminder for all of us fighting for social justice and equality.

Targeted caste-based sexual violence has a long oppressive history, right from the religiously sanctified and undignified traditions of Devdasi, Breast tax, exoticizing paintings of tribal women’s bodies for oppressors’ gaze, and amusement, to stripping and naked parading assertive DBAV women. This is despite the strength of constitutional guarantees such as the Protection of Civil

Rights Act, 1955 (1955) and the SC/ST Act, 1989, which seeks to extend all three forms of justice to Dalits: Punitive, Preventive, and Restorative. Efficacies of these laws have remained poor, owing to India's caste impunity culture. This caste impunity is institutionalised in the entire criminal justice system.

To us it is evident how justice is delayed and denied to the oppressed caste women, with the long list of cases of violent atrocities of Mathura, Bhanwari Devi and the mother and daughter duo of Khairlanji village, killed with two other male members of their family. In all these cases the oppressed caste women have not been viewed as "ideal victims" deserving of justice. The casteist notion that the oppressed caste woman is promiscuous or sexually available is entrenched in the justice system. Thus, an act of sexual violence by oppressor caste men on the bodies of oppressed caste women is deemed to be an act of caste entitlement not meriting legal redressal. This institutionalised casteism in the delivery of justice is also evident of the stark contrast in the way the Delhi gang rape case and the recent Hathras case were dealt with. While the overall conviction rate in rape cases is 25 percent, it is a mere 2 percent in cases of caste-based sexual violence.

The recent Hathras verdict also reminds us of the Khairlanji case where the three accused were acquitted by the court on the charge of sexual violence and under the Atrocities Act. Additionally, the court refused to invoke the SC/ST Act and held that the murder was based on revenge and the caste was not at work here. There has been consistent and systematic miscarriage of justice in cases caste based sexual violence for the whittling down of the Atrocities Act. This can be evidenced from the NCRB report which has consistently shown that atrocities against Dalits have been on the rise in recent years.

We are enraged by the incessant violence perpetrated on our caste-oppressed communities. Like in every caste-based sexual atrocity, this judgement reveals the depth and the scale of the systemic oppressor-caste hatred and disregard of the human rights of Dalits. This depraved indifference has claimed hundreds

of thousands of lives, so much so that it amounts to an ongoing genocide. In the case of Hathras, the state machinery, comprising police personnel, politicians, and government officials, have not only failed to implement the rule of law, but has also inflicted more violence on the victim's family.

In the wake of this unjust judgement, we collectively demand the following:

First and foremost, we demand that the state should file an appeal without any further delay before the High Court.

Additionally, a senior woman criminal lawyer, preferably from the DBAV community, should be appointed as the Special Public Prosecutor under section 15 of the SC/ST Act. All four Thakur men named in the victim's statement must be appropriately prosecuted under the IPC and SC & ST Prevention of Atrocities (PoA) Act.

- An inquiry must be set up against the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police involved in the foundational miscarriage of justice.
- The Investigating Officer from the State police must be proceeded against for willful neglect of duty, under section 4 of the SC/ST Act.
- We demand implementation of the SC/ST Act in letter and in the spirit of the Constitution.

Going beyond our demands is also for the implementation of preventive measures to keep a check on such rampant caste-based atrocities. Further, we demand that the psycho-social support through social workers and psychologists be offered to the family of the victim given the immense trauma they have been subjected to since the time of the incident and during the course of the trial.

We also want to underscore the need for working towards collectively building practices of restorative justice and transformative justice within an anti-caste feminist framework for dismantling Brahminical patriarchy.

Several observations to this effect have been made in our previous statement.

We, as women and queer persons, from DBAV communities, remain firm in our demands. We hold the value of social justice close to our lives. We are committed to eliminating all forms of caste and gender-based sexual violence.

References

1. We refrain from giving any name to the victim of caste-based sexual violence in Hathras for ethical reasons to respect and humanise her in her death. We believe this sort of name-giving puts the burden of ‘heroism’ and dehumanises the victim. We would like to ‘say her name’ to visibilise and humanise her but legally it is not possible. (This statement is a bit confusing; do we agree that we want to name the victim, but refrain for legal reasons? Or do we feel that name giving is dehumanising? This needs to be reworked accordingly)

2. DBAV women, trans and non-binary people’s Collective is an autonomous group and made up of three generations of Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi and Vimukta activists, many of us are engaged in national regional, and grassroots activism, many are research scholars, academics, artists, poets, writers, journalists, lawyers, and other professionals. This engagement in anti-caste activism, knowledge production, and praxis spans across five decades. As a group, we strive for horizontal and inclusive collaborations. We acknowledge the strength and challenges our diversity brings and we aim for utmost respect and dignity for members that face multiple marginalities and are the most marginalised even within this space of oppressed communities. Our fight for the annihilation of caste and gender Justice is intersectional, we believe for all oppressed to be free, the most marginalised should be free.

ALL INDIA DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

2253-E, Shadi Khampur, New Ranjit Nagar, New Delhi – 110008

Email: aidwacec@gmail.comWebsite: aidwaonline.org

Press Statement

Date: 4 March 2023

AIDWA Statement on Hathras Gang Rape and Murder Case Judgement

In a shocking judgment from Hathras, the Special Judge Trilok Singh Pal (SC/ST Act) has acquitted all the four accused persons involved in the horrific Hathras gangrape and murder case. This was a case in which a 19-year-old Dalit girl was gangraped and brutally assaulted on 14 September 2020 by 4 upper caste Thakur men of the village while working in the fields, and later died in hospital on 29 September 2020. Only one main accused Sandeep has been convicted for culpable homicide not amounting to murder and offences under the SC/ST Act. The judgment which reeks of patriarchal and casteist bias acquits all the four upper caste men of gangrape and murder, and does not give any credence to even the dying declaration of the victim, and the brutal assault obviously suffered by her.

Since the case was reported, AIDWA and others had pointed out that the U.P. Police had acted in a biased manner and botched up the investigation from the beginning. In this case, there had been a history of harassment of the victim by the main accused Sandeep for a long time. Though the girl named the accused just after the incident, the Police did not include the charge of gangrape in the first FIR. This was captured by reporters on video. Though the girl was shifted to an Aligarh Hospital the medical examination of the girl was done 8 days after the incident, by which time, obviously, no evidence of rape was present either on the clothes of the girl which had been changed or on parts of her body which had been repeatedly washed. However, it was noted that she suffered fractures due to repeated strangulation. The doctor in the hospital refused to rely on the victim's statement and stated that he would wait for the forensic evidence to testify whether rape had taken place, despite knowing that the forensic examination was meaningless as the samples had been sent several

days after the incident. The victim's mother who had found her had also clearly stated that blood was flowing from her vagina.

The DGP of Uttar Pradesh had also with an obvious bias pronounced that no rape had taken place on the basis of the meaningless forensic test. In Hathras, the upper caste Thakurs mounted an attack on the girl's family claiming that no crime had been committed, and the family had to be provided security by the CRPF.

It is also relevant to remember that when the girl passed away on 29 September due to her injuries, the Police hastily cremated her and did not allow the family to go near her when the cremation was taking place. Several outraged citizens and organisations including lawyers had then approached the Supreme Court for the transfer of this case to the CBI. The Allahabad High Court also took up *suo moto* notice and agreed to monitor the investigation which was transferred to the CBI.

The Special Judge held that because the victim had not named all the accused in the statement, she had given to a female Police Constable, five days after the incident, her statement given just before her death or after the incident or that of her mother could not be relied upon, and the victim could have been tutored to change her statement to allege gangrape by four persons. The Judge also held that the offence did not amount to murder as there was no intention to kill the girl.

The girl's statement to the Aligarh Magistrate on 22 September amounted to a dying declaration. Even earlier on 14 September, the victim had stated on video that the accused had done 'zabardasti' with her. The 22 September statement, which is a dying declaration statement has been established to be conclusive evidence for rape trials in India. The Supreme Court has highlighted the importance of the dying declaration in several cases and stated that the dying declaration can form the sole basis of the conviction. The judgment in concluding that the accused Sandeep and others had no intention to murder the victim as she was conscious after the incident was also wrong. In the Nirbhaya case, in similar circumstances the Courts held that murder was

proved. In any case the accused should be deemed to have known the consequences of their brutal attack on the victim.

AIDWA demands that the CBI should immediately appeal against the verdict so that the injustice meted out to the victim and her family can be undone.

P K Sreemathi
President

Adv Kirti Singh
Legal Advisor

Mariam Dhawale
General Secretary

The Hathras Judgment is a Sharp Blow to the Struggle of Women, Especially Dalit Women, for Justice

Date: 3rd March 2023

Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan Delhi is shocked and saddened by the decision in the Hathras case.

However, the reasons given by the Hon'ble Judge for acquitting the 4 accused of gang rape and murder can be analyzed only after reading the full judgment (not yet in public). It should be borne in mind that the girl had in her dying declaration identified by name the perpetrators of the violence against her person.

The experience of the women's movement is that the fight for justice in cases of sexual violence against women, especially minorities and Dalit women, is extremely complex and exhausting. If the accused are in power or are protected by those in power, the investigating agencies leave so many lacunae in the investigation and file chargesheet with loop holes, which benefit the accused. The security of the witnesses too is not ensured, for which also the complainant has to bear the brunt.

Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan Delhi demands from Yogi Government of Uttar Pradesh to challenge the acquittal of the accused of murder and gang rape

before the Allahabad High Court and ensure justice to the deceased young girl and her family members.

Shobha
(President)

Poonam kaushik
(General Secretary)

Submission to the 22nd Law Commission of India on Uniform Civil Code from the Disability Perspective

This submission is being made in response to the Public Notice dated 14th June 2023 issued by the 22nd Law Commission of India soliciting views and ideas of the public about the Uniform Civil Code. As organisations and individuals working with persons with disabilities (PwDs), we would like to state that we are an interested stakeholder in this process and therefore are submitting our views and concerns on the same.

At the outset, bereft of a draft or even an outline of the proposed UCC, responding to this public notice is an extremely challenging exercise. Nevertheless, we are submitting our response, from the disability perspective, on the premise of the right to equality for all and the obligation on the State to ensure that it endeavours to provide both *de jure* and *de-facto* rights to all. This must be done with the clear intention to strengthen existing systems and processes in order to reduce inequalities especially for all minorities and vulnerable sections, including PwD's. There is no gainsaying the fact that uniformity and equality are not synonymous with each other.

As we understand, a proposed UCC would cover the following aspects:

- Institution of Marriage
- Provisions of Maintenance (spousal and children)
- Adoption

- Guardianship
- Inheritance (inclusive of succession and wills)
- Real time execution of property rights
- Trust/Gifts/Endowments
- HuF and Waqf
- Community properties such as forest land, shamlat lands, sarbasadharana or poramboke etc can be governed by either customary laws in certain cases like tribal related properties and/or managed by local panchayats. These common lands get used for the benefit of the community and this includes their use for the community's vulnerable including the disabled.

Our Concerns

If these laws are changed, PwDs as individuals are due to get impacted, as they encompass different roles of being children, spouses, siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, dependent family members and members of a vulnerable and invisibilised population within the larger community, during the course of their lives. Across age, sex, genders, sexual identities, religious identities, caste identities, ethnic identities, class identities and regional locations, PwDs, a very diverse and heterogeneous population, inhabit all these spaces, within and outside marriage, within family and in institutions. Therefore, any discussion on these issues needs to take their voices, concerns, needs and vulnerabilities into account.

Vulnerability of PwDs

Our experience reveals that PwDs are extremely vulnerable to a range of abuses and exploitations within the familial, community and social spheres. For example, there are cases where PwDs are deprived of their share in family property; they are subjected to abuse within the family, in case they are chosen to inherit the property willed to them with the express intent of providing security to them over their siblings. Many are deprived of the right to marry, adopt and reproduce and have families of their own. These aspects are further impacted by the provision of 'unsoundness of mind', which grossly impact

persons with intellectual, developmental and psychosocial disabilities in comparison to other disabilities.

In contrast to these realities, are existing benefits for PwDs in certain aspects of the various personal laws and customs. For example, under the HuF system, PwDs have to be taken care of and provided for from the HuF funds by the Karta, as they are shareholders in the HuF property by birth. Under Muslim law also PwDs inherit by birth, marriage and consanguinity and their share has to be at par with other non-disabled inheritors. For emphasis, it is clarified that this ratio cannot be changed through a will.

Synchronise with Other Laws

Any process addressing the legal framework related to these domains of life will have to synchronise on the issue of legal capacity and supported decision making, as provided for both under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act, 2016) and the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 (MHCA, 2017).

In addition to personal laws with regard to PwDs, other civil laws, schemes and notifications also cover some of these aspects. For instance, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2007 (UNCRPD), which India ratified consequent to which we enacted the RPwD Act, 2016 and MHCA, 2017 reaffirms the rights to home, family, parentage, right to own property etc. for PwDs. Both the RPwD Act, 2016 and The National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 2000 create systems for endowments to support PwDs including destitute and abandoned PwDs and guardianship processes to assist PwDs in managing their lives and assets including immovable properties. These domestic laws create a strong regime of social protections for PwDs. The role of the State ought to be that of a regulator, which acts within a needs-based model to eradicate bad practices and strengthen good practices through legal reform. Its role must be limited to ensuring that all persons including PwDs are able to freely exercise and enjoy the rights guaranteed under these

life domains and seek justice through equitable, accessible and inclusive processes.

Existing vs Proposed New Regime

Furthermore, personal law regimes have some safeguards for disabled persons as already stated above. If these safeguards in customary and personal laws were to be strengthened with further safeguards access to justice becomes easier for vulnerable populations including PwDs because they don't have to fight the community conscience as well as a legal battle. It is well known that when faced with no option the government had previously brought in prohibition of child marriage and sati. However, it took almost a century for the practice of sati to die out and child marriage still continues. In such a case if a disabled minor is married off against their wishes, it becomes very hard to go against the entire community and deal with an adversarial justice system. Similar situations can be anticipated where the law is in conflict with societal customs instead of being used as a tool to amend these systems to provide equal rights and protections within the customary and societal context. For example, the 2005 amendment to Hindu law which extended coparcenary rights to daughters has provided an avenue for women to access their rights within the societal context. We feel that it is easier to amend an existing legal regime to remove impediments to equality than to replace the same with a completely new regime.

Hold Consultations

Reform of personal laws, or for that matter any law, should only be done after wide consultations with all stakeholders. We therefore urge the Law Commission of India, to not go ahead without adequate consultations with all stakeholders including the disabled by hearing their voices and that of their representative groups and organisations. It would also be pertinent to note that the RPwD Act, 2016 recognises 21 types of disabilities. Their lived experiences and interactions within these domains may vary depending on their disabilities and the degrees of their impairment. Consultations with all of them is therefore imperative. We urge the Law Commission of India, to give serious

consideration to our views and also hear the voices of PwDs and their representative groups and organisations.

Additional Recommendations

At the same time, we would also recommend that the Law Commission should take up for consideration some important issues on which many of us have been advocating since long. These include:

1. Harmonisation of all Indian laws in consonance with the provisions of the UNCRPD;
2. Amending Article 15, 15(1), 15(2), 15(4) and 16(2) of the Constitution of India to include “disability” as a ground on which discrimination is prohibited;
3. Amending Section 3(3) of the RPwD Act, 2016 which legitimises discrimination of the disabled; and
4. Removing other discriminatory provisions against PwDs under various laws in force; repeal/amending laws that bar disabled from contesting elections (municipal/panchayat/cooperative societies), removing the provision of “unsoundness of mind” etc.

Representation drafted by:

Muralidharan, General Secretary, National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled (NPRD)

Roma Bhagat, Advocate, Delhi High Court

Seema Baquer, Cross-disability Professional

Sadhna Arya, Gender and Disability Activist

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Working Group on Law Commission Submission on the UCC

To,
The Hon'ble Chairperson and members,
Law Commission of India

14 July 2023

Sub: Response of feminist, queer and women's rights groups and individual feminists to Public Notice of the Law Commission of India dated 14/06/2023, soliciting views on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). Respected Chairperson and members of the Law Commission of India

We, the undersigned, write to you as representatives of feminist, queer and women's rights groups, as well as concerned citizens, who have been working on issues related to gender justice and equality for women from diverse communities across the country. We draw upon our collective experience over many decades, as we respond to the current discussion on the proposed Uniform Civil Code.

Our submission is in three parts:

1. Concerns related to the procedure adopted to initiate these discussions by the Law Commission of India (LCI).
2. Comments on substantive issues of uniformity, equality and non-discrimination vis à vis gender justice.
3. Governing principles for any efforts towards gender justice for all

1. CONCERNS RELATED TO PROCEDURE, ITS INTENT AND IMPACT

We write to express our grave concern regarding the public notice issued by the LCI soliciting views and ideas of the "public at large and recognised religious organisations on the UCC." Our concerns are as follows:

a) Ironically, despite the call of the LCI inviting 'views' from the public, there is complete lack of information about

(i) what would actually constitute this Uniform Civil Code

(ii) how it would conceive of “uniformity” in matters of marriage, divorce, custody, adoption, maintenance, inheritance, etc across diverse communities, historico-geographic locations, and irrespective of marital status, and

(iii) how the LCI envisions its implementation

b) In the absence of any concrete proposal, outline or framework or adequate time for the public to respond, what should have been a serious public engagement, has been reduced to an opaque process marked by political rhetoric and social media campaigns. Vested interests, ranging from temple associations to Resident Welfare Associations, and others are spreading a highly communalised campaign in favour of the idea of a UCC that specifically targets religious minority communities. Given the track record of the BJP-led government in power, serious apprehensions are being expressed by religious minority groups, tribal and Adivasi communities across the country about the intent and remit of the proposed exercise. It is extremely disappointing that the LCI, the foremost statutory body for legal deliberation in India, with an almost 200-year-old history of law reform, has issued this notice in such a casual and cavalier manner. Initiating an ill-informed and undemocratic process on an issue that is complex, sensitive, and that has been contested for decades.

It is even more worrisome that the current LCI has raised this topic without any substantial reference to the 21st LCI report of 2018 on the very same issue. In its Consultation Paper on “Reforms of Family Law,” the 21st LCI made several recommendations on the matter of gender equality and concluded that, “Uniform Civil Code is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage as it would be counter-productive for the harmony of the nation,” and suggested that “reforms in personal laws should be done by amendments and not by replacement.” Further, by identifying that “discrimination and not difference that lies at the root of inequality the 21st LCI had prioritised ‘gender equality within each religious community, rather than between’

Therefore, the current notice dated 14/06/2023 that simply states the 22nd LCI ‘considered it expedient to deliberate afresh’ without clarifying what warrants a rethink, betrays a complete lack of seriousness on a matter that impacts the life of many, particularly women citizens. It only carries a vague reference to ‘various court orders’, without even bothering to specify which court orders and what issues they raise. In the absence of clear terms of reference, it appears that the present endeavour is more of a ‘political exercise’ than a ‘legal’ one.

c) It is deeply troubling that the LCI has specifically sought “views from the public at large and recognised religious organisations” to the UCC. Furthermore, this reveals the erroneous presumption that the Indian people can be divided *en masse* only into religious groupings; and that these groupings can only be represented by religious leaders and so called “recognised religious organisations.” Consequently, the notice fails to recognise or acknowledge that the primary members who are impacted by such laws are women from across religious, caste, Adivasi, and tribal communities, gender minorities, atheists and agnostics. Hence such a call only serves to reinforce the patriarchal belief that they are not the primary stakeholders in gender-just family law reforms – which makes this a deeply discriminatory process. Pertinently, the term “recognised religious organisations” finds no reference in the Constitution or any other statute, that governs the secular constitutional Republic of India.

Amplifying the confusion surrounding the UCC have been contradictory and conflicting public declarations by the government. In Bhopal on 2 July 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed that India needed a UCC as the country could not run with the dual system of “separate laws for separate communities.” Then on 7 July, 2023, Home Minister Amit Shah assured the Chief Minister of Nagaland that, “the government is actively considering exempting Christians and certain tribal areas from the proposed Uniform Civil Code (UCC).” The Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Law and Justice, Sushil K Modi has also stated that the exemption would extend to states under Article 371 such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Assam,

Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. If that is so, what parts of the nation and which communities is the proposed UCC meant to bring ‘uniformity’ to? Who will it protect with gender justice?

2. COMMENTS REGARDING UNIFORMITY, EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION VIS À VIS GENDER JUSTICE.

a) It is important to reiterate that in a country as plural and diverse as India, the lived realities of people within and across communities are very varied.

(i) Exceptions accommodative of customary laws and practices are found and included within most religious laws.

(ii) Contrary to popular perception, the UCC if drafted adhering to the principle of uniformity, will have implications for and impact on all religious personal laws for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, etc as well as the secular law.

(iii) It will have ramifications on all customary laws, as well as tribal and Adivasi community practices protected under Schedule V and VI of the Indian Constitution – practices that are not only around family and marriage, but also around how land and resources are held and used as shared by communities.

(iv) Additionally, any new UCC will also affect the existing UCC already in force in Goa – which in itself requires more analysis and understanding.

b) The rights of those marginalised by gender vis à vis the state and the economy, in the familial, social, legal and political domains remain deeply unequal, determined as they are not only by religion, but also by caste, class, ethnicity, dis/ability and sexuality. The very idea that uniformity, applied across such hierarchies, can guarantee or imply equality is fallacious and misleading, and insidiously opens the door for majoritarian tendencies.

c) In relation to laws relating to marriage, the position of the Central government remains contradictory.

(i) The Solicitor General of India, representing the Union of India in hearings of *Supriyo @ Supriya Chakraborty v. Union of India*, WP(C) No. 1011/2022 on the matter of marriage equality, vehemently argued against any change or interference with marriage laws, stating that it would impact more than 157 legal provisions, across statutes that govern the domains of family, marriage, inheritance, adoption,

(ii) Further, the Central Government in the marriage equality matter before the Supreme Court also asserted that marriage is a religious institution and despite codification of personal laws, it is a “sacrament” and thus, the “sanctity” of personal laws must not be interfered with.

This complete volte face is quite revealing that in the name of uniformity, the same Union of India is rejecting all personal laws and proposing one omnibus law to address all issues relating to gender equality in the domain of the family!

d) On the matter of ending unequal rights/discrimination against women, the present government’s stance continues to be selective, problematic and lacking c Take for instance the much-discussed issue of polygamy among Muslim communities, around which much of the current propaganda around UCC is centred. The National Family Health Survey – 5 (2019-20) reveals the prevalence of polygamy is 2.1% among Christians, 1.9% among Muslims, 1.3% among Hindus, and 1.6% among other religious groups. Yet, the focus remains on prohibiting polygamy within Muslim communities, without any apparent intent to secure the rights of women in such bi- or polygamous marriages across communities. Therefore, we question whether the government is propounding the UCC to ensure justice for all women, or use this as an occasion to target one community as being discriminatory to women, even though data reveals a different reality.

e) Additionally, there is no indication of how the proposed UCC intends to address legal changes since 2018 to ensure non-discrimination in matters in the private domain, such as:

(i) The recognition of the rights of transgender persons, through the NALSA Judgment, 2014, and the consequent Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

(ii) Emerging and changing concepts of marriage, family, and kinship as being articulated in society and through the courts by those most affected by family laws across community identity.

(iii) Petitions challenging the constitutionality of restitution of conjugal rights as a matrimonial remedy, and the practice of nikah halala as well as those related to marriage equality, which are pending before the Supreme Court of India.

As women, our lives and our freedoms are in myriad ways impacted by growing political majoritarianism, as well as the disturbing growth of community and state conservatism in which inter caste, inter religious and even intra gender partnerships, friendships and marriages are being violently opposed. As feminists from diverse locations, we are uncompromisingly committed to a notion of equality not uniformity, and affirm women's autonomy within and outside the structures of marriage and family.

3. Governing Principles to Ensure Gender Equality and Justice

It is crucial that all efforts of law reform recognise, and are based upon the understanding that:

(i) Taking into consideration patriarchal forms of gender imbalances and discrimination the domain of marriage and family must be one in which marginalised/minoritized stakeholders in the family and community, such as women within and outside the institution of marriage, queer and transgender persons, persons with disabilities, etc must have

equal rights, accruing from marriage, divorce, guardianship, inheritance and other matters related to family laws and the rights so secured must be accessible and protected, so that the same can be enjoyed.

(ii) Further, rights secured by law, must be ensured with corresponding state responsibilities. The role of the state is crucial and critical in securing civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights to all women, especially women from marginalised communities and locations. Without an assurance of a robust and respectable social security granted to citizens, especially those in conflict with their families, there can be no access to, and implementation of, gender justice. Basic entitlements of food, shelter, education, health, livelihood, pensions, etc., are a mandate and obligation that the State has to assure through substantive positive measures and enactment as evidence that it is serious about gender justice.

(iii) Any reforms towards gender just family laws must draw upon the best gender just practices from across diverse religious laws and customary practices, harmonised with present day lived realities.

(iv) The legal system must be based on principles of accessibility and affordability for gender justice and equality to be realised, especially for those from marginalised communities.

(v) The personal autonomy, bodily integrity and capability for independent decision making of all adult persons must be respected.

We urge the Law Commission of India to re-consider this deeply problematic, and opaque process on a matter of deep import. Such an extraordinary rush to complete the process in 30 days after a whole five years since its last findings in 2018, seems to point to the process being guided more by political considerations and malafide intent, rather than gender justice, as is being claimed.

We urge the Law Commission to call for a series of meaningful public consultations across the country to reconceive what gender equality would look like in the face of all the widely varying laws, customs and practices across the

country. Given the cultural and religious diversity, any changes in personal and customary laws are bound to be complex, and need to be done in an open, transparent, democratic and inclusive manner within the framework of the Indian Constitution. These consultations could then inform much needed changes in all discriminatory personal as well as secular civil laws.

As the 21st Law Commission rightly stated, “The issue of family law reform does not need to be approached as a policy that is against the religious sensibilities of individuals but simply as one promoting harmony between religion and constitutionalism, in a way that no citizen is left disadvantaged on account of their religion and at the same time every citizen’s right to freedom of religion is equally protected.”

Given the deep polarisation on the issue and the systematic targeting of specific communities, the onus is on the LCI to create an atmosphere conducive to reasonable dialogue and consultations with a wide spectrum of all those who will be most impacted by any such legal amendments. Without that, women and other vulnerable stakeholders in whose name this exercise is purportedly being conducted, will be silenced and invisibilised yet again and the entire exercise will simply serve some vested political interests.

Finally, we do believe that the Law Commission should engage with various civil society organisations of those marginalised in the family system. And when you finally do so we would be willing to come and discuss with you.

Feminist Working Group on Law Commission Submission on the UCC

Women of India Rise in Rage

We Demand Justice for the Kuki-Zo Women who were Brutally Assaulted

We, the undersigned, are outraged that it takes a viral video of unbelievable brutality on the Kuki women of Kangpokpi district for the Chief Minister of Manipur to Act; and for the Prime Minister of India to speak after 75 days of deafening silence.

We rage against the impunity of the mob

The video that went viral on social media on 20 July 2023 shows an incident of 4 May 2023, in Kangpokpi district of Manipur, in which two Kuki women are seen paraded naked and groped by a mob of Meitei men. A survivor has recounted that they were told, “If you don’t take off your clothes, we will kill you.” Of the three, the youngest, a 21-year-old woman, was gang-raped. Her 56-year-old father and 19-year-old brother were killed. This incident took place as five people of the Kuki community fled their village to escape a murderous mob. The FIR states that the assailants were armed with sophisticated weapons like AK Rifles, SLR, INSAS and 303 Rifles: proof that the state government has outsourced violence to mobs of the dominant community, in the on-going violence in Manipur.

The images on the video have shaken all of India, as it has shaken each of us. It tells us about the nature of this crime. Stripping and parading of women publicly is an attempt to strip the victims of their dignity and humanity. This form of sexual violence is a hate crime meant to assert social and political dominance over the community to which victims belong; that the perpetrators looked at the camera and filmed their crime as a trophy, tells us how much impunity they enjoy in Manipur. We demand an end to this impunity for violence against women.

We rage against the silence of elected leaders

Every woman in this country is shaken that it took a viral video to get our leaders to open their mouths about such egregious violence going on, day after day, against women. Given that the CM of Manipur knew about it, the home minister would have known, the Prime Minister would have known. The fact is that the survivors of the assault in the video have been speaking up from the very beginning. In at least 5 other cases of sexual violence, survivors or victim's kin have spoken and given testimonies to citizens and journalists; these have appeared in international, national and regional news publications. There are documented testimonies of two Kuki-Zo mothers about the rape and murder of their daughters by a Meitei mob; the murder of a woman whose body was found shot, burnt, and dismembered; and the abduction, rape and brutal thrashing of an 18-year-old woman, who narrowly escaped being killed. But no elected leader, either in Manipur or at the Centre spoke a word.

In mid-June 2023, 550 concerned citizens on Manipur issued a statement asking for accounts of sexual violence to be investigated. A fact-finding team of women's rights activists visited Manipur in the end of June 2023 and reported that several women had experienced sexual violence. Instead of investigating and acting against the perpetrators of crimes against women, the Manipur state and police filed FIRs against the Fact-Finding team itself, accusing it of working against the interests of the state and the nation.

How many such cases of brutal violence have taken place? How will justice be ensured in the face of obvious State complicity in the cover up?

Every institution of India has failed women. The National Commission for Women, the National Human Rights Commission, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes – neither has found it fit, after 2 months of violence, to visit the state and document these crimes. The Governor of Manipur, Anusuiya Uikey, instead of helping heal wounds, has only fueled xenophobia by suggesting that “infiltrators” (implying Kukis are not Indian, but terrorists from across the border) are to be blamed for the on-going violence in Manipur.

We, therefore, ask that the Supreme Court of India set up an Independent Enquiry Committee to examine the scale of violence against women in Manipur.

We Demand That:

1. The State must ensure social, emotional, physical and economic rehabilitation of the survivors, dignity, privacy and security from further harassment and violence. The survivors must be provided all legal assistance and enabled to pursue justice for what they have suffered.
2. Immediate arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators and the police officers complicit in this atrocity.
3. Intervention and monitoring by the Supreme Court of the implementation of rule of law in this case and in the investigation of other cases of mob violence in Manipur.
4. An Independent enquiry committee should be constituted by the Supreme Court of India to examine the scale of violence against women in the on-going conflict in Manipur.
5. Fact finding, solidarity and enquiry teams by citizens, activists and civil society must be allowed to visit Manipur and help document these crimes, without fear of state reprisal or police cases.

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Justice for Mahsa Amini: Statement by Forum Against Oppression of Women, Mumbai

We, women and women's organization from India, are writing this letter to register our horror at the brutal attacks on the women and citizens of Iran as they protest the killing of Mahsa Amini at the hands of the Gasht-e-Ershad. These brutal attacks have resulted in and continue to result in further deaths and imprisonments.

These brave women of Iran are demanding freedom from the Morality Police and the State imposing upon them what they must or must not wear and how to wear it; what they must and must not do, or act, or behave. They are rejecting this control. The men of Iran are giving full support and putting their bodies on the line alongside them. The resulting violent repression is heinous and inhuman.

We stand in solidarity with the women of Iran who came out in public to protest killing of Mahsa Amini and to voice their demands for freedom, equality and autonomy.

We stand in solidarity with the citizens of Iran who bravely protest the killing of Mahsa Amini and the right of women to not wear hijab.

We demand that Iranian State respect the freedom and rights demanded by women of Iran in every aspect of their life.

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

Zan, Zindagi, Azadi

Forum Against Oppression of Women, India

#JUSTICE for Mahsa Amini

#FREEDOM and EQUALITY for WOMEN OF THE WORLD

OBITUARY

Prof. Aparna Dutta-Mahanta (20-8-1946 to 26-1-2022)

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

In passing away of Prof. Aparna Dutta-Mahanta the women's studies and women's rights movement not only in the North-East region but all over India has felt an irreparable loss. Dr. Aparna Mahanta was a Retired Professor of the Department of English, Dibrugarh, a Founder Director of the Centre for Women's Studies, Dibrugarh University, a life member of Indian Association for Women's Studies and a veteran women's rights activist who kept in touch with women's studies centres and women's organisations all over India. She was highly respected throughout India and represented the Northeast Region in the national gatherings. She was highly revered for her writings in Assamese and English on all contemporary challenges faced by people in general and women in particular, in the North Eastern states from the perspective of human rights and women's rights. In her highly acclaimed book entitled, *Nareebad-Part 1 and part 2*, Prof. Aparna Mahanta charted the herstory of feminist movement in its various trajectories across histories and geographies. Her another celebrated book was *Journey of Assamese Women (1836-1937)* that contextualised Assamese women's predicaments in the colonial political economy shaped by the British rulers.

Throughout her academically active life of over 50 decades, Aparnadi had been an epitome of courage, supporter of feminist praxis and powerhouse of energy. She took part in the National Conferences of IAWS and women's rights movements, took a pro-active interest in the deliberations, polemics and resolutions passed by the delegates, indulged in animated debates, led rallies and addressed public meetings at the end of the conference during the 1980s and 1990s. She was a member of Mahila Samakhya Project of Government of Assam. She was actively involved in the women's movement in Assam till the end. At the seminar on 25-2-2020 on "Prevention and Abolition of the Practice of Witch Hunting" at Indira Miri Conference Hall of Dibrugarh University, she

had urged the audience not to look at witch hunting as an isolated issue but within a larger web of women-related crimes as well as the property rights of women and she also pointed out how women in matrilineal societies too become victims of witch hunting.

Prof. Aparna Dutta Mahanto will continue to inspire us through her writings. Salute to this brave soul. Rest in power Prof. Aparna Dutta Mahant.

Gouri Choudhury
(12-12-1938 to 9-9-2022)

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

A stalwart of women's rights movement, Smt. Gouri Choudhury passed away peacefully on 9th September 2022. Popularly known as Gouri di, this a stellar social activist had a record of feminist activism since early 1970s. She had edited special number of HOW on political economy of dowry way back in 1977 published both in English and Hindi. This was widely used for study circle by the newly emerging women's rights groups in the post emergency period. She was an institution builder and had always opened her heart and home for the social activists of progressive movements of workers, youth, women, rural poor and tribal people. founder member of Action India- a community-based mass organisation (1976), Stree Sangharh (1977), Saheli (1981), WomenPowerConnect (1998). She was a role model and a soul sister to thousands of women and men across generations whose lives and hearts she touched.

Sharp in her wit, clear in her perspective, upfront about her political position, totally committed to eradicate domestic violence, Gauri di will be missed greatly by all in the women's rights movement. Gauri di believed in building bridges between all social movements fighting for human rights of the

marginalised sections facing intersectional oppression. The best homage to Gouri di is to carry forward her life's mission and legacy for a world of gender equality and justice. Gouri di's favourite song, "*Khamoshi todo, waqt aa gaya !*" (Break the silence, time has come!) captured her quest to fight against all forms of discrimination, oppression and exploitation. Gouri di was a conscience keeper for the younger generation of feminist activists.

Urdhva Mula offers homage to Smt. Gouri Choudhary, expresses solidarity with her co-travellers in the women's rights movement and conveys heartfelt condolences to her sons- Partho and Amit, daughters-in-law Maureen and Karen, and granddaughters- Monica and Julia.

Tribute to Ela Bhatt (7-9-1933 to 2-11-2022)

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

Indian women's rights movement has lost a visionary and powerful leader of poor and marginalised women workers and self-employed women facing intersectional vulnerabilities in the labour market, factor market and product markets in the informal sector. Her passing had created an immeasurable void in the democratic spaces that strives for dignity of individual and social cohesion. Elaben always stood by the underserved sections of society in the urban, rural and tribal areas. Elaben supported the survivors of 1969 communal riots and 1980 anti-reservation riots in which the Dalit families were attacked. I, as student of M.S. University and member of Study and Struggle Alliance in Vadodara, got in touch with Elaben during early 1970s when the textile mills were closing their doors for the women workers. We were working for textile workers of Vadodara. At that time, Elaben was a young lawyer of Textile Labour Union founded by Gandhiji and Anasuyaben Sarabhai.

Secular Humanist who stood by the Dalit, Adivasis and Religious Minorites

In 1969, Gujarat had experienced extremely violent communal riots targeting Muslim localities, shops and bustees. In a highly charged environment of religious bigotry, Elaben stood tall among the survivors of riots- mainly widows, orphans, elderly who had lost their young boys and men, property, shops and homes and had lost all hopes of rebuilding their devastated lives. Elaben not only extended her helping hand in relief operations but also encouraged these 'women headed households' to start business as vegetable vendors, hawkers of food items, weavers of handloom, artisans producing handicrafts, embroidery workers and come together under the umbrella of SEVA women's cooperatives. When they were prevented to sell their products in the streets of central Ahmedabad, she encouraged and joined them registering their protest in the form of peaceful sit-ins in front of the District Collector's office.

Formation of Self-Employed Women's Association

Elaben formed world's first women's trade union, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) with an aim of fight against exploitation and discrimination in the labour market and in course of last 50 years, put in place structures and systems for income generation programmes, self-employment, social security, housing rights, financial inclusion, health insurance and human development investment through collective efforts of the working-class women. During this year of Golden Jubilee Celebration, there are so many inspiring and evocative stories and vignettes have been shared in SEVA's monthly newsletter, Anasuya in Gujarati and Hindi!

Friend of Women's Rights and Women's Studies Movement

In 1981, Elaben invited me and Trupti Shah who was active in Manthan, Vadodara to, conduct cultural workshop at the newly established trade union office of Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) that was formed in 1972. It was very insightful to discuss with Elaben and her enthusiastic and erudite husband, Prof. Ramesh Bhatt who taught economics at H. K. Arts College of Gujarat University. Elaben found reaching out through cultural

medium of songs, street plays, documentary film screening, photographic memories, storytelling and exposure trips extremely valuable to develop synergy among women members of SEWA. We stayed at her home and enjoyed simple Gujarati meal warmly served by her and her husband, Prof. Rameshbhai Bhatt. At SEVA, Bhadra, Ahmedabad office, She also introduced us to different divisions and production units of SEVA in that building. We had great time singing feminist songs, improvising plays and experimenting with street- theatre format and watching documentary films in Gujarati on legal rights of women made by Dinazben Kalwachwala of India Space Research Organization (ISRO), Ahmedabad. She translated her favourite song, **We shall overcome** into to rustic/colloquial Gujarati as ‘*Ame Paar Karishun.....*’.

In 1981, in the midst of anti-reservation agitation in Gujarat, she vocally supported the reservation policy enshrined in the Constitution of India and when angry anti-reservation rioters came to burn her house and pelted stone at her, Elaben and Rameshbhai stood peacefully, firm, and poised. Robust women’s rights movement and nascent women’s studies movement stood by courageous Elaben and invited her to address plenary of the First Women’s Studies Conference hosted by SNDT Women’s University in Mumbai. When IAWS was formed, Elaben and several office bearers of SEVA became not only its life members, but also actively participated in the IAWS Conferences.

In 1985, Elaben led SEWA’s delegation at the United Nations End of the Decade and we witnessed her humane style mentoring and hand holding of SEWA members in those 10 days of the International Conference in which there were delegates from 165 countries.

Shramshakti Report, 1988

In 1986, when Elaben became member of Rajya Sabha, both Dr. Neera Desai and myself visited her at her official Delhi residence. She welcomed us with great affection and enthusiastically showed us her labour of love, vegetable garden that she had nurtured. She chaired the National Commission on Self Employed Women in 1987. When she decided to come up with *Shram Shakti* Report profiling macro analysis of women in the unorganised sector workforce,

hundreds of women's rights activists, scholars, researchers from all states and union territories of India who were inspired, led and mentored by Elaben supported her initiative voluntarily by collective data, providing case studies, field reports to produce a mammoth *Shram Shakti Report*, 1988. We, as *Narimukti* Collective of Gujarat, translated *Shramshakti Report* into Gujarati in 1989. Mahila Daxata Samiti Delhi and Mumbai published its Hindi and Marathi translation respectively.

Legal Reforms for labour Standards, Social Security, Social Protection of Workers

Under her leadership SEVA played pivotal role for enactment of The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act (2008), National Rural Livelihood Mission (2011) and Street Vendors Act (2014). In the II Labour Commission's Report only 2 chapter- on informal sector and child labour stand out for their commitment to social justice and workers' rights. For both these chapters were drafted by the SEVA team.

Elaben's Contribution to The Elders, formed on the 89th Birthday of Dr. Nelson Mandela:

In 2007, South Africa, Elaben was invited to attend the meeting convened by Dr. Nelson Mandela, Graça Machel, and Desmond Tutu in Johannesburg in which group of world leaders arrived at a consensus to contribute their wisdom, independent leadership and integrity to tackle some of the world's toughest problems under the banner of The Elders. Its commitment is for peace building, peace keeping and peace-making in the conflict zones, resolving cross-border disputes, sustainable development goals. Elaben Bhatt was particularly involved in The Elders' initiative on equality for women and girls and campaign titled, 'Girls, not Brides' against child marriages in Asia and Africa. In 2009-2010, Elaben made 2 visits to the conflict zones of the Middle East with Elders delegations and averred that, 'Nonviolent work demand more hard work than fighting' and 'cowards use weapons'. In 2011, She visited Bihar with the fellow Elders- Mary Robinson, Desmond Tutu and Gro Harlem Brundtland. Together, the Elders and had a dialogue with the members of

Jagriti, a youth-led project aimed at preventing child marriages in Bihar, and motivated the state government of Bihar to make concerted efforts to prevent child marriages with the help of community-based development investment in education, nutrition and women empowerment.

Elaben's Persona

Several obituaries by her colleagues and admirers have described Elaben as a 'gentle revolutionary'. Elaben won the hearts of activists and academicians, researchers and policy makers by her polite but firm style of communication, her refined sense of humour, warm hospitality that had a personal-Elaben touch, her courage of conviction and creative methods of finding solutions to unfolding challenges in the changing socio-economic and political realities that threatened the survival base of the urban, rural and tribal women. She was a secular humanist not only in her speeches but also in praxis. Recipient of Padma Shree, Padma Vibhushan, Magsaysay Award for Community leadership and *Frances Legion d; Honneur*, Right Livelihood Award, Indira Gandhi International Prize for Peace, *honoris causa* from Harvard-Yale-SNDT Women's University and many more; as well as innumerable prestigious awards from the state and non-state institutions all over the world; Elaben remained humble and accessible to all of us till the last day of her life. As she spoke slowly and in a non-threatening manner, she could reach out to her listeners effectively-may they be young students, working class women, elderly artisans, erudite professionals, funders, global politicians and firebrand journalists. As Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad during 2015-2022, Elaben firmly adhered to Gandhian principles of non-sectarian and pluralist approach in governance.

Selfless Life Lived with Honesty of Purpose

Elaben, as a true Gandhian followed the principles of simplicity, dignity of sweat labour, decentralization, economic self-sufficiency, cooperation, equality, non-violence, peace-making, peace keeping, peace building, actions guided by human values of ethics and justice, social solidarity, empowerment of village production units and sustainable future by living in harmony with nature. She considered poverty and hunger as structural and systemic violence.

Her inspiring values and beliefs conveyed in these statements, ‘Let diversity be maintained, grow, flourish....’. ‘Think correlatedly, creatively and respond with empathy and social solidarity when you face challenges in life’.

Elaben was a product of freedom movement and pit into practice, Rabindranath Tagore’s verses *Ekla Cholo Re*, when faced with adversities in her public life. She had a harmonious personal life. While working with poor women at the grass roots level, she acquired new wisdom from the grounded reality. Whether it was a matter of desirable rate of interest to be charged by SEWA Cooperative Bank or launching SEVA Insurance Programme, she consulted the members of SEWA. Currently SEWA Bharat has 21 lakh members in 18 states of India and luminaries such as Renana Jhabvala and Mirai Chatterjee who dedicated their whole life for the mission of SEWA and Elaben’s dream of empowerment of unorganised and informal sector workers. ILO has recognised SEVA as a Trade Union.

During the lockdown in 2021, It was such a moral boost to find you on zoom platform of Citizens Forum by Bharti Sinha Sahay when I made presentation on Gender Responsive Budgets. Your presence and encouraging comments meant a lot to me. We wanted you to address IAWS members, but now we have to satisfy ourselves with your inspiring memories. Dear Elaben, we promise to continue your legacy of making dedicated efforts for social security, social protection of the unorganised sector workers and will amplify their voices. My heartfelt condolences to Elaben’s daughter-Amimayiben, son-Mihirbhai and their family members, her colleagues and millions of members of SEWA.

I would like to end this tribute with beautiful verses of **Our Deepest Fear by Marianne Williamson that was often recited by Dr. Nelson Mandela.**

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness

That most frightens us.

We ask ourselves
Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?
Actually, who are you *not* to be?
You are a child of God.

Your playing small
Does not serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking
So that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine,
As children do.
We were born to make manifest
The glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us;
It's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,
We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we're liberated from our own fear,
Our presence automatically liberates others.

Dear Elaben, your presence had a liberating influence over all those whose lives your touched. Rest in power Elaben. We promise to follow in your footsteps wherever we are.

Tribute to Chandita Mukerjee (1953-2023)

- Vibhuti Patel



I remember Chandita Mukherjee (20-4-1952 to 18-4-2023) as a helpful, self-effacing and highly refined comrade. During 1980-1985, Chandita provided all audio-visual support for Forum Against Rape/ Forum Against Oppression of Women campaigns. After our weekly meeting, Chandita and Anjali Monteiro would quietly come and ask what could they could do for the

rally/demonstrations/public meeting. At the event, they would reach with posters/placards and take photographs of the event. During 1980-1983, Chandita took photographs of all our demonstrations, rallies, sit-ins and generously shared with the mainstream media to go along with the reports by journalists. Chandita would visit colleges and community-based organisations as a representative of AVEHI to present slideshow of 'Women and Reproductive Health' (*Kahani Nahanyachi*) and patiently answer questions of young adults. AVEHI Slide-show on Menstruation was organised also in bustees and classrooms by us. Chandita would politely answer all queries of the participants.

When COMET Media produced, 13 episodes of '*Bharat Ki Chapp*' under leadership of Chandita, it became an important resource to explain history of science and technology in India.

When I met Chandita as a new-comer to Bombay in 1977, she introduced me to the Cultural Centre of the House of the Soviet Union in Mumbai, as I wanted to borrow prints of Sergei Eisenstein's "Battleship Potemkin" and "Strike" for screening in the meetings of trade unions- HMS, AITUC, CITU and Vadodara Kamdar Union in Vadodara. At that time I was staying in the working

women's hostel, Bhagini Samaj on the 3rd floor of VIKAS Apartments, just above their meeting place which was a flat on the 2nd floor of the same building. On 26th January, 2009, Neela Bhagwat - a noted feminist classical singer, lyricist and composer invited for lunch her feminist friends who had been associated for over 3 decades. It was a memorable meeting. All of us were nostalgic about our collective efforts in the women's movement-Sonal Shukla from VACHA, Chandita Mukherjee from COMET Media, Anjali Monterio from School of Culture-TISS, Shanta Gokhale renowned art-critique, Lalitha Dhara-author of series on 19th century social reformers and activist with YWCA and Women Networking, Vijaya Chauhan from UNICEF (retired), a veteran Feminist Aruna Burte and myself shared challenges faced in our journey in the social movements.

On 6-3-2009, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai had collaborated with Vacha Charitable Trust to commemorate 8th March in our Committee Room where short films made by girls from VACHA, who were trained by Chandita, were screened. Chandita's. We felicitated Chandita who was not prepared for so many nice things being told about her by so many of us!! She blushed.

Women rights and Women's Studies movement salutes documentary film maker and media activist, Chandita Mukherjee for her commitment to Development Media for Equity and Social Justice.

Obituary for Prof. Zarina Bhatti (1933-2023)

- Vibhuti Patel

As a young activist researcher, I used to watch Prof. Zarina Bhatti from distance, full of admiration for her poise, electrifying smile and peace-loving nature whenever I attended meetings at Research Centre for Women's Studies, YWCA Delhi, IAWS Conferences and national seminars and consultations during 1980s. In those volatile days of feminist activism and polarised debates, Zarina Apa never lost her cool, put forward her arguments in a persuasive manner.



Zarina Apa, as she was addressed by my generation of feminist and women's studies faculty, was born in Lucknow in a conventional Muslim family which practised the *purdah*. She was a living testimony of an educated Muslim woman in a pre-Partition India who had great dreams to contribute to social transformation and nation building. After her marriage she relocated to London and completed her bachelor's in sociology and political science and masters in political science from The London School of Economics and Political sciences. She completed her Ph.D. even when there was strong opposition from her facing family opposition. She joined Jesus and Mary College in Delhi as a professor of sociology and taught there for a decade.

Prof. Zarina Bhatti made valuable contribution through her field based research on women workers in the informal sector. She was a founder member of Indian Association for Women's studies in 1981 and IAWS President for its 10th National Conference at Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Orissa in 2002 with an overarching theme, "*Sustaining Democracy: Challenges in the New Millennium*".

Zarina Apa gained respect for her academic excellence, grounded research and analytically rigorous presentations on wide range of women's issues with special focus on Muslim women's challenges. She worked as a gender specialist for several organisations of the United Nation.

She authored an extremely moving and inspiring autobiography (2016) titled, *Purdah To Piccadilly—A Muslim Woman's Struggle For Identity*, Sage Publication and a highly acclaimed edited volume (2022), *A Portrait of Ageing: Essays and Reflections* published by Destiny Media. Neatly divided into fourteen chapters, each chapter chronicles the important milestones of her life and talks about her trials and tribulations at large.

Prof. Zarina Bhatti will be remembered by the future generation through her writings and stories of her courage in the midst of difficult circumstances. She was an example of how an empowered woman empowers all women who touches her life. Salute to Zarina Apa for her grit, determination, academic excellent and a quest for gender justice.

Tribute to a feminist stalwart Prof. Jalna Hanmer (29-5-1931 to 26-5-2023)

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

In passing of Jalna Hanmer, the global women's rights movement has lost an iconic persona that taught, through her praxis and power of pen, grounded qualitative research and institution building, the lessons of transnational feminist solidarity. She institutionalised consciousness raising for collective empowerment, women centred social work practice, intervention strategies to provide support to the survivors of domestic violence, community-based dialogue to prevention violence against women. Her stay in Leeds and professional work at Centre for Women's Studies at Bradford University had given her exposure to students and their families from post-colonial countries. Her favourite slogan was, *Women United, will Never by Defeated.*



I came in contact with Jalna during mid 1980s where I had access to communication only through postal service. She got my address from New Left Review, London that had published by article, "Women's Liberation in India" in issue No. 153 in 1985. I received a big carton full of documents of the feminist movement in UK, USA, Canada and Australia. Both of us used to regularly read ISIS newsletter during the UN International Women's Decade. When she read my reports on campaign against sex selective abortion, Jalna Hanmer and Maria Mies invited me to join **FINRRAGE** (Feminist International Network on Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering) and be its country representative. I was invited to speak on 'Sex Determination Test and Femicide' at the conference in Berlin with huge participation of women from the industrialised world who were fighting against new reproductive technologies. At the meeting of working group of **FINRRAGE**, got to meet feminists from

Australia, Canada, USA, Scandinavian and European countries. All of us had come to the meeting with their publications-reports, newsletters, journals, books, resolutions, statements. Working with them on RAGE Bulletin published by Pergmon Press, UK was a great learning experience. Jalna invited me to give Seminar on "Sex Determination Tests in India", Bradford University, UK, November 1988.

In 1992-93, during my 10-months stay in London for post-doctoral fellowship at London School of Economics and Political Science, we met often. She was 60 and I was 37, but never felt the age gap. She enthusiastically took me to Feminist Archives and Feminist library, introduced me to the fellow feminists throughout the U.K., organised my talk on "Current Issues in Women's Studies and Women's Movement in India", at Gender Studies Dept. University of Bradford and my talk at Sex Selection Conference, organised by British Medical Association, at BMA House, London. I stayed in her house thrice. From the time we would meet, till I left we would continuously converse, in-between she would warm up and serve food to her father, her pets and me. Jalna was in her 60s and shared her insights on politics, culture, lifestyle and aging in great detail. She gave me a life's lessons, "Vibhuti, when are aging, you must plan your food security, stock enough ready-to-eat food." Till now, I am following her *gurumantra* i.e. prophetic statement! I was amazed with her energy, the way she managed her family a professional life with compassion and care. Her companion, her child, Jalna's aging father and pets were nurtured by her so beautifully! She was multifaceted personality-interested in classical music, gardening, communicating with people of varied cultures. She was always smiling and was a patient listener. Hence, her qualitative researches are nuanced. She was a team player and always a giver.

Jalna lives with us through her landmark contribution made through her book *Women, Violence and Social Control* (1987), co-authored books, *Well-Founded Fear: A Community Study of Violence to Women-Explorations in Feminism* (1984), *Women and Social Work: Towards a Woman-Centered Practice* (1989 ND 1999) and *Women. Policing and Male Violence: International Perspective* (2014) and innumerable scholarly articles.

Obituary to Prof. Maria Mies (1931-2023)

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel



During late 1970s, I was active in Socialist Women's Group that worked with the working-class women; and debated paid and unpaid work, production of life and reproductive labour of women in our study circle. We were also bringing out newsletter, ***Feminist Network*** that connected us with newly forms feminist clusters in

several cities of India. One of them was Stree Shakti Sangathana in Hyderabad through whom we got to know of Maria Mies. At that time she had concluded her field work of a very important study on lace makers of Narsapur (Andhra Pradesh). During the International Women's Decade, (1975-85), International Labour Organisation had come up with Women, Work and Development series in which her study was published. She shared her book. She was an established academician interested in research on women's role in economic development and how unpaid work benefitted capitalist systems. Maria introduced us to dual approach of world capitalism with a common goal of subordination of women by 'housewifization of while women' and 'super exploitation of coloured women in its drive for capital accumulation. In 1979 when she established the Women and Development Programme at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands, her regular interactions provided inspiration to newly emerging autonomous women's organisations and women's studies centre.

I still have vivid memory of her session on 'Methodological guidelines for feminist research' at the workshop organised at Indian School of Political Economy. She exposed us to an alternative, feminist and decolonial, approach in research methodology and ethics of participatory action research; knowledge construction for social transformation based on egalitarian principles.

Thorough her grounded research, Maria showed how women's labour gets devalued and exploited under capitalism that treats poor women of colour as a 'last colony'. Intersectional perspective put forward by Maria in her academic writings while deconstructing dynamics of capitalism thriving on patriarchal control over women's sexuality, fertility and labour and colonial exploitation and Maria's firm belief that women's liberation is intertwined with the larger social movements striving for distributive justice and environmental justice; were found most convincing by the socialist feminist scholars of the South.

Maria was warm and friendly, had a big heart and faith in global sisterhood.

During late 1970s till 1990, we used to meet and interact with Prof. Maria Mies regularly in the workshops, study circles, consultations, conferences and meetings of Feminist International Network on Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering (FINRRAGE). After 2 weeks of passing away of Maria, we lost another stalwart of FINRRAGE, Prof. Jalna Hanmer. Both Maria Mies and Jalna Hanmer invited me to join FINRRAGE (Feminist International Network on Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering) and be its country representative. While introducing me to the gathering in Berlin in 1988, Maria said, "Vibhuti has coined term for Indian women as 'endanger species' as an abuse of scientific technique of sex determination and sex selection is resulting in femicide". In this FINRRAGE conference, I was invited to speak on 'Sex Determination Test and Femicide' and on "Sexist, Racist and Classist biases of Population Control Policies". There was a huge participation of women from the industrialised world who were fighting against new reproductive technologies. To energise the participants, I began with the most popular song of the reproductive rights and reproductive autonomy movement, a parody (that changed from actual 'intra uterine device (IUD)' that was used on mass of women in poor countries to imaginary 'intra penis device' (IPD). This song exposed utter brutality of vertically imposed, bureaucratically mismanaged and barbaric practices against women from the postcolonial countries, in the name of population control that violated dignity and bodily integrity of women. All participants including Maria joined me in singing; women participants and children were also dancing. I goes like this,

I sing you all a song, about a wonderous new device,
A nation's latest contraceptive plan,
A funny little object they call the IUD,
Is guaranteed to fit an average man.
It's IPD, It's IPD, It may feel too good to you,
But it is not hurting me.
So every time the pain begins to feel your eyes with tears,
Remember I put up with it for years.

They tested it on whales,
they tried it out on mice,
they used it in the poorer paths of town,
It is cleverest invention since the automatic life,
Guaranteed to never let you down.
It's IPD, It's IPD, It may feel too good to you,
But it is not hurting me.
So every time the pain begins to feel your eyes with tears,
Remember I put up with it for years.

Now, some people are never satisfied,
So scientists are working once again,
They have found something better than the good old IUD,
Moring after pill for men.
It is pill that is better than the IPD, it may not be too safe,
But you will have to wait and see,
So set aside your worries, and put away your fears,
Remember I put up with it for years.

At the meeting of the working group of FINRRAGE, I got to meet feminists working on reproductive rights, from Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, USA, Scandinavian and European countries. All of us had come to the meeting with our publications- reports, newsletters, journals, books, resolutions, statements

and posters. I had carried copies of *In search of our bodies: a feminist look at women, health, and reproduction in India* that included this song.

Working with Maria, Jalna, Renate Cline on RAGE Bulletin published by Pergmon Press, UK was a great learning experience in transnational feminist solidarity. Maria Mies whole heartedly supported our campaign against sex-determination and sex selection and highlighted sexist, racist, fascist and ableist biases of all new reproductive technologies based on principles of ‘selection’ and ‘rejection’. She would aver, “Pro-natalist and anti-natalist policies of social engineering are two sides of the same coins.”

Her inspirational writings based on grounded research and quotable quotes, 'coloured women as a last colony for capital accumulation', 'invisible hands of working-class women' have been cited by us in our lectures, research reports, training programmes and study circles. Maria's books are included in the syllabi of Women's Studies and Gender and Development courses in India. The most popular of them are

- Mies, Maria (1980). *Indian Women and Patriarchy: Conflicts and Dilemmas of Students and Working Women*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing English translation of her Ph.D. thesis
- Mies, Maria (1982). *Lace Makers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives Produce for the World Market*. London: Zed Books.
- Mies, Maria (1986). *Patriarchy and Accumulation on A World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. London: Zed Books.
- Mies, Maria & Veronika B.T. (1988). *Women: The Last Colony*. London: Zed Books.
- Mies, Maria & Veronika B.T. (1999). *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalised Economy*. London: Zed Books.

Legendary collaborative knowledge construction by *Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva* (1993). *Ecofeminism* proved to be a guiding light to understand current challenges posed by climate change and pathways for sustainable development.

RIP, Prof. Maria Mies, you will always be not only with us but also with the posterity, for your MUST-READ books and articles.

Homage to Dr. Harshada Rathod (1953-2023)

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

Feeling extremely sad that our dear colleague, Dr. Harshadaben Rathod passed away on 13th June 2023. She was a great asset for Maniben Nanavati Women's College as well as the SNDT Women's University and was serving on many



important Committees of the university till her demise. Her valuable contribution and commitment to empowerment of girls through education was unique. Under her supervision so many women scholars completed their Ph.D. dissertation. She led a simple life and financially supported the education of innumerable girls throughout her life.

I have fond memories of teaching at the Economics Department as an adjunct faculty

MA and M.Phil. courses during the early 1980s when she was the sincerest student in the class. She was full of idealism and adhered to Gandhian values of simplicity, sweat-labour and high morals. Harshadaben became my colleague when I joined as a regular faculty in 1988 at Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDTWU, Juhu Campus. She had enrolled for a 6 weeks course on '*Women in Changing India*' to prepare for the foundation course introduced in 1990. She proactively took part in all activities- discussions, group work, poster making, singing, writing and reviewing. She stood out for her commitment, work ethics and honesty of purpose. After that it was always inspiring to work with her. She had close association with the Economics Departments of UG and PG Courses of all affiliated and conducted colleges of SNDTWU and the University Departments in Mumbai and Pune.

She was sincere, devoted and punctual in rendering her services, both as a principal of Maniben Nanavati Women's College and as a member of several decision-making bodies of the SNDT Women's University. It was witnessed in everyone's love for her and an overwhelming response on email, WhatsApp, Facebook as well as in the *#In Memorium* at the SNDTWU on 15-6-2023 that was received from teachers, staff, scholars and past students when the sad news of untimely demise of Harshadaben were shared.

Harshadaben had an unmatched energy. For me, she was 'a friend in need'. During the last 2 years of nursing my paralysed father, she not only gave useful tips and shared her experiences of looking after her ailing parents; but she also helped by personally carting a heavy box of hygiene products (in bulk) from the wholesale market in her neighbourhood. She never thought that it was beneath her dignity to personally carry the huge box from Ghatkopar to the college from where I would pick it up.

When Mumbai police conducted 'Operation Help' and rescued thousands of trafficked girls who were housed in 13 shelter homes of Mumbai; as a principal, Harshadaben opened the doors of the college for those girls who were eligible for admission. and some of them were admitted to the junior college. She did this without any publicity and also while maintaining confidentiality about their painful past. These girls in difficult circumstances were given one-to-one counselling, hand holding in teaching and care for their dignity and safety. Now, several of them are leading respectable lives. I was most touched by this compassionate and life-changing action on the part of Harshadaben.

For her students and Ph.D. scholars, she played a role of mentor, guide & philosopher. It was an amazing experience working with her as she touched our heads and hearts. She set an example of a good human being, helpful colleague, proactive administrator, honest institution builder, hardworking researcher. She had bare minimum personal needs, believed in the dignity of labour, nurtured the younger generation with generosity of heart. She was a GIVER- of kindness, knowledge and support. Now, Dr. Harshada Rathod has

made a permanent place in our hearts. She will be remembered as an ideal teacher and a role model for the academic community. Rest in Peace, dear Harshadaben.

Wear Black this 15th August

I pondered whether I should wear orange, white or green and then I remembered it didn't matter what she wore when she had been stripped naked.

I thought about wearing my new eyeliner and wondered if she has stopped crying.

I'd love to wear my red lipstick but I thought about whether her bruises have healed.

I don't have enough hair to think about a hairstyle.

But I have enough shame to not 'celebrate' Independence Day when my sisters (and brothers) have been ruthlessly attacked by those they elected to serve them.

How many years have we proclaimed loudly with pride: "All Indians are my brothers and sisters"??

So for my brothers and sisters in Manipur.

And for my brothers and sisters who stand well dressed and abdicate their responsibility in parliament, I will wear black this Independence Day.

Mourn with me for Manipur.

Mourn with me for our democracy.

Mourn with me for our humanity.

- Adele Pereira

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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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Book:

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