

Covid -19 Stories Through a Gender Lens



Laadli Media Fellowships 2020 Documentation Report



Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

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New Delhi

Covid -19 Stories Through a Gender Lens

***Laadli* Media Fellowships 2020**
Documentation Report

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Message from UNFPA



Ms. Argentina Matavel Piccin, Representative, India & Country Director, Bhutan, UNFPA

Recognizing the fact that the media – in all its diverse forms - plays a critical role in shaping popular perception on gender roles and identities and addressing discriminatory practices, UNFPA in India has been engaging with the media, in collaboration with our partner Population First through a campaign called Laadli- or the cherished girl child. The campaign began with the idea that gender must be mainstreamed in print and electronic media, advertising, and films. Over the years, it has become a movement that has been challenging gender stereotypes and encouraging communication personnel to apply a gender lens in their work. A key strategy of the campaign has been the institution of fellowships for young, journalists to focus on and improve news coverage on gender issues. As a part of this initiative, journalists are sensitized, provided mentorship, and encouraged to write stories from a gender perspective.

We have all witnessed and experienced the impact of the crisis precipitated by Covid-19 that has laid bare and deepened existing gender and social inequalities. This has always been the case during emergencies, disasters, and humanitarian crises, but the Covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented in world history. The gains that societies had made in marking progress on gender equality are now at risk of reversal. In this dynamic context it is that much more critical that we continue to apply a gender lens in the media's attempt to document and record the impact of the crisis and the changing scenario around us. For the 2020 media fellowships, UNFPA and Population First therefore decided to institute fellowships on the gendered impact of Covid. I am happy that 17 media fellows were selected to develop stories on this important subject.

Through powerful stories and compelling narratives, the selected media fellows have put the spotlight on how women and girls were disproportionately impacted; on different difficulties faced by women in vulnerable situations; and on women who played a leadership role in responding to the crisis, among other issues.

I believe all our media fellows can be strong allies and partners in our efforts to ensure that the voices and stories of women and girls continue to be heard. I would like to wish them all the very best for their future endeavours. I would like to specially acknowledge the support of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in India for our partnership on enhancing value of women and girls that has made this media initiative possible.

I close with an expression of deep appreciation for our partner Population First. I appreciate the creativity, and sincerity with which all efforts have been made to take this endeavour forward

Thank you.

Foreword

It gives me immense pleasure to present to you this e-documentation report on our Fellowship initiative implemented as part of our media advocacy campaign. The fellowships were instituted as part of the collaboration between Population First and UNFPA for engaging with the media to enhance the value of women and girls. The collaboration and media initiatives in 2020 were made possible through support from the Royal Norwegian Embassy in India. Seventeen fellowships were given to journalists from 9 language media from across 13 states.

The objective of the fellowship was to get stories from across the country that 1) explore the impact of Covid-19 on women and girls, 2) analyse implementation of programmes through a gender lens 3) highlight the role of women in Covid-19 response and 4) analyse the changing gender equations due to the lockdown and the new norm of working from home.

The fellows included young and seasoned journalists, freelancers and working journalists, and journalists writing for print publications and online publications. This allowed for a much larger reach and diversity in content.

A big thank you to Yogesh Pawar who painstakingly went through all stories and edited the whole document. We particularly appreciate the fact that he had done it while going through some serious personal crises.

I would like to thank all the editors who have published the fellowship articles and helped the stories reach a large number of readers.

I would like to express my gratitude to Ms Malti Mehta and Mr Gawhar Geelani for mentoring the fellows.

I thank UNFPA for the partnership in engaging with the media, and for their support in instituting the fellowships. I also thank the Royal Norwegian Embassy in India for their support that made this initiative possible.

I thank Alka Dhupkar, Anuradha Mascarenhas, Yogesh Pawar, Sharmila Kalgutkar, Mohini Singh, Revati Laul, Raksha Kumar, Ninglun Hanghal, Deval Thoria, Manjushree M. Kadakola, Nikitha Nellutla, Vikas Jain, Sachin Shrivastava, Tariq Ali Mir, Akhand, Diganta Sarma, and Sunil Sharma for bringing out such refreshing, interesting, inspiring and thought-provoking stories on Covid-19 written from a gender perspective.

A very special thanks to Ms Anuja Gulati, Consultant UNFPA for conducting the orientation programme for the fellows.

Last but not the least I thank my colleagues Venu Gawali and Mrinmayee Ranade for coordinating the project and Kashish Kanojia and Pooja Nagdev for designing the e-document.

I hope all the Fellows will continue to write stories through a gender lens in future as well.

Dr A.L. Sharada
Director, Population First.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Population First is a social impact organisation that works on health and population issues from a gender and social development perspective and focuses on women empowerment, gender equality and community mobilisation.

Population First was registered as an NGO in March 2002 by Bobby Sista, a pioneer in the Indian advertising industry, to leverage communication and media influence to address social and demographic issues. Population First believes that it is not the size of the population alone but the unequal social development and gendered mindsets that are responsible for the poor social demographic indices - be it maternal and child mortality, child marriages or falling sex ratios. Thus, it considers it important to challenge the gendered mindsets which undermine the value of girls and women, promote discrimination against them, and justify gender-based violence.

LAADLI – The Girl Child Campaign

Laadli, Population First's girl-child campaign was launched in June 2005 to challenge such mindsets and address the problem of the falling sex ratios highlighted in Census 2001. While it was important to create public awareness about falling sex ratios, ensure that the laws are implemented effectively and the capacities of the legal systems are built to promote gender sensitivity, it was felt that it is equally important to understand the deep-seated patriarchal values and misogyny in society to improve the status of women in all spheres.

Laadi believes that every communication that goes in the public domain should be gender-sensitive to bring in long lasting chain be. Sporadic efforts and communication would not be effective if the communication in the media and advertising, the biggest influencers is gendered and promotes patriarchal values and misogyny.

Laadli, therefore, launched its flagship programme *Laadli* Media Advocacy campaign in 2007 with the announcement of *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity.

The *Laadli* media Advocacy initiative works at three levels:

1. Capacity building of the media and advertising professionals to report from a gender perspective with greater sensitivity. Gender and media training programmes and workshops using theatre and other innovative techniques are organized for media persons across the country on various themes.
2. Creating an enabling environment by engaging with the media and advertising leaders, opinion makers, thought leaders, associations and professional bodies by partnering with them and engaging them as influencers in all its advocacy initiatives. Identifying and working with this rich pool of individuals and organizations has been one of the key strategies of the *Laadli* initiative.
3. Putting in place a reward mechanism to identify, acknowledge, and felicitate positive efforts in media that promote gender sensitivity and inclusiveness in reporting and communication. Apart from the launch of the *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity, which are one of its kind awards in the world, *Laadli* through its advocacy efforts has played a role in mainstreaming gender sensitivity as a category in mainstream industry awards like the Abby Awards of the advertising industry and the Screen Writers Association Awards.

Laadli Media Fellowships

Laadli's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment is pursued through gender-specific programming and initiatives. Thus, gender-inclusive and gender-equal media workplaces as well as gender sensitivity in news reporting on women and men, are the twin objectives of *Laadli* media initiatives.

It was against this backdrop that Population First decided to engage in the global framework of gender-sensitive journalism. This was done to create a set of gender sensitivity indicators across all media so that both the choice of subjects covered and their treatment undergoes a change. In fact, this was the strategy to foster gender-sensitive media persons and develop a mandated gender-sensitive ecosystem in the media.

One of the important initiatives under this broad objective was the launch of *Laadli Media Fellowships*, which were announced in 2012-13 with support from UNFPA. It is a well-known fact that the curriculum of media and journalism courses do not focus on gender sensitivity as an intrinsic value of good journalism. The in-house training programmes also often do not focus on gender-sensitive reporting. The pressures of 24-hour news channels, the TRPs, circulation figures and ad revenues undermine in-depth media reporting based on time-consuming investigative and research-based reporting. Thus the fellowships, while building the skills of the media persons to report from a gender perspective, also create a supportive eco-system by getting the commitment of the editors to publish the fellowship stories.

The Fellowships provide the much-needed resources to the journalists to travel and research on a theme identified by the *Laadli* team. Each Fellowship consists of a cash payment of Rs. 50,000 to pursue and publish their stories within 4 months.

To ensure that the stories are published in the mainstream media, initially applications were invited through editors from publications having a circulation of more than one lakh. However, with the emergence of online publications which have much greater readership, the fellowships were thrown open to all publications. However, the requirement of getting an undertaking from the editor that the stories would be published was retained, to help the Fellows pursue the stories without the fear of the story getting rejected by the editorial team later.

Apart from providing financial support, the fellowships also build the skills of the media persons to write gender sensitive stories through orientation programmes and mentoring processes.

Orientation and mentoring

An enduring prejudice in most societies is gender disparity, which limits types of roles and responsibilities women can take. This disparity is perpetuated and aggravated by the portrayal of women in the print and electronic media, a powerful tool with far reaching impact and influence on the human psyche.

Media practitioners' gender prejudices and biases are one of the major obstacles in the portrayal of women and their voices in the media. Journalists and editors too, are socialised as men and women in a patriarchal world, long before they choose journalism as a career. This socialisation influences how the media reports on, portrays, and projects women and gender issues.

While all those selected for the Fellowships are established media persons, often pursuing mainstream beats can leave journalists with little bandwidth for social issues or the contours of a gendered view. There is also a certain ennui that sets in among many, after years of covering issues and seeing them up close. The lack

of a focussed impetus to highlight gender issues may lead to coverage of these issues in a sporadic manner with fewer follow ups. No wonder research has shown, time and again, how news is told largely through the eyes, voices, and perspectives of men. The media often mistakenly confuses gender with women. This leads to a news approach which focuses on women as isolated members of societies with specific needs and interests. While this is true due to women's subordinate status in societies across the globe, this approach often further marginalizes women.

Also, the media reports on so-called 'women's issues', which is often decontextualized from the issues of society in general, and often fails to underline more clearly the inter-relationships between patriarchy, gender identities, gender roles, resource access, and power. The media coverage of incidents of gender based violence particularly highlights this. Such coverage is usually characterised by prejudices, victim-blaming and inappropriate language, along with the problem of under-reporting.

The orientation programme of the Fellows, therefore, focuses on the prevailing gendered reporting in the media and how to make it more gender sensitive and inclusive in nature, particularly with reference to the theme identified for that particular edition of the Fellowship. Along with the training programme, the fellows are also linked with a senior journalist or a member from the *Laadli* team to bounce ideas and get feedback on the draft articles.

Editors' response

From the beginning, the response of editors has been quite positive and they have all been very supportive of the Laadli Media Fellowship, encouraging more and more journalists in their team to apply for what has come to be seen by the community as a very prestigious Fellowship. Fellows are now recognised for being selected and a special mention is made of it even while introducing them at public interfaces.

The way the leadership in newsrooms sees the Laadli Media Fellowship can be discerned from the way the Editors Guild of India ex-president, Editor-in-Chief of The Print and veteran journalist Shekhar Gupta who was the Chief guest at the Laadli Media Awards in 2018 opined, "Laadli is doing a wonderful job since last 16 years creating a platform to showcase gender-sensitive reporting and its contribution is highly rewarding. In 1977, very few women were there in media and journalism but these days it's about 8 women to 2 men. This is a big change which has come around. They are there because they are good, not as a favour from anyone."

Chapter 2

Laadli Media Fellows 2020

Over the years the *Laadli* Media Fellowships have become a major annual journalistic milestone that the media community looks forward to. The year 2020 has been different in every possible way for various reasons, and the Fellowships reflected that.

The Corona challenge:

The Covid-19 pandemic became one of the biggest public health challenges India has ever faced in 2020. The pandemic has brought out the fault lines in the society with the marginalized sections of the society, particularly women and girls facing the brunt of it. Loss of jobs and fear of the pandemic led to reverse migration from cities to the villages with women, the invisible labour in the informal sector, constituting a major chunk of the migrants. Lockdown forced women to be with abusive partners leading to a spike in domestic violence. Education of girls suffered due to digital gap with schools being closed, and classes being conducted online, work from home led to new forms of sexual harassment, and sex workers and LGBTQIA community faced many problems as they lost their livelihoods and faced more stigma and discrimination. The front line women workers also were in focus as they encountered many problems while discharging their duties due to poor safety measures, increased workload in difficult conditions and stigma and violence from the community.

Oxfam India estimates economic loss from women losing their jobs during the pandemic at about Rs 15,824.21 billion, knocking off 8% from the country's GDP. This clouds women's already poor economic outlook. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2020 already ranks India 112th of 153 countries in offering equal opportunities to women and men and women often do not have the same access to health care and education as their male counterparts. This is clearly set to nosedive further following the circumstances created by the Corona pandemic.

Each of these factors and the intersectionalities created the background for and amplified the exceptional suffering and distress caused by the current pandemic. Communities on the margins, particularly women, ended up facing the worst brunt of the unfolding crisis and yet most of the coverage completely invisibilized them. Keeping this in mind, the number of *Laadli* Media Fellowships was increased from 4 to 17 to do four stories each on the fall-out of the pandemic from a gender perspective. This totalled to as many as 68 reports which looked at various facets of how gender was playing out during the pandemic across languages and platforms. The fellowships were awarded to journalists writing in nine languages from across 11 states.

The Fellowships were given as below:

English	Anuradha Mascarenhas Raksha Kumar Revati Laul Ninglun Hangal Yogesh Pawar
Hindi	Mohini Singh Sachin Shrivastava Sunil Sharma Vikas Jain
Marathi	Sharmila Kalgutkar Alka Dhupkar
Gujarati	Deval Thoria
Odia	Akhand
Telugu	Nikitha Neelutla
Kannada	Manjushree M. Kadkola
Assamese	Diganta Sarma
Urdu	Tariq Ali Mir

***Laadli* Fellows 2020 - Brief Profiles**

English

Anuradha Mascarenhas

Based out of Pune, Anuradha Mascarenhas is a senior editor with The Indian Express who writes on health, science, environment, women and developmental issues. A much-respected and credible byline, her reporting has always stood out for being high on facts and figures.

As a *Laadli* Media Fellow 2020, she reported for The Indian Express on the menstrual health and hygiene challenges faced by adolescent girls and young women in slums, relief camps and smaller houses during the lockdown and the pandemic. Mascarenhas also highlighted the difficulties faced by the visually-impaired,



several of whom also have learning-disabilities. The lockdown is particularly hard for visually-impaired women as the sense of touch is important to get around guiding online classes, social volunteering: the report heartwarmingly looked at how the visually-impaired women in Pune were also using the lockdown to work on their skill-set to be independent.

Her third story looked at the contribution of women paramedics. “Nurses, equally if not more than doctors, are directly at the frontline of the effort to stop the spread of Covid-19. Each nurse has a story to tell and while most have not met their families for more than two months, what was common among all of them was their commitment to looking after patients suffering from Covid-19,” she says and adds, “I felt this had not been celebrated as much as the doctors and asked myself if it was happening only because most of them are women.”

With authorities caught in stopping the spread of Corona, the number of child marriages (most common in Beed district and other rural parts of Maharashtra) were back with a bang. Mascarenhas investigated whether such child marriages were also being promoted by the trafficking mafia.

Ninglun Hanghal

Freelance journalist Ninglun Hanghal is based in Imphal, Manipur with regular bylines in www.thenestories.com, The Statesman and The Hindu Business Line. She also contributes to various portals and various media houses across India. This former Delhi correspondent of the Imphal-based The Sangai Express largely writes on women and development covering India's northeast, most specifically Manipur and has co-founded www.her-world.co.in. Associated with several women's groups and organisations Hanghal is keen on contributing towards the emancipation of underprivileged women, especially those heading their families.



Her stories looked at the impact of the Covid-19 on the people of Manipur at large and women in particular. She explored the impact of the pandemic on women’s mobility and economic activity, covering how the ‘new normal’ discriminated against women in the rural areas and periphery, significantly in terms of the digital divide. She also looked at how women in Manipur contributed to ensuring the availability of food and essential items even while ensuring their micro-economic sustainability. “Just like the pre-Corona period Manipuri women, both as individuals and in collectives continue to shoulder the responsibility of sustaining families and society at large, she says.



I thank Population First for the fellowship that enabled me to cover stories for www.thenestories.com which otherwise get overlooked.



Raksha Kumar

Raksha Kumar is a human rights journalist, with a specific focus on land and forest rights. Since 2011, she has reported from 12 countries across the world and a100 districts across India for The New York Times, BBC, Guardian, TIME, Foreign Policy, South China Morning Post, The Hindu, etc. She is a consulting editor of Citizen Matters, Mumbai, a journalism website that focuses on civic and governance issues in Mumbai. Raksha has spent the last four years producing academic reports on media freedom, sustainable financial models for journalism and online hate mongering and disinformation. With a Fulbright Scholarship for Leadership Development, she graduated from the Journalism School, Columbia University and holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Human Rights Law.



The four stories that she had written were on the female labour force participation in India which looked at their contribution to both the agricultural and corporate sectors. All the stories which appeared in Forbes India were based on official and other data, but also had strong women characters who shared their stories and voiced their concerns.

Revati Laul

Revati Laul is an independent journalist-filmmaker. During the fellowship, she was based in New Delhi but transitioned to a new role and destination working full-time against mass violence. She is doing this through her NGO Qalandar, in Shamli district of Western Uttar Pradesh. After 25 years as a television journalist, she transitioned to print in 2010 focussing on gender violence and mass-violence. All her writing explores ways to nuance the conversations on these twin issues.



About her work under the Fellowship, she says: “The four stories I worked on looked for ways of giving women agency, where they are not victims but shape-shifters, people who change the spaces they inhabit. In ordinary times this is necessary, but in Covid times, I felt it’s important for the writing to serve as a way of holding onto some sliver of hope and to feel we have the power to effect change and that change is always personal, gendered and in the little, everyday spaces. Those are key and those are what I focused on.”



From looking at a daily wage professional Arti in Shamli, Western UP who decided that instead of despairing over her hardships due to the Covid pandemic she could harness her energies in hundreds of videos highlighting herself, to looking at how a woman relief worker took on toxic patriarchy both at home and in the village panchayat and emerged victorious, to profiling the new woman District Magistrate of Shamli who was negotiating an avowedly masculine political system in her new posting during the pandemic, Revathi Laul portrays women who are exercising their choice and agency to deal with the unprecedented crisis of Covid -19. These three articles were carried by The Wire while Laul's final story that took a gendered look at her personal experience of Covid-19 when she had self- quarantined for 14 days, after travelling to UP, appeared in The Quint. She looked at why the pandemic is by and large masculine, based on the health sector, preventives, vaccines, etc. all being driven largely by men.

Yogesh Pawar

Yogesh Pawar has been a print, web, magazine and television journalist for 26 years with The Indian Express, rediff.com, Elle, NDTV and DNA. A freelancer now, his bylines can be found in Caravan, TheQuint, Free Press Journal, SabrangIndia and The Dialogue, among others. Though he has eclectically reported on politics, crime, social issues, culture and art both as spot report and long-format, his strength comes across best while reporting on caste, gender, victimisation and exclusion. This social-work post-graduate from Tata Institute of Social Sciences is also a recipient of the UNFPA- *Laadli* gender sensitivity award in 2016.



As a *Laadli* Media Fellow 2020, Pawar first looked at how the Corona conundrum brought sex workers to the brink and then highlighted how the pandemic and the resultant lockdown brought gender-inequality and gender-injustice within the confines of the home into sharp focus.

The last article in his Fellowship series looked at how the boom in dating apps and its spin-off ecosystems due to improved internet access which enabled people to explore relationships or instant hook-ups in recent years has been impacted by the pandemic and how this plays out vis-a-vis gender-based agency in a patriarchal India. All his stories appeared in the Free Press Journal and The Dialogue.



Soon after pursuing the first story from the Fellowship, I lost my father. Following his last rites, I also tested positive for Corona. After 17 days in the ICU, I spent over two months at home recuperating with barely enough strength to stand. That's when I became aware of the patriarchy and its gender straitjacket around me. The story that I was looking for without, was within and all around. That's how the domestic chores story happened," he recounts and adds, **"As a technophobe, the Fellowship helped me enter hitherto uncharted territory when I pursued the dating app ecosystem story to look at the intersection between tech and gender.**



Hindi

Mohini Singh

Mohini Singh is a young journalist working out of Uttar Pradesh. She began her journalistic journey five years ago with the daily Inext. After learning the ropes as a sub editor for six months, she shifted to reporting for the daily broadsheet Navbharat Times where all her work for the Fellowship appeared. She has shifted to working for the Uttar Pradesh Police's 112 Cell recently as an 'information assistant.' This cell fields calls from women about domestic violence, sexual harassment and other crimes against women. "My reporting on gender issues has qualified me for the current job," she says.



As a *Laadli* Media Fellow, Singh has highlighted the plight of women looking at their social status given the toxic patriarchy they have to deal with. One of her first reports saw her go to a women's prison where she documented the stories of detained women who didn't know why they were arrested or where they should look for legal help from. Her next two stories looked at the increased and brazen instances of domestic violence during the pandemic when women were stuck with their abusers in hostile situations due to the lockdown. These stories got a lot of traction on social media too. Actor Tapsee Punnu and filmmaker Anubhav Sinha also tweeted about the same while promoting their film *Thappad* which looked at the issue of domestic violence.

One of her stories highlighted how many women led from the front when it came to collectivising for relief work like distributing dry ration and home essentials for poor families stuck in the lockdown without any money or income source.



One assumes the arrival of a crisis like the pandemic will make people drop such toxicity and work unitedly to help everyone irrespective of gender. But when you look around we see the contrary unfolding.



Sachin Shrivastava

Sachin Shrivastava is a Bhopal-based Hindi journalist with an experience of over 20 years working in mainstream newspapers such as Dainik Bhaskar, Dainik Jagran, Prabhat Khabar, Amar Ujala, etc. His Fellowship work has appeared in *Deshbandhu* and *Sarvodaya Press*. He reports on politics, crime and social issues.

"Just like a person who has only read about cricket and finds the actual game very different, I was also exposed to what the real daily struggles of women are thanks to this Fellowship," he says

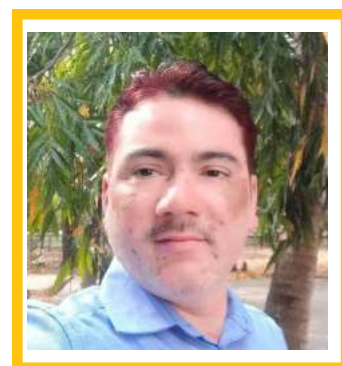


and adds, “Though I've often looked at poverty, hunger and destitution, the *Laadli* Media Fellowship made me consciously work towards looking at the gender angle in stories and I was surprised at how well the first article in the series was received. This told me I was on the right path and paved the way for the other stories.”

His reports under the Fellowship looked at the problems faced by the transgender community, the sex workers community due to the lockdown and the apathy of the service delivery system toward them. He reported how the transgender community got involved in works to help the society in general during this period - from campaigning for elections to actual farming; though these were some of the exceptional stories. One of his four stories talked about how half the population - the women and girls - was away from the touchscreen or the mobile phone. Either they didn't own a smartphone or they didn't have a data pack or the phones were managed by the men in the house.

Sunil Sharma

Sunil Sharma has been a journalist for 18 years with regular bylines in Dainik Haribhumi, Raviwar Post and the latter's website www.raviwar.com. He has consistently engaged with issues related to farm rights, forest rights, tribal rights, gender and human rights issues. This National Foundation for India Fellow (2010-11) pursued several investigative reports looking at displacement of tribals. In 2012, he attended a training programme on Digital Media organised by the International Centre for Journalists at Colombo.



His reportage under the Fellowship has focussed on how the impact of Covid-19 on women was more or less forgotten was whenspoken of in a homogenised manner. He movingly reported on women with terminal cancer not being able to access healthcare and women who were rendered jobless without any prior notice. “I felt that the same patriarchal traps were using Corona as a ruse to trap women who had barely begun experiencing some freedom once again.” He says that his reportage for www.cgkhabar.com has led to his colleagues/peers getting enthused about looking for the gender perspective in all their reporting.

One of his stories reported how domestic violence cases doubled during the lockdown when the men were forced to stay home. The fourth story is about the increasing incidence of child marriages in Chhattisgarh, where the Akha Teej festival is considered the best time for child marriage. (Akha Teej was celebrated during the lockdown.)



I did some spot reports around the time the Corona pandemic began making headlines in India but I was not satisfied with how they lacked the focus needed around any single point. The *Laadli* Media Fellowship arrived at the right time to give me the right kind of push.



Vikas Jain

Vikas Jain has spent over 15 years in journalism, more than 10 of which have been spent at the daily broadsheet Rajasthan Patrika. Known for his work documenting social issues and politics, all his four reports under the Fellowship appeared in this newspaper.

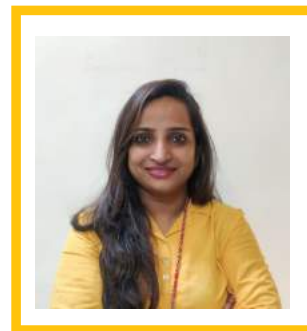
His reports looked at challenges faced by women paramedic staff, the heightened instances of domestic abuse, the plight of women who were left to fend for their families with no relief coming their way and the increased instances of child marriage during the pandemic in the deeply patriarchal state of Rajasthan.



Marathi

Alka Dhupkar

Mumbai-based Alka Dhupkar has been a journalist for 16 years and is known for her in-depth coverage with a perspective on issues of gender, social and political sector, caste-based violence, public health and rural reporting. Though she's currently Assistant Editor with Mumbai Mirror, she was the news editor of IBN Lokmat, a Marathi news channel of Network 18 group for seven years before that. She has also worked with Mid-Day, Sakal media group, Apla Mahanagar and Belgaum Tarun Bharat.



Her reports under the Fellowship were as eclectic as her own background. Whether profiling one Kavita Chavan, from Solapur who helped families take dead bodies of Covid-positive patients to crematoria or looking at the spike in gender-based violence even at Covid-care centres in Maharashtra or highlighting the plight of nurses who went unpaid despite putting in extra hours during the pandemic or an expose on child marriage in Kolhapur when authorities were busy during the pandemic Dhupkar's stories were widely read and circulated.

Sharmila Kalgutkar

Sharmila Kalgutkar has been a journalist for 17 years with extensive experience writing on health, communities, gender and social issues. She pursues these beats at one of Mumbai's largest selling Marathi daily broadsheets - Maharashtra Times



Kalgutkar's stories under the Fellowship during the Covid pandemic highlighted the plight of women needing blood transfusions having trouble accessing blood donation centres because of a lack of public transport. She also reported on girls who stay alone in Mumbai in rented accommodation.

Very often they had fled abusive unhappy homes to come and work in the city as a way of escape. While the pandemic and the ensuing lockdown was forcing some to return to the same hostile backgrounds they had left behind, many decided to stay back taking on challenges that came along. Her third story was about the curtailment/complete suspension of obstetrician-gynaecological services for women using Covid as an excuse. Left with no option women were forced to seek unsafe abortion at fly-by-night clinics or worse, carry the unwanted pregnancy to term. The fourth article highlighted how men are also victims of the patriarchy trap which the pandemic underlined once again. Many lost jobs, were saddled with economic burdens, took to addiction and the resultant extra burden of medical expenses made them feel more helpless and miserable.

“Reporting how men are themselves victims of the patriarchy is a great way for making men address this issue and effect change in society,” says Kalgutkar whose last article highlighted how women who were legally separated and weren't being paid the maintenance amount were suffering.



Irrespective of the story, for me, what the person on the street with the barest minimum thinks, matters the most. Her views have to reflect in what finally goes out as the story on that issue,” she says recounting how this trait led her to highlight the lack of washrooms for women on railways stations leading to the famous Right to Pee campaign, her series on kangaroo caste courts led to a crackdown on them by authorities.



Telugu

Nikitha Nellutla

An engineering graduate, Nikitha Nellutla who is based out of Hyderabad, Telangana has been a journalist with Sakshi and Velugu over the last six years. She has recently joined Namasthe Telangana – a Telugu news daily.

Profusely thanking Population First for the Fellowship, she says, “It has helped me both learn and gain satisfaction from doing meaningful work. I saw the pain and discrimination faced by women in all walks of life at close quarters.”



Nellutla's stories went into detail looking at the exceptional distress that women migrant workers faced due to the lockdown. “I remember breaking down while talking to some of these women. No one should be robbed of their dignity as a human being like that,” she says and adds, “I will be always ready to report on these issues henceforth and also consciously seek the gender angle in all my coverage hereon.”

Her first story is about how women entrepreneurs faced more problems after the lockdown, at the very beginning of starting their businesses. Nellutla’s second story described the travails of the women migrant labourers during their journey back home. She wrote about the struggles of single women, domestic help, and daily wage earners in the other two stories.

Kannada

Manjushree M. Kadakola

Manjushree M. Kadakola has been a journalist with the leading Kannada daily Prajavani since 2006. Her work has always been about women-centric issues. Whether working on women, women's health, the social problems they face, or the struggles of Devadasi women and their children, she has consistently made women the focus of her journalism.

Kadakola has edited a book on the Davangere district theatre movement for Karnataka Nataka Academy and has been awarded the Charaka Developmental Award-2010 (for highlighting the poor facilities for rural women in Karnataka), The Vanitha Sahityashree award in 2013 for her contribution to journalism and the Karnataka Media Academy award in 2018 before she got selected for the Laadli Media Fellowship 2020.



Her first story under the Fellowship highlighted how the women conservancy staff, who protect the health of society, have no access to health care and safety themselves.

The second story looked at the plight of sex workers due to the Corona pandemic. “Instead of a holistic approach looking at the issue from the perspective of the women, the administration was just cracking down on brothels and sex workers, asking them to stop their work since March, in an ostensible bid to enforce social distancing. “But that put a question mark on the very survival of over 1.5 lakh sex workers. I was shocked at the authorities' apathy and felt compelled to highlight the same,” she says.

Her third report looked at women who were part of essential services like bus conductors who were facing multiple challenges both at the workplace and at home due to Covid. The last in the series highlighted how women in the garment industry were suffering after their factories shut down due to the lockdown. Several of these women who are sole breadwinners for their family have been forced to become cooks, domestic help, vegetable vendors or daily labourers.

Odia

Akhand

Akhand is a freelance Odia journalist based in the eastern state of Odisha with an experience of over 20 years, both as a print and television journalist. He has consistently written on developmental issues like human rights, gender, health and poverty. A recipient of the Sarojini Naidu National Award for Journalism in 2008 for reporting on women in the panchayat raj, Akhand has also won the *Laadli* Media Award for Gender Sensitivity in 2017. As a part of the US State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) on gender issues, he has visited the US to look at how the media reports on gender there in March 2017 and also attended the UN Human Rights Council General Session in March 2020 to participate in sessions on various rights issues.



As a *Laadli* Media Fellow 2020, his first report looked at how women doctors, health workers, Anganwadi workers, Asha workers, police personnel and volunteers in Odisha tirelessly worked to protect people and their families from Covid-19. “Some have lost their loved ones and many have themselves lost their lives in the line of duty. I feel they are no less than soldiers who martyr themselves on the borders to protect the country,” he says. He also highlighted how women's groups have come together to spread awareness and intervene in instances of spiralling domestic violence during the lockdown bringing in a visible reduction of such instances.

The Corona epidemic has broken people's financial backbone and exacerbated the child marriage problem. On the one hand, the district administration and police were busy dealing with Covid-19; while on the other, the incidence of child marriages rose. Akhand's fourth story explained how a single woman in Nayagarh District of Odisha died of hunger with no relief reaching her during the lockdown. His report exposed how officials were on the defensive and were trying to show that the death was not preventable.



Akhand says his first report saw an avalanche of calls from people asking him to write about women in their own areas. “Due to Covid-19 I had no work and was facing extreme difficulty in eking a living and my confidence was shaken. This Fellowship helped re-boost my confidence and gave me hope,” he admits and proudly points out, “When the readership for each of these stories on <https://localwire.me/> crossed more than 12,000 views, I knew that there is a demand for this kind of work.”



Assamese

Diganta Sharma

Diganta Sarma is a journalist based in Guwahati, Assam. Since 2003 he has been regularly contributing to the Assamese weekly Saadin and the news portal www.biriya.com. He regularly writes about human rights, politics, indigenous people's movements and development.

Despite coming from a very marginalised section themselves, some Assamese women are doing exceptional work with regard to both awareness generation and relief work related to Corona, taking on tasks which were generally seen as a 'men's jobs.' Sarma documented such women for his first story under the

Fellowship. For his second, he looked at the hardships faced by HIV-positive women, who were not able to collect life-saving drugs due to the lockdown which also drastically cut their access to nutritious food. He highlighted the increased instance of girl children being trafficked for sex work by desperately poor parents and guardians in his third story while his fourth looked at women in debt who were unable to pay back the money borrowed due to loss of work and income during the pandemic. The story highlighted how such women are more susceptible to being exploited for working long hours at very tough jobs for really poor wages.



The pandemic and the resultant lockdown had induced a crisis of sorts for me when a door suddenly opened with the *Laadli Media Fellowship 2020* to explore the pandemic and its fall-out from the perspective of gender.



Urdu

Tariq Ali Mir

Tariq Ali Mir is a South Kashmir-based journalist reporting under exceptional circumstances since 2006. He cut his teeth as a reporter at the daily broadsheet Kashmir Uzma reporting on cultural heritage and history through a decade-long Sunday column Meerass-Uzma. His work through the column has been recognised by the Department of Archives, the Cultural Academy, Urdu Academy. He also launched his own Urdu monthly Belaag in 2014 which looked at larger issues of the Indian subcontinent. Unfortunately, it was shut down following protests and a 53-day long strict curfew when Indian armed forces killed a locally popular 'militant' Burhan Wani in July 2016.



As a *Laadli* Media Fellow 2020, Mir's stories were carried by Kashmir Narrator and the now revived Belaag and Tameel-I-Irshad. One of his stories also got narrated on Radio Kashmir.

With the pandemic bringing a complete lockdown, women's groups began collecting clothes, groceries and cosmetics for weddings of girls from underprivileged backgrounds. This was highlighted in his first story while his second looked at how women artists, singers, poets and calligraphers were using their art to spread Covid-awareness. Most women either run beauty parlours or work there. After they were shut women were left with no support or income source leading to hardship and misery. That was Mir's third story while his fourth celebrated a boutique owner who didn't want the women working under her to lose employment and began using the same dress material to make masks which she sold on a no-profit basis, sustaining both her business and also without letting workers go.



As a reporter, I've written about gender in the past too, but this work under the Fellowship was driven by the exceptional resilience shown by Kashmiri women in an already unfavourable situation in the conflict-ridden state worsened by the pandemic.



Gujarati

Deval Thoria

Gujarat-based Deval Thoria has been a print journalist for 18 years of which she spent 13 with Divya Bhaskar before shifting to Gujarat Samachar. While she has reported on all beats, she is drawn to social issues, especially those related to gender.

Her reporting as a *Laadli* Media Fellow 2020 saw her profile the way Sewa has helped 5,000 women reinvent their roles despite the Corona challenge, take an overview of the increased cybercrime and harassment targeting women, highlight the 70% spike in domestic violence against women in Gujarat and explored whether work from home was the convenience it was made out to be for working women.



I am glad that the *Laadli* Media Fellowship 2020 allowed me to broaden my worldview and look for gender nuances in my everyday reporting.



Chapter 3

Covid-19 Stories Through a Gender Lens

The 68 reports looking at the fallout of the pandemic were spread out across States covering Kashmir, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Assam, Odisha, Telangana, Karnataka, Gujarat and Maharashtra. They had a mix of stories from urban and rural areas and looked at issues across the gender spectrum too. 50 stories are included in this document the remaining 18 could not be published due to technical reasons.

The works of nine of the Fellows were published on portals (36 stories) while stories by five were published in newspapers (20 stories). Three of the Fellows' works were published on both websites as well as newspapers (12 stories). While there were no television stories, Tariq Ali Mir's story on the plight of women running beauty parlours or working for them was broadcast by Radio Kashmir.

Type of publication	No of stories
Web portals	36 stories
Newspapers	20 stories
Published both online and offline	12 stories
Radio	1 Programme

It's been an eight-year-long journey for the Laadli Media Fellowships. This exceptional year 2020 saw the Fellowships widen their horizons with a larger focus on the gendered impact of the Corona pandemic. From looking at the struggles of women in conflict-ridden Jammu to highlighting the heightened incidence of domestic abuse, looking at the challenges faced by sex workers and the LGBTQIA+ community, to documenting the struggles of women paramedics and other service providers, Fellows chose various subjects reflecting on the realities unfolding around them.

The 68 reports were carried in the following publications and portals each of which has wide reach:
These include:

Name of publication	Nature of publication	Circulation
Indian Express	Newspaper	5,00,000
Forbes Magazine	Periodical	50,000
The Wire	Leading pan India news portal	3,00,000
The Quint	General news and opinion website	1,60,00,000
Free Press Journal	Newspaper	70,000
The Dialogue	News and Opinion Website	11,819
Hindustan	Newspaper	22,21,566
Www.raviwar.com	News and opinion website	260
Rajasthan Patrika	Newspaper	17,88,420
Aap ka Samvidhan	Periodical	5,000
Maharashtra times	Newspaper	10,00,000
Namaste Telangana	Newspaper	31,49,000
Prajavani	Newspaper	5,79,000
https://localwire.me/	News and opinion website in Odia	1,00,000
www.biriya.com	News and opinion portal in Assamese	40,000
Taameel-I-Ershad	Newspaper	75,000
Belaag	Digital Daily	30,000
Gujarat Samachar	Newspaper	46,42,000
The Sangai Express	Newspaper	48,000
Total Circulation		1,19,19,000 +

Thus the articles have reached roughly more than 10 million people even if we assume that only 20% of the readers have read the articles.

The stories published could be categorized into the following themes:

- Issues of women service providers, frontline workers, nurses, AWW, police, etc. (7 articles)
- How the lockdown has impacted domestic workers, migrant workers, retail sellers,
- women engaged in handicrafts and handloom industry, etc. (11 articles)
- Stories of the marginalised - sex workers, trans people, disabled (6 articles)
- Harmful practices like child marriages, domestic violence, trafficking (4 articles)
- Women and girls' access to services- education, general health care, reproductive services, counselling services for women facing domestic violence, etc. (9 articles)
- Success stories (7 articles)
- Programme Implementation (3 articles)
- Problems of migrant workers (3 articles)

A. Issues of women service providers, frontline workers, nurses, AWW, police etc

Globally women make up over 70 % of workers in health, including those working in care institutions. They are on the frontline of the fight against Covid-19 and this pandemic has been the worst they have ever seen. As a result of the current public health challenge, they are bearing a double burden: longer shifts at work and additional care work at home.

This gets further compounded in a mostly patriarchal India where World Health Organisation estimates say that 38% of all Indian health workers are women. This includes doctors, nurses, other paramedics (pathology laboratory technicians, physiotherapists, etc), midwives and ancillary healthcare workers.

As a part of the **Laadli Media Fellowship 2020** freelance Odia journalist Akhand looked at how women doctors, health workers, anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, home guards and volunteers in Odisha work tirelessly to protect people and their families from Covid-19 despite facing personal crises – even losing their loved ones or even losing their own lives while in the line of duty.

Similarly, the Pune-based journalist with The Indian Express Anuradha Mascarenhas also wrote about nurses, who are directly at the frontline of the battle to stop the spread of Covid-19. From the sorrow of the nurses who could not meet their families for more than two months to those who put themselves at great risk, what she found common among them was their commitment to looking after patients suffering from Covid-19 which they put over and above their personal lives.

Hyderabad-based Nikitha Nellutla's report highlights the many challenges women covid-warriors face – both physical and mental during menstruation. She has written about the five-day-long cramps and mood swings, unmindful of which, paramedics offer service with a smile even while wearing PPE kits through the heat and humidity. Though sanitary pads need repeated change during menstruation, Covid-safety protocol and the PPE kits make it impossible to visit the washroom for a change. Often these women paramedics have nothing to eat or drink too because of this protocol and yet stay on their feet for long hours ignoring menstrual stains, hunger pangs and severe dehydration. The latter also causes urinary tract infection in them.

Bangalore-based Manjushri M. Kadakola's first story under the **Laadli Media Fellowship 2020** also movingly highlights how women conservancy staff who protect the health of society by keeping neighbourhoods clean, have no access to health care and safety themselves.

Shamli, Uttar Pradesh-based independent journalist-filmmaker Revati Laul has also brought the toxic patriarchy that Shamli's frontline relief workers had to contend with into sharp focus. Some of these women have to stand up to men in their neighbourhoods when they pick fights with them - before tackling Covid-19.

Forgetting themselves, Covid-19 warriors serve people amid many hurdles

Akhand

localwire.me

Bhubaneswar, July 08, 2020

People, doctors, health workers, anganwadi workers, Asha and police personnel, and volunteers in Odisha have given priority to protecting people from Covid-19 infection. In the process, some have lost their loved ones and many lost their own lives.

Gauri mourns the loss of her only child

During the first phase of Covid-19, Gauri Behera, a Home Guard working at the Pipili police station in Odisha's Puri district, lost her only daughter, Lopamudra, who was in the eighth standard. Gauri was away on duty in the Pipili market on the afternoon of April 15, 2020, ensuring that the public maintains social-distancing when she got a call that Lopamudra had died. The news of her daughter's death left her shocked and devastated.

She had already seen a lot of struggle. Many stories of her struggles came to light after this incident. A few years after her marriage, Behera's husband divorced her. Her world had centred around her daughter and elderly parents since.

Though the role and function of Home Guards are very important, their salaries are not high. Behera's cancer-stricken daughter needed regular treatment. Due to lack of money, she was still living in a thatched house with a polythene roof. No government assistance or benefits were available to her as she worked in a government establishment. Even during Covid-19, Home Guards did not receive any additional assistance for the extra duties or hours they were assigned.

After the news of her daughter's death spread, some government agencies and the police department extended her a helping hand. But she still rues the fact that she never received help for her daughter's treatment. Three months after her daughter Lopamudra's death, Behera still holds her photo and weeps. Despite such a severe personal blow, she not only reaches on time for duty but also handles traffic posts in the Pipili market regularly with efficiency.

Without depending on men around, she has faced multiple challenges and continues to do so. Both Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and the Director General of Police Abhay have also lauded her courage and determination during the Covid-19 pandemic. As someone who places her work ethic over everything else she avers: "I have never allowed my work as a Home Guard get affected by either financial or other family problems."

Duty during pregnancy

Another example of such a woman leading the fight against Covid-19 from the front is Teresa Xess, a sub-inspector of Sambalpur Town Police Station.

In March, she was seven months pregnant and on duty. She did not take leave until May 5. Other police

staff were busy enforcing the lockdown according to government norms. An officer was hence needed to be stationed at the police station and Xess was assigned that role. The expectant mother put in long hours at work often dealing with walk-in complainants, even while caring for her five-year-old daughter.

“No one at the police station forced me to work, but I was determined to do my job,” she said and added, “At that time, though this ate into my time with my daughter as a mom, I realised that I must live up to the responsibility placed on me.”

The Director-General of Police Abhay who visited Sambalpur was all praise for her commitment even while inquiring about her health with concern. Following the birth of her second daughter on May 28, she was able to spend more time with her children while on maternity leave. But after five months, she is firm about returning to work on the first day itself.

The warriors of the village

Anganwadi and ASHA workers are working as front-line fighters in the villages of Odisha to raise awareness about Corona and implement various government schemes to prevent it. But they have to endure a lot. Many have also lost their lives in the fight.

Madhuri Nayak, an ASHA worker from Geligenda under Banigochha police station in Odisha's Nayagarh district, was attacked by people resisting the restrictions being enforced. Scalding hot water was flung at her by an unknown person. And yet she continued to go from house to house explaining steps to take to avoid the Coronavirus infection.

Similarly, Nalini Pradhan, another ASHA from Binodpada under Ranpur police station, was attacked on May 10, 2020, for persuading a man to stay in home isolation as he came from another district. She was later attacked by his family members who wanted the man to move around freely.

These frontline workers working to solve the health problems in villages face resistance from some sections of people who want to disregard the Covid safety protocol. This resistance is also rooted in an old patriarchal mindset when many, especially men, are reluctant to take advice from an ASHA worker because she is a woman. “How dare she?” and “What can a woman explain to us?” are some of the comments the workers encounter while moving around in the villages.

Bharati Swain, an Anganwadi worker from Kholkhali village in Buguda block of Odisha's Ganjam district, who was working at the Covid quarantine centre fell ill herself and died. Basanti Samal, 35, an Anganwadi worker from Kankpur village in Kanas block of Puri district, also died on duty. She was employed at the Deipur Panchayat Temporary Health Centre. She went door-to-door to ensure sanitation in the village and died on July 7, while being taken for a Covid-19 test. Samal is survived by a 12-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son.

The government does not provide any additional assistance to those workers who are away from their families serving others day and night. And although the government has promised financial assistance for the dead, it refused assistance to the workers, denying that their deaths had anything to do with Corona. ASHA and Anganwadi workers are particularly affected by this attitude of the government.

Similarly, some teachers too have lost their lives while on Corona duty. Though the government which assigned them this work has still not yet officially declared them as Corona warriors, their story inspires all and will continue to do so in the days to come.

(Translated from Odia)





(Director General of Police meets Home Guard Gouri at Pipili police station)

Pushpa's innovative efforts to prevent domestic violence during Covid-19

Akhand

localwire.me

Bhubaneswar, July 14, 2020

The incidence of domestic violence has risen across the country during Covid-19 as women are being confined at home with abusive spouses. In rural areas, where women are either afraid or ashamed to bring these incidents to the fore, the efforts of some women workers working to prevent domestic violence, has borne fruit with a significant decline in such violence in their area.

Anganwadi worker Puspanjali Panda has used innovative efforts to curb domestic violence during Covid-19 in Odisha's border district of Gajapati. She works in the Anganwadi Centre of village B Sitapur under Kerandipur panchayat of Gosani block, 300 km from the capital city – Bhubaneswar where she is popularly known as Pushpa Apa, i.e Pushpa sister.

After reading in newspapers about the increased rate of domestic violence during the pandemic, Pushpa decided to work on this issue in her area too. Though she had worked on the issue earlier, this time she planned to do something special. At first, she went from house to house trying to find out how domestic violence was playing out in her neighbourhood. She found that since men are at home most of the time (due to the lockdown) scuffles over minor matters quickly escalate into violence. This meant children cannot stay at home and study due to the potential threat of parental anger and violence. Pushpa realised this needed immediate redressal. So first she went door-to-door enlisting children between the ages of 3 and 12 in some activities during the lockdown. She trained them to do various enjoyable toy projects which the mothers also showed interest in joining. Four-year-old A. Yashwanti made beautiful paper flowers with some help from her mother. Similarly, 4-year-old Joshna made small lamps and idols of animals and birds. The children also made small chariots to mark the world-famous chariot festival in Puri in June. The beautiful chariot made by six-year-old Barsharani was praised by all. Their parents were quite happy with the children's projects. Pinky, Barsharani's mother said: "They're so happy we're helping them. We love their work and it has improved the atmosphere at home." The children also created awareness posters about Covid-19. Now that the government has told young children not to leave their homes, they are spending time at home doing these projects. "Her contribution came to our notice when the villagers praised Pushpa Apa," say officials in the district health administration.

Pushpa is doing all this work, often jeopardising her housework. "Sometimes I come into the village with rice on the chulha at home, and when I return, the rice is burnt," she laughs. Her husband, Taraprasad, shares the domestic chores.

She also does her regular work during Covid-19 like distribution of masks, caring for pregnant women, distributing food to newborns and pregnant women and spreading awareness on the importance of washing hands. That is why today the Anganwadi workers are called Corona warriors.

(Translated from Odia)



International Nurses Day today: Nurses, the frontline warriors put patients above their own family.

Anuradha Mascarenhas
Indian Express
Pune, May 11, 2020

Mayura Awasare, 36, swallowed hard, but she could not control her tears. The nurse in charge at the Kothrud unit of Pune's Sahyadri Hospital said it would be impossible to go to Raigad district, more than 150 km from Pune, to be with her 14-year-old on his birthday on May 23. "He disconnected my phone. How do I explain to my child that I'm taking care of those suffering from the coronavirus and cannot take leave?" she asked.

Maya Bapat, 52, nurse in-charge at Sassoon General Hospital's paediatric ward, has not entered her kitchen for the past month. On May 9, her husband decided to celebrate his birthday by cooking her favourite food and taking a tiffin to the hospital, where she has been engaged in caring for Covid-19 as well as non-Covid-19 patients. "My husband and father-in-law both have diabetes and, at home too, I maintain a distance from them. My 85-year-old father-in-law keeps calling me to the dining table. He doesn't understand why I eat separately by myself at home," she revealed.

Over 5.5 km away, at Symbiosis hospital, Praisya Varghese, 45, wakes early to cook three meals for her 13-year-old, who stays alone for more than eight hours till she joins him after her duty hours as nursing director.

At the civic-run Naidu hospital, Saroj Vasudevan, 56, the nurse in charge, was the first to don Personal Protective Equipment and train younger juniors to care for those suffering from Covid-19.

At the frontline of the effort to stop the spread of the Coronavirus, each nurse has a story to tell and while most have not met their families for more than two months, what is common among all of them is their commitment to looking after patients suffering from Covid-19. "Patients who tested positive are extremely scared and if we do not provide care, who will? We have no option but to keep our families in a corner and perform our duty," said Varghese.

The year 2020 is being observed as the Year of the Nurse and May 12 is International Nurses Day. The celebration will be muted due to Covid-19; however, in their own way, each hospital will cheer for the nurses who are providing yeoman service.

At Sassoon General Hospital, Bapat spoke of how she, along with 25 others, was caring for 75 coronavirus-positive patients. "I have hypertension and hypothyroidism but I've chosen this profession and need to do my best. There are so many patients alone in the ward and some feel totally isolated when they see us in PPE. This is one disease the patient faces alone and I ask the young nurses to talk to them and tell them how we all must have had some connection that Covid-19 has brought us together."

Vasudevan, a widow, lives by herself. She said, “My daughters are married, though the younger one has now come home for a while to look after me,” adding that the entire hospital staff and her patients were her family and, particularly, recalled how among the initial lot of people who had travelled abroad and returned to Pune was a Chinese national who was wary of how he would be treated. “He was happy and left a really nice thank-you note for us,” she said.

Male nurses in the intensive care unit, like 33-year-old Manjeeth Kadam, said it was difficult to have water at times as they could not remove the PPE. “We can't have food or water after we wear the PPE. We're dealing with a deadly virus and if we don't look after ourselves, how can we care for patients?” Kadam asked and added that only after duty hours were over, nurses removed the suit and soaked it in a disinfectant and took a hot shower.

For the overall in-charge of the nursing department, like 57-year-old Mariamma Jose at Sahyadri hospital, who has more than 600 nursing staff or Rajashree Korake, nursing superintendent at Sassoon hospital, who has more than 1,000 nurses to manage, it has been a challenge. “From 1,100 nurses, we had to rule out those with comorbid conditions and engage the younger lot of 155 nurses to take care of Covid-19 patients,” Korake said.

Jose said she had to deal with several issues like parents of younger nurses not allowing them to work, but after a lot of counselling and providing PPEs, the nursing community was on track. As Dr Sunil Rao, group medical director of Sahyadri Hospitals, said, “Without our nurses, it is impossible to manage this pandemic. They have risked their lives and given their best.”



The cleanliness warriors, who protect the health of the society do not have health care facilities

Manjushree M Kadakola

Prajavani

Bengaluru, July 23, 2020

Civic worker Lakshamma exclaims with a sigh, “If you don’t want to get affected by the disease, you have to wash your hands every half-an-hour. Half of the working day is spent removing garbage and we can’t even drink the water peacefully.”

About her current situation she says, “After the corona pandemic, we are also maintaining distance from each other. When a few people died, we were also scared. We prepare food with the same hands which remove the garbage. What if Corona strikes our family members? But we need to do everything for survival; we can’t give up our jobs.”

Like doctors, nurses and police, about 80% of the state’s conservancy workers are women, who are fighting against the pandemic in their own way. Neither N-95 mask, gloves, shoes nor PPE kits have been provided to them though they dedicate their life to clean the city streets, every day. These workers are not subject to thermal scanning as per health department guidelines. These women who are busy cleaning up the city are often seen wearing torn gloves (sometimes bare hands), their masks are provided by NGOs, and they are constantly confronting the disease. Even in this mid-Covid, there is no security for the life of these cleaners, who work without any health insurance.

Most of the conservancy workers live in dense slums. While the men spend time after work on the streets, women conservancy workers are supposed to look after the elders, kids and also cook. These women are the anchors of their families. Stressed over their small homes, poor income, husband’s illness due to the addictions, they hardly pay attention to their own personal hygiene and health. Already stuck in unsafe jobs these women conservancy workers are now staring at health insecurity too.

Scarcity of sanitiser

“Though the corporation provides us with a bottle of sanitiser every month, that isn’t enough for the entire month. Hence, we have to buy it ourselves again. A good quality sanitiser bottle costs a minimum of Rs. 350 in the market. Often we also buy brooms for ourselves too. This is an additional burden,” explain the women conservancy workers.

Before the Corona pandemic struck, women conservancy workers on urban roadways were quite independent. However, due to a logistical problem with the lockdown, most women find it difficult to get to work from home.

Some borrow a family member’s bike/scooter, while many hire autos to reach work which makes it difficult to maintain safety and social distance. “Five of us used to shell out Rs. 15 per head for an auto but now they have hiked the fare to Rs. 30/- per head,” complained Sumathi, a conservancy worker.

After work, police personnel, doctors and nurses get quarantined in a separate room. However, there is no such amenity for women conservancy workers. Since they live in really small one-room homes, this puts their entire family at risk as the women get into direct contact with them once they reach home.

Shilpa, a conservancy worker, who died recently due to Covid, was denied timely treatment in hospitals. “We are called to maintain cleanliness but why does the city ignore us when it is the question of our lives?” asks a woman conservancy worker on condition of anonymity.

There is no accurate estimate of the number of conservancy workers in the state. In some cases, women conservancy workers who go to the doorsteps to collect the garbage have to sort out wet and dry garbage manually. “Our system is such that it does not provide even minimum safety equipment for their work,” said Dr RV Chandrashekar.

The Social Justice and Equality Center of the administrative training institute and the Safai Karmachari Watch Committee have appealed to the government that all conservancy workers (permanent, direct and contractual) and their families should be provided with a Rs 50 lakh health insurance and frontline workers who engaged in Covid-care work should additionally be paid up to Rs 5,000 per month.

Guidelines of the High Court

Meanwhile, the Karnataka High Court has directed the state government to provide PPE kits to civic workers of BBMP jurisdictions immediately. The Department of Social Welfare also issued a circular on the PPE kit before the court order, but the BBMP did not pay heed.

‘Civic workers were required to work only from 6.30 am to 10.30 am but now they are forced to work until 2 PM. Those who engage in continuous cleaning work are more likely to be infected,’ says State Monitoring Committee member - Padma Kolar.

The Social Welfare Department's General Secretary G. Kumar Nayaka issued a roadmap and a circular on July 4 to provide essential security benefits for civic workers but there are complaints that these guidelines are not being followed. Amidst all the orders, directives and circulars, workers who are out on the street to sweep without protective equipment have to go out to work with a fear of encountering a chronic infection.

Test is mandatory

23 out of 99 garbage workers in a ward of Bengaluru have tested Covid positive, among them, 18 women. Five civic workers (three women) have died of Covid in Bengaluru itself. “We have appealed to the government to do a Covid test for all sweepers, conservancy workers and frontline workers of the state. Who is responsible if these women are infected while sweeping the streets where the infected live?” asks the president of the Karnataka State Council of Citizens S Narayana.

Is there no value for these workers?

“Conservancy workers, already neglected by society, are further invisibilized during the Covid-19 epidemic. The plight of women conservancy workers is the worst. “Research shows Covid can spread from faeces. Yet these women cook with the same hands when they return home from work. For women workers, there is apprehension, not just outside but inside the home too. Isn't their life worth living?” asks Magsaysay Awardee and human rights activist Bezwada Wilson, angrily.

High risk of infection:

“It is already known that those not washing their hands and legs are more prone to infections like Cholera, Typhoid, and Covid. Often these women workers don't have access to such a facility to clean themselves properly. Their financial condition limits their access to good nutrition which further compromises their immunity making them more susceptible to infection. Since there is no drinking water facility at the workplace and no toilets, women usually skip consuming water. This makes them more prone to kidney stones. Not just the hands but feet also should be clean. Thousands of germs are accumulating on the fringes of women's skirts. These women should compulsorily wash from the front foot to the knee,” says gynaecologist-obstetrician Dr HH Girijamma.

Notice of caution:

“I've instructed authorities to take all precautionary measures for conservancy workers' healthcare. In addition, infection detection tests are widely conducted,” BBMP Commissioner Manjunatha Prasad assured and added that if a health problem is detected, treatment should be arranged immediately.

Guidelines from the Department of Social Welfare -

- When workers report to work, concerned local civic authorities should check body temperature and spray them with sanitiser while marking early morning attendance at the ward range.
- Ensure that safety equipment (mask, hand gloves, gumboots, and apron) has been worn and only then dispatched to work.
- Spray the sanitiser again after finishing the work, check the temperature with thermal scanning, and send them to their residence after a thorough hand wash.
- Create awareness among conservancy workers to prioritise personal hygiene and provide them with safe restrooms and changing rooms.
- To protect from Covid-19, PPE Kits must be distributed among all conservancy workers.
- Regular health checkup by skilled specialist doctors and medicines should be provided free of cost.
- Directing the Heads of Local Institutions concerned to carry out all preventive measures so that Covid-19 is not spread among the garbage workers, and also providing free treatment to Covid-19 infected garbage collectors in Covid-19 hospitals.

(Translated from Kannada)



The anguish of the warriors that no one cares about!

Nikitha Nellutla

Sarathi Media

Hyderabad, October 31, 2020

The Corona pandemic saw doors shut across the country severing neighbourhood bonds. Yet, as soon as the authorities sounded a siren of the pandemic, health activists and workers came forward to serve and help the suffering even leaving behind their children and families. During the national lockdown, it is they who turned into lifesavers for millions. The efforts of women workers stand out as they often respond to the call of duty disregarding their own risks, menstrual discomfort and pains and even other chronic health issues. Their battle with Corona has thrown up many heartbreaking stories of struggle and selflessness which has gone unsung and unrecognised.

Risking their lives in the fight against the dreadful virus, women health workers in the suffocating PPE kits continue to serve the patients while ASHA workers walk door-to-door seeking a list of the contact cases across cities. Their relentless efforts to fight the pandemic and their patience in withstanding the strain and stress of their work deserves a national salute.

Suffocating Menstrual Periods

Women face many challenges, not only physical but also mental during menstruation. Cramps and mood swings mark those five days. Imagine how tough it is to offer service with a smile while wearing PPE kits through the heat and humidity. Sanitary pads need repeated change during menstruation. But the Covid-safety protocol and the PPE kits make it impossible to visit the washroom for a change. Often they have nothing to eat or drink too and have to be on their feet for long hours ignoring menstrual stains and hunger pangs. This leads to severe dehydration and urinary tract infections.

PPE kits designed for the male body

Although said to be unisex, PPE kits include a pant and shirt which is small in size for women. Surveys show that about 70 % of global health workers are dissatisfied with PPE kits. There are innumerable difficulties with the PPE kits in India. Most women Indian health workers wear saris (that is often the dress code of nurses in many hospitals) and the PPE kits worn on top make it extremely difficult to even walk. On-duty doctors and nurses have to endure this for long work hours.

Non-stop duty for nurses

The plight of the nurses is the most heart-wrenching story amongst Corona warriors. As the number of corona cases increased, nurses in both government and private hospitals were assigned double shifts. The long hours of being on their feet is taking a toll on their spinal health. Many complain of severe backache and some have even developed disc problems. Despite this, they have readily agreed to the double shifts in light of the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic. Yet some were cruelly denied leave even for urgent, personal reasons during this period. While most senior doctors switched to online consultancies, nurses don't have the luxury of such an option. It should not be forgotten how they not only provide care and support to Corona patients but also fill the void in the absence of near and dear ones in the isolation/quarantine centres.

Working with a heavy heart

The bond between a mother and her child lasts long after the umbilical cord is cut. But, many mothers dedicatedly working in the health department are staying away from their own children for months to save them from virus exposure. Sujatha (namechanged) a nurse, expressed her concern. “I’m a nurse in a corporate hospital. My baby is only a year and a half old. Since I work amidst Corona cases, it’s not right to have my child with me. So, I sent her to my mother’s place five months ago. When I make a video call every day to talk to her, it becomes emotionally quite overwhelming and I can’t hold back tears. Occasionally I feel like giving up the job. But how can I quit the profession I joined based on my conviction?” , she says

Who will care for the caregivers?

“We tell Corona patients to drink 4 and 1/2 litres of water a day. We advise them to take more nutritious food to boost their immunity. But, because of the face shield and PPE kits, we cannot even have a drop of water or food even if we are thirsty or hungry while on duty. It leads to bloating and migraine. During menstrual periods, the suffering is nothing less than hell. We can’t even change our pads despite severe bleeding. The tension of the risk to the family does not allow me to eat or sleep properly even at home. In August a doctor colleague was Corona positive. As I was in contact with her, I was also isolated at home for 14 days. The mental stress I experienced during it was beyond words,” says pulmonologist Dr Sarita.

We were forced to quit the job

“I have been working as a contractual nurse in a government hospital for three years. I spent 12-14 hours a day with Corona patients. Sometimes, I slept in the hospital to minimise travel time. Despite this, hospital staffers treated me as inferior to them because I was a contract employee. I was treated rudely and exploitatively assigned non-stop duties. Meanwhile, my family objected and asked if the hardship was worth Rs 15,000 per month I was making. They stopped talking to me for not leaving the “stressful and risky” job. When my father and mother also joined them the pressure began to get to me and I resigned. But, the hospital management refused to approve my resignation given the dire situation. Now I’m struggling between my professional and personal life daily,” recounted Hemalatha (name changed) who broke down.

The model needs to change

“Despite suffering from diabetes at the age of 52, I’m fighting for public health and serving the Corona-positive patients without looking at long hours, irrespective of what time I’m called in. Meanwhile, many co-workers and their families too have tested positive for Corona. Every time I hear such things the faces of my children and husband flash before my eyes. I’m a fighter and won’t flee from the fight. But is it too much to expect something as basic as a more comfortable and better fitting PPE kit specifically designed for women?” said NIMS Hospital Head Nurse G Nirmala.

No Help from the Government

Since the first Coronavirus cases emerged in India in early 2020, ASHA workers have been working relentlessly striving to help the Corona-affected by rushing them to the hospital immediately, tracing those who come in contact with such infected persons and helping stall the march of the Covid 19 virus. But, governments seem to disregard their efforts.

“The first Corona case was reported in our hometown in the first week of May. As soon as we got to know, we traced all the contact cases in the village and shifted those suspected to be infected into quarantine. We set up a tent in the middle of town in the hot summer and guarded the red zone area. Even now in the heavy rains, we are doing our duties with just an umbrella. We fear the risk of infection while feeding our

children. We worked hard, even putting our lives at risk and all that the government has given us is an incentive of Rs 750 per month for just 3 months,” rues Sandhya, an ASHA worker of Suryapet district.

Couldn't Maintain the Family

“Unlike other government employees, ASHA workers have no facilities even though the authorities expect us to be professionally responsible on par with government employees and more. We hardly make any money. The government gives us Rs 1,500 if we take a pregnant woman for a check-up every two months from the 1st month and make her have the delivery at a government-run hospital. Apart from this, there is no monthly salary/honorarium. That is hardly enough to feed my family so I'm looking out for other work to help me put food on our plates,” says Shyamala, another ASHA worker from Nizamabad.

Helpless Helpers

- Despite an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty due to the Corona pandemic, nurses who dutifully take responsibility find themselves saddled with more work, responsibilities and shifts instead of incentives. Months after putting in extra shifts and longer hours serving Corona patients, they've still not been paid their overtime dues.
- There's no difference in the injustice faced by health workers at government and private hospitals. In some hospitals, adequate PPE kits weren't available and even those available aren't comfortable for women workers in saris.
- ASHA workers have been exceptionally stressed during the Corona pandemic with sudden and excessive work. They work day and night for long hours without even a basic, minimal, regular salary. The government pays them a pittance for the work they do.

(Translated from Telugu)



For Shamli's new DM, the challenge of managing COVID-19 spread in a polarised district

Revati Laul

thewire.in

Shamli (U.P.), Jun 06, 2020

It isn't every day that a comb and a bottle of hair oil become the defining image of a person or place. But these are not normal times. And in the office of the district magistrate of Shamli, piled up in white squares, right in front of the magistrate's chamber, were Covid-19 relief boxes, which upon opening revealed quite a lot about the place and the person in charge.

There was a hand towel, a small tube of toothpaste and a brush, hair oil, a comb, sachets of shampoo and soaps. There were also separate kits for women and snack boxes for children containing tetra-packs of juice and an assortment of chocolates. Also, neatly stacked behind the magistrate's chair – carrom boards and strikers.

Jasjit Kaur took over as the district magistrate at the end of February, just a month before India went into lockdown. She is the first woman to be put in charge of the district ever since it was carved out of Muzaffarnagar in Western UP in the year 2011.

Shamli has been the epicentre of communal violence in 2013 and this raised its head once again during the four successive lockdowns, where Muslims were spoken of as 'Covid-19 spreaders'. It's also a place where polarisation and chauvinism combine, highlighted most obviously by the district's skewed sex ratio – or the number of women to every thousand men. In Shamli this is lower than the rest of Uttar Pradesh – 878 women per 1,000 men – while the UP average is 912. This is still way below the national average of 940.

The district's literacy rate is also abysmally low – at 53.89%. These numbers make it easier to understand why, even after four lockdowns, the people of Shamli observed next to no social distancing or safety measures. More men wore masks than women, but they mostly had them hanging around their chins as ornaments, instead of around their noses and mouths.

What appears on the surface may seem like a straightforward story of a woman battling many odds – patriarchy and polarisation along with a pandemic. But two extended telephonic interviews and plenty of time on the ground in Shamli has established one thing firmly – nothing moves in straight lines.

Excerpts from interviews with Jasjit Kaur

You took over at a time when a crisis was hitting. And Shamli is a very patriarchal space. I came to Shamli on May 1, I saw how everyone was out on the streets in close proximity. How have you been dealing with this?

Shamli is basically an agrarian society. People work in the fields, so they are of the opinion that nothing can happen to them. So it's still very difficult to make people feel that Covid-19 can happen to them. There have been many relaxations since lockdown 4.0 and you see people moving around. So we've decided to set a very heavy fine for people because we can see that people don't want to wear masks.

Unlike in Agra or Meerut where there was an explosion of cases that led to some fear being built about the coronavirus, that fear hasn't set in here. Slowly cases increased and then they decreased and now they're rising again. There are 11 at present. The last four cases have been of migrant workers that came in from Mumbai. But there is still no real fear of the virus so that is a challenge. But maybe with time, some understanding of the virus will seep in.

You joined at the end of February and Covid-19 started becoming a full-blown crisis in March. Can you explain the challenges you faced and whether being a woman in charge in a mofussil town was a factor or not?

There was no special challenge being a woman as such but because this was my first posting and the Covid-19 challenge just happened, it's once in a lifetime that people see a pandemic like this, so initially, it was a challenge.

In Shamli, we do not have a district hospital. It is under construction. There was a tiny hospital running in a small place and resources were strained as was the equipment. So we made a small isolation centre there, of five beds. And at that time, money for a hospital was not sanctioned. It got recently sanctioned – Rs 5.5 crore. So we can begin work on it. So we made arrangements in this new hospital building. We converted a section into a 100-bed quarantine centre. Lots of people came to help when we put out the word that there was a lack of financial resources. I started a bank account where people could make donations.

There is also the question of asserting yourself. Like the time in early May when the Haryana government suddenly sent in busloads of migrants and overnight there were 4,000 of them.

In this case, Haryana had decided on two dates when they were going to send in workers. And they started two days earlier. So initially we did have a problem. I had to report to my authorities in Lucknow to say we can't do this because we don't have a single UP state transport bus in Shamli. If people are sent here in transit, I have to make a demand for buses. We have to order them from Muzaffarnagar or Saharanpur.

So I did talk to a few district collectors in Haryana. And I spoke with my seniors in Lucknow (the Uttar Pradesh state capital) to say that busloads of people have been sent in here with no prior information. I'm not prepared. Then our UP home department spoke with the authorities in Haryana. Then all the district collectors in Haryana started calling me and saying – madam if we have your consent, only then we will send in buses, otherwise not.

But first, you had to call Lucknow and tell them to talk to Haryana on your behalf?

Yes.

Do you think this was because you're new or because you're a woman or a mix of the two?

It was nothing, it was because there was a lot of stress of the UP labourers. And because of some miscommunication maybe that they could send them. I've never felt that because I'm a woman, people are taking undue advantage.

A couple of social activists I've spoken to at the district level who've been involved in Covid-19 relief, some junior level officer apparently told a Hindu social worker the following – 'If you are Hindu, go distribute relief kits in Hindu areas, don't go to Muslim areas because they are Covid-19 spreaders.' Are these things you've heard of or had to contend with?

No. This is an eye-opener, what you're saying. I need to work on this to find out more.

In general, there is this perception in the village that Muslims are spreading Covid-19 .

Actually, when it initially spread in Shamli, most cases were spread by those who attended the Tablighi Jamaat Markaz in Delhi. But now it's the vegetable mandi and Hindu families that are spreading it, so the effect of those rumours have come down. We did try to generate awareness, we said anyone can get Covid-19 . Hindu or Muslim. Ever since there is more diversity in the cases, Hindus have been infected and spread the disease, that's gone down.

I noticed the kind of relief kits you had made when I was in your office. They included things like hair oil and also your kits for children with chocolates and carrom boards. Was this your idea?

We have had lots of migrants coming here to Shamli. And we had to shift them to institutional quarantine for 14 days. It is very tough for them to stay in one place without visiting their family, so I wanted to make sure they were comfortable. I've seen people in such distress as I'd never seen before – people walking such great distances. There are rivers at both ends – Karnal border and Panipat. Some people came across sitting on tyre tubes. With children in tow. It was something else! We tried to monitor these spots and roped in our village pradhans to help us get to these people, provide vehicles. And get them to shelter homes.

So they had all their daily use items, sufficient clean water and clean toilets. The kits weren't just my idea. My team here is very innovative.

Providing clean drinking water and clean toilets must have been a challenge in the first few days, how did you pull it off, for 4,000 people?

Our municipal staff was there for ensuring the toilets were clean. They have their own tankers in which they mixed sanitiser and bleach powder which they were instructed to spray in the toilets. And there are three sugar factories here. They also have a sanitising mix that they use in their distilleries. That liquid they provided and we used that. And our fire brigades and the police used the mixture provided by these sugar mills to sanitise not just the toilets but also the premises – in the morning and in the evening.

Many departments had to pool in – the municipal staff, the fire department and police and sugar mills. And all of us were on duty from the morning to the wee hours of the following morning – up to 3 and 4 o'clock, as migrants came in. The entire tehsil staff was totally exhausted. For three or four days 80 buses came in each day and then the numbers started reducing. I would sit there till 3 am with my staff to motivate them. That inspired them to see that `madam` was also there on the ground.

I was in the field till 3 am and back on duty by 7 am. Once I go then everyone follows. And they know that madam has a home and a small child and is still sitting here night after night, so that actually helps.

So have you moved with your family or is your family in Lucknow?

No, my family is here with me. My son (who is 1.5 years old) is here and because of the lockdown, my husband has been with me for the past three months. He's taking care of the kid and I'm taking care of Shamli.



(Sudha prepares Covid-19 kits for distribution (left) .Outside the house (right), she keeps her head covered. Photo: Revati Laul)

Before Covid-19, Shamli's frontline relief worker had to fight the men

Revati Laul

thewire.in

Shamli (U.P.), May 24, 2020

Her bronze sari with red sequined flowers gleamed in the afternoon sun. It was calculated to have just the right amount of drama without making too much of a statement. Sudha was in a commanding position in her village, Nala, in the district of Shamli, as she set up a desk at the front porch of her house, to begin distributing Covid-19 emergency relief kits.

Her superior position was enough to set off competitors and jealous neighbours. This was Uttar Pradesh, where men ruled. But in the last two and a half years, Sudha had fought enough of them as head of a women's collective across 14 villages. Now that seven hundred people of a total of 6,000 in her village were completely out of food, Sudha was in a unique position to help. As she sat down, back ramrod straight, ready with her list of most-deserving candidates, she acknowledged how far she had come from the time she started out by being labelled a slut and a pimp.

“Yeh madam ban rahi hai gaon ki – She's becoming the madame of the village,” said one woman. “Aur dekhna ek din aise hoga yeh gaadi me bhar ke sab ko le jayengi saath me aur ganda ganda kaam karwayengi. Wait and watch, she will take all the women away by the car-full and make them do really dirty things.”

It all began with a knock on the door from women social workers attached to the government. They had come from Hyderabad and were asking women to form self-help groups or SHGs so they could apply for small loans and start small businesses. “Job lag gayi hai meri – I've been selected for a job,” Sudha said excitedly to her husband, Angrez Singh.

Angrez Singh was a man's man. The way he sat with his chest out and surveyed the territory in front of him spoke for itself. “Naukri nahi karani hai – I will not have you work,” was his firm reply. But Sudha had a stirring within that she was unable to suppress. The women from the National Rural Livelihood Mission re-kindled a fire that was burning inside her ever since Sudha was a little girl. Growing up in the district of Bulandshahr in UP, she would close her eyes in front of the gods in temples and pray to them, asking to be made a working woman or a woman who travels and gets to see the world outside. She was married off instead when she was just in class ten, and in her new home in Shamli district, the only role she was expected to play was that of the good wife with her head covered at all times, face never to be exposed to people outside. After having three children and settling for the prescribed role, a knock on the door from the government proved to be a godsend.

“Mai aapka sar neecha nahi honey doongi – I will not do anything to take away from your honour,” she assured her man. He relented. With her initial loan, Sudha started a beauty business. Women could buy makeup and she also provided parlour services in her home. Other women were even more audacious in their choices. Kavita became a mechanic, inspired by her husband who found out that making LED lights at home was a very profitable business.

In the last two and a half years, the SHG groups' economic independence was threatening to overturn the entire village's economy. Social activist Ashvani Singh who has worked with Sudha for the last year and a half explained. Women in rural Shamli mainly get work as agricultural labourers on wages that are much lower than their male counterparts. "If the men are paid 300 rupees a day, then women get anywhere between 120 to 180 rupees for the same work," said Singh. If they stopped doing this work, the landowners would have to pay men more, upsetting their calculus entirely.

The more they asserted themselves, the more trouble the women were in when the lockdowns part 1-4 put their battles temporarily on hold. Five days before the first lockdown, Sanjo, a Dalit woman who was part of Sudha's group, was emptying the trash, when a man from the most dominant caste in the area – the Jats – told her that as a Dalit woman, she could not put out the garbage where dominant castes did. Sanjo, now armed with her new woman-centric strong coat, spoke back: "If you can throw your kachina here, so can I." For this, she was shoved into the drain because even though her words were menacing, her frame was slight.

Covered in the muck, she got out and yelled back at the Jat man – "Kuttey – you dog." This was too much for his caste ego so he ended up hitting her on the chest with bricks. The women rallied around in support and charges were filed with the local police. However, in an ugly twist, the Jats surrounded Sanjo and threatened to decimate her family unless she retracted her charges. Which she did. Sudha was planning to take further action when India went into lockdown mode. Sanjo was so battered and bruised she could barely stand. She and her husband were both brick kiln workers and with those being mostly shut, they had nothing to eat. There were many others in the SHGs in similarly precarious positions.

At this point, Sudha, having created a network both with the government and civil society groups, asked NGOs to come and distribute rations. A lot was at stake. Feathers had been ruffled in villages across Shamli, starting with the pradhan or head of her own village. There were two opposing narratives here, instead of one, which in itself told the story of how assertive these women had got.

Narrative one – in which Sudha and her groups said they were up against a powerful and irate man. A spark was lit when these women were in a meeting where a social activist made a rousing speech: "We must start by resolving our own basic issues – over roads and electricity, water and rations. Only then will we be seen as a force to reckon with. Otherwise, anything we say about resolving other women's issues will seem like a cruel joke." Sudha and the SHGs in her care immediately put this to the test. They demanded that a road be built in a part of a village that had been so badly clogged with sewage and silt that it was impossible to get in or out, especially when it rained. In their version of events, their request kept getting blocked by the village pradhan – Pravin Kumar. They were forced to bypass him and go up to the district magistrate.

Narrative two: In Pravin Kumar's version, he had the road built. "Budget government se hamari li, gram panchayat humney karaya, usme samuh kya karega? The money came from the village coffers, their group had nothing to do with it."

Now, by calling in an NGO, Sudha was taking on the pradhan again, just by the sheer optics of it. Helming a Covid relief operation that was a private initiative challenged Pravin Kumar's role as the patriarch-provider. D day was tense. Men playing cards in the street, commented as Sudha got into a car with an NGO person. "Bhundhi thuthdi," a slur in the locally spoken Braj bhasha – "the woman with the ugly face."

As the truck full of potatoes and rice, masalas, dal, sanitary pads and condoms rolled in, Sudha and her associates pored over lists. Who to include and who to leave out? The social activist Ashvani Singh, who was native to Shamli, put Sudha's operation in context. He had seen relief being distributed in other villages with a dominant caste Jat man at the helm. "It was calculated to add to his vote-bank. The poorest, the migrants, those whose votes didn't count locally, were left out." Far worse was the patronising language used, said Ashvani, "Bhaiyo bhukke logon ke liye khana hai. Yeh iske liye khana hai jo bhukka mar raha hai bilkul. This food is for the wretched and hungry, it's for those people dying of starvation. Words that break the spirit of those being given rations."

Now, with Sudha at the helm, care was taken to draw up lists of the most deserving without fear or favour. All those who got rations in the last round were struck off the list, even when they were members of SHGs. A brawl broke out. A frail-looking woman with white hair and a fierce manner threatened to call the police. "I will have the lot of you arrested if you don't give me some!" she shrieked. Sudha stormed into the house, past her desk, to an inner room and slammed the door. Her face was flushed with anger. "I cannot take this anymore," she said in an outburst. Her sons and daughter and husband rallied around.

Angrez Singh was by now very proud of his wife's achievements, so he pitched in and fended off the angry woman. And followed it up with another surprise. He put colas and namkeen on a tray and served those who were waiting. There was so much humility and acceptance in his act, that Sudha finally melted. Her trademark smile was back. She marched back into the arena, glasses in place, register in hand, to call out the names of the next people on the list. Her pallu covered her face, presenting to the world a strange paradox – a woman in charge who was also, the mythical unchanging, submissive, good wife.



B. Women and work. How it has impacted domestic workers, migrant workers, retail sellers, women engaged in handicrafts and handloom industry, etc.

In India, 95% or around 195 million women are employed in the unorganised sector according to a March 2019 report by consultancy firm Deloitte. Juxtapose that with what the International Labour Organisation says about Indian women: they represent 50% of the population, constitute 30% of the labour force, perform 60% of all working hours, receive 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property.

Women's economic participation is often defined in terms of the production of goods and services in the national income statistics. And, female work participation has always been low at 26% compared to 52% for men. However, women have always been majorly engaged in unpaid care work but their contribution to the economy and society has never been acknowledged in the calculation of our national economic indices.

Given this context, they were the worst hit by the pandemic and the patriarchal ecosystem did its best to air-brush and invisibilize this.

Laadli Media Fellows, however, took it upon themselves to underline how this crisis had implications not only for the affected women but society as a whole. Bangalorean Manjushree M. Kadakola, for example, has highlighted how the shutting down of garment factories had pushed thousands of their women employees to the brink without any help coming from the authorities. Women entrepreneurs who had set up such garment factories, with the hope of being independent were also staring at the challenge of starting the factories again.

Guwahati-based Diganta Sarma met Assamese women who lost jobs as domestic help following the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. They have had to reinvent themselves as fruit and vegetable vendors taking on the responsibility of running homes, as the lockdown drove men indoors into the roles of managing home and hearth. This has brought several difficulties and challenges in its wake for the women as they earn less than what they earned as factory workers or as domestic help and have to keep re-skilling themselves. But becoming principal breadwinners has done wonders for the women's confidence and assertion. They have created safer spaces in the markets which they have come to own.

Nikitha Nellutla from Hyderabad put the spotlight on women entrepreneurs who had taken on both society and their families to chart their own paths. The Corona pandemic and the resultant lockdown has jolted their set-up and dreams and they find little support or even solace from their families in this crisis. But instead of letting this get to them, the women are resolutely fighting to keep their ventures going and do not want to give up despite the patriarchal obstacles.

Imphal, Manipur-based Ninglun Hanghal and Bhopal-based Sachin Shrivastava have shone the torch on how the digital revolution has become yet another patriarchal ploy for 'exclusion through technology.' Hanghal's story shows how tribals are community-oriented and their physical spaces are owned and managed collectively in societal and familial platforms. On the other hand, online education demands a quiet and individual space for learning. This, coupled with limitations in access to resources and technology has ensured that many girl children are simply being left out. This is also true of adult women who fall far behind men in getting or being given access to technology. Shrivastav's story spoke of how fewer women have access to touch-screen internet-enabled phones than men. This automatically limits their access to information and the outside world.

Bangalore-based Raksha Kumar highlighted how the pandemic has exposed the reasons behind why Indian women don't pursue paid employment. In a pandemic-affected world, she found two reasons for this rate to be shamefully low in India - first, women are busy doing unpaid work at home, including cooking, cleaning and caregiving and second, women employees populate the informal economy in large numbers. They are paid smaller amounts and in cash, which they do not consider to be 'work.'

Raksha Kumar also wrote about the discrepancies in how women's and men's agricultural labour and their social perception has worsened due to the pandemic. Traditionally, farm work by women is not mechanised as much as men's work. This means more and more women work in the fields, while men get replaced by machines. Though as much as 84% of rural Indian women depend on agriculture for their livelihood, women's contribution to agriculture and food security goes unsung since 87% of land is owned by men who benefit from such ownership while women toil away. Even while selling farm produce men are at the forefront of bringing money, back home the women remain 'invisible' farmworkers.

Kumar also highlighted the plight of young women who face the brunt of India's economic downturn, which has worsened due to the Corona Pandemic. In the last week of August, the Narendra Modi government admitted the GDP had shrunk by around 24%. In April-May 2020 alone about 120 million lost jobs. While many of the jobs were regained, most people were out of salaried positions and many others have settled for lesser pay. Given the pecking order of employment, young women (below the age of 29) are the worst affected. In rural India, this means an ugly retreat of several gains of the last two decades as the scourge of child marriage is making a comeback.

Not that urban women have it better, found Kumar. Since women hold most administrative and data-processing roles that artificial intelligence and other technologies threaten to usurp, as routine jobs become automated, the pressure on women will intensify and they will experience higher unemployment rates.

Revati Laul's story of how an out of work woman factory worker puts fears over her future aside to find refuge in making TikTok videos, highlights how some women are finding new ways of coping with what the Corona pandemic has unleashed.

Will the readymade cloth industry ever recover? Women are suffering due to garment industry hardship!

Manjushree M. Kadakola

Prajavani

Bengaluru, October 31, 2020

Whether branded clothing stores or locally manufactured readymades, Karnataka stands out as a leader in this industry. The capital, Bengaluru is also famous as a 'garment hub'. The government-imposed lockdown from March which was supposed to hit the Coronavirus hit the garment industry worse. Though the government permitted readymade garment units to function normally from May 4, many are yet to open following the sudden shock of closure.

Thousands were dependent on this industry; mostly women. Many of these lone breadwinners for their families lost jobs in the garment units during the closure. The lives of these women, who had a stable income, weekly holidays, provident fund facilities, have been shattered. Ironically, those patching torn clothes are now struggling to patch their own lives.

Several women, dependent on the salary from garment industries are now forced to find other work like cooking, housekeeping, selling vegetables and work as daily wage labourers to survive. They weep recalling what they now call "good olden days."

Suma from Gowdanapalya, for example, worked in the garment industry for 13 years. When her factory was shut during the lockdown she survived nearly four months on the petty Provident Fund amount she had. Now she works as a cook in two homes. Earlier she had access to the Employee State Insurance facility if any health problems arose. Now she has to spend Rs 1,000 plus for even the smallest treatment.

Suma, an informal sector worker also doesn't get a fixed wage on a fixed date. She gets only two holidays per month, leaves home at 5.30 am and returns by 2 pm. She has to cook different types of food as per her employer's family's taste. "I can't stand for long hours and have no skills for any other job. I wake early to cook for myself and then spend long hours standing at the kitchen tables at my workplace too. I get exhausted by the end of the day. They insist I travel by auto-rickshaw instead of the bus due to the risk of Covid but no one wants to pay for my auto-rickshaw fare. Like this half the money earned is spent in commuting to work," Suma points out.

Children move to the government school, mother to daily labour.

"Both my husband and I have never been to school but we put our children in a good private school so that they have a good future. Now with the loss of work I can't afford the high fees in the private school, so I shifted them to the village government school. I couldn't afford the house rent and other expenses in Bengaluru. Therefore I came back to my village and now I work here. I earn Rs.180 per day only if there is work. Also, women get paid far less than men for a day's work in my village," says Sushilamma, choking on tears. Once an independent woman who was the chief breadwinner of the family, though she has not been infected, the Corona pandemic has hit her very hard.

She says she thought she would earn more if she worked in a small factory, on a piece basis by bringing work home. “But the factory representative did not show up again since the lockdown. Though Dussehra is one of our biggest festivals, forget making sweets for the children, I did not have enough to make a proper meal. I cooked a packet of instant noodles, put them to sleep and then cried myself to sleep hungry wondering when our misery will end,” recounts Susheelamma.

House rent, ration, vegetables

Thousands of women who worked in Bengaluru are suffering not only because they can't find another job and also because their pending salaries are overdue from the garment units they worked for. Most have vacated their city homes and gone back to life in the villages which they had once escaped. From financial independence they find themselves rejoining queues for free rations in government-run PDS shops since they have no money. They live for days on watery dal without buying vegetables, trying to save every penny. Milk is now a luxury and a small bottle of cooking oil is stretched for months.

Karnataka, especially Bengaluru and its outskirts are a hub to small scale garment manufacture units where women are paid minimally on a per-piece basis on the work they do. Some of the women have taken on such work even while continuing to hang on to their old jobs because they have not been paid their Provident Fund till now. The general secretary of an organisation which fights for the rights of such women labourers Yashoda P H laments how these women who once were the chief breadwinners of their families can't even afford sanitary napkins for their daughters. “We provided food kits to some families for three-four months. But we were unable to help every needy person. Really small factories have gone belly up. Many factory units unable to pay rent have shut down,” she points out.

It is not like the unit owners are not hit. A woman entrepreneur who owns one such small unit spoke of the loan she had taken to start her own garment factory in Tumkur. “There were 50 women tailors working there sewing school and college uniforms. First I had to bear losses in 2016 due to sudden demonetisation announced by PM Narendra Modi. I was barely recovering when Covid came and wiped me out. We don't have orders unless schools begin. Due to this, I'm unable to pay the loan and the interest is going through the roof.”

Another woman owner of a small garment factory from Kamakshi Palya told this writer, “When I started, many old hands in the industry mocked me saying I was bound to fail as I was stepping into a male domain. My situation has unfortunately given them cause for glee as they feel they were proven right,” she says and adds, “I have somehow opened up the factory again but where is the work? Everyone I speak to wants to not even pay the basic cost price. There are 25 women working in my unit. I have ensured they get a salary till now. But my rent for the building is long overdue. I hope the situation changes for the better for the sake of both my workers and me.”

The commuting crisis

Textile and garment industry union president Pratibha R points out how some garment factories had arranged their own buses for women workers to travel to and fro from various parts to Bengaluru's readymade garment factories. “Given the Covid safety guidelines, many factories abandoned the transportation facility. Also, in the beginning, all public transport was shut due to a complete lockdown. Even when it was slowly revived the number of vehicles is far lesser than the number of people travelling. The largely male crowds make public transport unsafe, especially in the current scenario. Hence, many women are unable to go to work because they have no transportation. Some even tried to save their jobs by taking risks and travelling on their own vehicles, hitching rides on goods transport vehicles, autorickshaws,

tempos etc but this is not the same as a regular fixed mode of transport. With the skilled women workforce not available the garment units have also learnt to make do with unskilled or semi-skilled labour from the areas where they are located. They also pay them dirt cheap on a daily basis. Since it is seen as cost-effective in the short run, the older women workers have no hope of getting their jobs back.”

A blow to economic self-reliance

The women who worked in garment units were financially independent. The job loss due to the pandemic made them dependent on their husbands and children for even petty expenses. Some who had borrowed money and bought necessary household items for the family are now facing difficulty in repaying loans. This has changed their status at home with the family and dependants not bestowing the same respect on them like when they were earning. Swati Sivanand, an activist of the Alternative Law Forum, who surveyed the Garments Women Workers' Association, has found that more women are now facing domestic violence than before since they are not earning.

Of the 26 factories around Bommanahalli, Peenya and Mysore Road, 12 have shut down. Some factories forced women workers to resign and re-hired them at lower wages. While the husbands of some of these women are auto drivers, daily wage labourers and carpenters, etc in many families, the men are currently without any job. Analysts say that as the family's overall income has reduced, their ability to buy regular essentials has also substantially declined. Cumulatively this will also cast a dark shadow on an already sluggish economy.

Expect to be resilient

Nearly 10 lakh people work in the garments and textile industry in Karnataka. Of these, over 60% are women workers. It's they who have lost jobs in the largest numbers (nearly 40%). According to government statistics, there are 800 garment manufacturing units in Karnataka. According to an estimate, more than 40 factories have been shut in Bengaluru itself. Even the large better-established factories had faced two months of hardship in exporting manufactured goods. “I wish the lockdown announcement was better worked out and timed, it would have been beneficial at least in saving some from the immense misery unleashed,” shrugs Jayaram KR, leader of the Garments and Textiles Workers Organisation who adds, “We ensured that some large factories paid salaries to their employees during the lockdown. We made sure the 104 hours of overtime payment was cleared to nearly 1,400 people at a garment factory on Mysore Road. Out of the 1,300 employees, 538 got settled at a large factory in Srirangapatnam. The state government has issued a Rs.5,000/- package for taxi drivers. Sadly, no package was announced for these working women. The new season is likely to start from January to March,” he said and hoped that January will see the garment industry recover.

Experts suggest Minimum Income Support

Historian Ramachandra Guha, education expert Prof. Vinod Gaur, Prof. Rameshwari Verma, Prof. Amit Bhasole, Prof. Deepak Malaghana, Prof. Ramachandra TV and others have listed out a 15-point programme that the government must put in place to alleviate the plight of migrant workers.

4.5 lakh women work in the apparel (readymade clothes) industry. If the demand for exports diminishes, it will be a serious setback for the livelihoods of this large working class. Experts have recommended that a special plan for the garment industry should be designed to provide minimum income support for garment factory workers.

(Translated from Kannada)



Lockdown Impact: Challenges and changes of profession of working-class women being women, they are dominant in metropolitan

Diganta Sarma

biriya.com

Guwahati, August 21, 2020

48-year-old Bhanumati Rai, stood near a rickshaw parked on the roadside, not waiting for passengers, but buyers. The vehicle was converted into a mobile shop to sell bananas, pineapples, apples, pomegranates, etc. in the Hatigaon area of Assam's capital city, Guwahati. The rickshaw-turned-fruit shop used to be driven by her 55-year-old husband, Prafulla, to support his family. The couple are natives of Golakganj in Dhubri district of Western Assam who migrated to Guwahati with their two children to live in the Hatigaon neighbourhood. Prafulla plied the rickshaw while Bhanumati worked as domestic help. Between them, they were barely able to provide food and shelter for their children who are in Grade nine and seven respectively. Trouble started when PM Narendra Modi made a sudden announcement of lockdown without any prior notice. "With no passengers for his autorickshaw Prafulla was left idling and in a double whammy I was also terminated from work by my employers," she recounts. "Our savings got wiped out as the lockdown got extended. Seeing us go hungry, Prafulla decided to sell vegetables off the street near our home but the police confiscated his vegetables and beat him up badly. Later, I began selling fruits from his autorickshaw." What about the police? "They came and threatened me but I fell at their feet and wept to tell them how we had no food at home and they relented," she says and adds, "I follow all the Covid-safety rules as I drag the rickshaw to different neighbourhoods to sell fruits. I know that if I don't do this we will starve."

The Rais are not alone. Many are caught in the same dire situation and it is the women who have been able to help their families survive.

Take the case of Golapi Das from Pathshala area of Barpeta district in Assam who has been living in Guwahati for the last five years. She has been selling vegetables on a tricycle in different parts of Guwahati since the lockdown. The 56-year-old was also a domestic help. A day after the announcement of the lockdown, her employers were laid off and told her they couldn't afford to pay her. Since her husband faced harassment from police she began running the mobile vegetable shop. "I had to muster courage and change my life because of the lockdown. I now feel more independent than working as a domestic worker. Doing business on my own, I earn less but I am only answerable to myself. That is especially great for a woman," she told this writer and hoped, "I hope things change for the better. I have taken this tricycle on a daily rent of Rs 100."

A few blocks away, 52-year-old Sabita Garh sat by the side of Narangi-Chandrapur main road in the Shankar area. Vegetables, collected from the forest nearby, were arranged in neat piles in front of her. The lockdown meant fewer buyers so Sabita kept looking hopefully at everyone who walked by.

For her, this is the only way she and her family can survive. This resident of East Khankar village in Kamrup Metropolitan district is doing what no local woman has ever done. “These are desperate times,” she mentioned how she worked at a small factory before the lockdown. “We were told to go after the lockdown and my husband is very ill. I was forced to forage for vegetables in the forest to sell. The police came here but I told them how desperate our situation is and asked them to kill us if they have to. Because if I stop this work we will die of hunger.”

These are not isolated instances. More and more women are now forced to step out into what were essentially all-male spaces and become breadwinners to their families, often the only ones. The transition from working within the confines of home to being out in the open hasn't been easy but this dark cloud has a beautiful silver lining too. 55-year-old Maina Upadhyay who now runs the small kiosk on the highway of the Hajongbari area along the Chandrapur-Narangi Bypass National Highway instead of her husband Kalinath (he goes to graze cows which she did earlier) says: “The markets are now full of women vendors and shopkeepers. In the afternoons when business is slack it feels great to chat with other women and share each other's sorrows and experiences. Apart from lightening the load it also makes us feel like we have each other for support.”

Though they earn less than their jobs in factories or as domestic help, becoming the principal breadwinners has done wonders for the women's confidence and assertion. The bustle in the markets punctuated by occasional laughter is proof of how they are safer spaces which these women have come to own.

This came across strongly recently when a group of women protested police rubbishing vegetables from a woman vendor in the Beltola area. When the women gathered in large numbers and began asking questions about livelihood and abdication by the state's welfare machinery the police had no option but to retreat.

This collective strength has seen women draw on it to emerge decision-makers in their own homes too, says Sabita. “Many women like me who previously worked as domestic help will not be happy to go back to doing that again after we have tasted the independence of self-employment.”

A study found that many women who worked as domestic help were subjected to various forms of harassment, including sexual harassment and even abuse by their employers. Some women did not receive adequate wages or were not paid on time during the lockdown, many employers abruptly fired them from jobs leaving them to fend for themselves. But the lockdown has helped the women overcome all these harsh realities and establish their dominance on the roadside and sidewalks.

Pooja Nirala, a social activist, says, “Lockdown has forced many to change their profession. This is because the state has not enacted any strong law for the unorganised sector which can ensure social security. Due to such a complex situation, all these women have to change professions in the face of a financial crisis. The government should take immediate action to support them. Since it is impossible to build a society by ignoring the question of livelihood, the government should take special steps for the rights of all such women.”

Dr Sonali Sarma, a former research scholar of Dibrugarh University and OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, says, “It is significant that women in different parts of Assam have come up with creative ways to find financial independence. This is one of the fallouts of the lockdown. It is like the lockdown triggered something and the women were able to dig deep within and rediscover their strengths, initiate a social transformation in the state by creating a dynamic of self-reliance.”

Rihan Ali, a social worker insists that the contribution of these women was far greater. “They have become the front-runners for the economic recovery post-lockdown. This is not only the case in Kamrup Metro district, but also in other parts of Assam where women have rightfully found the space which was always theirs. The men of the house who took over all the aspects of the house, playing a decisive role are taking a back seat and women are leading from the front. This is truly special.”

(Translated from Assamese)



It's about women's empowerment

Nikitha Nellutla

Sarathi media

Hyderabad, July 24, 2020

In this male dominated society a woman's struggle to carve a niche for herself is an uphill task. Self-confidence, self-belief and courage are not sufficient for her to move forward; she needs family and society's support. There is always a chance that she will be criticised, antagonised, if she commits a mistake or fails in her endeavour. The very family which supported will go against her. Knowing all the hurdles and difficulties, women steadily created a place for themselves in the society. This pandemic has turned the tables against them. All their aspirations, ambitions and dreams have shattered.

The journey of a woman from kitchen's four walls to an educated, independent entrepreneur, was not accomplished in a matter of few days but it was a result of immense suffering and struggle. Our country in the recent past has seen steady increase in women entrepreneurs. And many women from middle income group started small businesses to support their families. This pandemic has not only disturbed them economically, but emotionally and psychologically too. Women are not willing to give up inspite of this setback and are willing to bounce back with more vigour and enthusiasm. As they have already tasted both struggle and success they want to move forward. Unfortunately, some women are forced to retracted back to those four walls of the kitchen which is slowly taking away their self-confidence to be economically independent.

On the brink of closure

Well-educated techie Swathi (name changed) had a handsome salary and luxurious lifestyle. Yet she strove for special recognition. She didn't want to be another also-ran in the corporate world. This led her to think of starting her own business in her home city Hyderabad.

It helped that she owned a building at the nodal RTC X-road near Ashok Nagar which is a hub of coaching centres for civil service examinations. She used her knowledge about the area and started a ladies hostel with special yoga and motivational classes to help them to achieve their goals. It turned out to be the best thing she ever did. Within days, her hostel became the topmost hostel in the city. However, she is staring at it all coming apart. "Due to the pandemic, students have gone home and are taking online classes. They are not willing to come back," she says and points out how another crisis is brewing in her own life. "There is a lot of pressure at home to get married citing the failure in my business venture. If the same happened with a man, would they have reacted like this? Then why me?"

I had to take a gold loan

Hailing from Ongole, Andhra Pradesh, Sirisha (name changed) completed her bachelors and PG in MBA (HR) in Hyderabad. With dedication and discipline, she worked hard to develop a start-up for four years. That boosted her confidence. When she wanted to start an HR consultancy, her parents tried to dissuade her. Secretly, she took a gold loan, trusted her instincts and contacts and went on to establish her position in the field of HR. She faced discrimination and misogyny along her journey but she says she took it head-on going from strength to strength.

That success story would have gone on if the pandemic had not hit her hard. In a jiffy, she saw 35 clients dwindle to one. "There is too much psychological pressure, but I won't step back. I'll fight to make things work," insists Sirisha.

There is no value for our words

“My father is a civil contractor and me being a civil engineer, I used to assist and manage his work on the sites,” says Sowjanya (name changed), “But being the lone woman on construction sites, every second man questioned my credibility, ignored me or worse tried to patronise. Forget about respect, my words didn’t seem to have any value.” During the lockdown, due to her father's ill health, she tried to manage the site on her own, but workers and other supervisors simply refused to take anything she said seriously. “Sometimes though I requested them to work slightly longer hours due to this crisis, they didn’t cooperate.” While admitting that the women face discrimination and obstacles in every field Sowjanya says the real estate sector, especially the construction industry is the worst.

Sympathy? But why?

Quitting her highly paid IT job, Shilpa started a beauty parlour at Ameerpet Metro station. Using technology and understanding the urgency of passengers, she ran her business successfully and was on the brink of opening another one at Hi-tech city station. But due to the pandemic, the government closed all metro stations in March and her world collapsed like a pack of cards. “All my staff come from lower-middle-class backgrounds and I understand what the financial crisis must be like for them. So, I took loans to pay them minimal wages for sustenance helping them cope with the situation. But some people would discourage me because I am a woman and say, 'You are not a man, why do you need all this?' and discourage me,” says Shilpa.

Counselling centres are packed

“For every step, a woman moves forward, a thousand hands are pulling her back. Businesswomen are no exception and Corona turned their lives upside down. Financially everyone was affected, but there were a few who were affected psychologically and were queuing up at counselling centres,” says life coach-therapist Rabindranath.

- Bhargavi has been running a boutique in Hyderabad for five years. However, due to the lockdown, she suffered losses. All of the clothing was piled up and at the same time, her husband too lost his job. The couple soon began to disagree and argue. “Your boutique has run out of savings. Why did you start a business when you could not manage properly without making any profit?” Her husband often mocked Bhargavi. Lack of a source of steady income (job or a business) was causing sparks between them.
- Rajeshwari started a small food delivery business in January this year. Everyone in the colony encouraged her and she started saving for her daughter’s marriage. She got into profits just days before the lockdown. Meanwhile, the virus spread and her business suffered as the government announced a lockdown and that affected her husband’s income too. Financial troubles started in her family since everything was linked to her business. “Now my husband would never allow me to restart my business,” she grieves.

Life amidst Corona

- Women carry more responsibilities than anyone else in the house. Most importantly, many are reluctant to send married women to work; with children, it’s entirely a different story. Their close family and kin never encourage women to do business. Pushing every hurdle aside, women who became entrepreneurs are now compromising for the family due to the corona crisis.
- Young women are more interested in starting their own business than finding jobs and some parents also encourage them. But when they get married, they have to leave their business and settle down as homemakers because of the husband’s family and/or the responsibility of raising children. Women entrepreneurs from these backgrounds are often being subjected to domestic violence in the lockdown.

- Various analyses have shown that women have more difficulty than men raising funds for their start-ups. Women entrepreneurs sometimes don't take care of financial transactions. Also, not many come forward to invest in a business started by a woman. They do not receive any finance from the family as they enter the business sector often against the family's wishes. Some financial companies have even resorted to lending for the sole reason that they are female. Moreover, many women entrepreneurs are voicing that no one has come forward to support them from the losses caused by the Corona pandemic and the ensuing lockdown.

Discrimination against women is also high in the business sector. Especially when a woman wants to start a business in partnership, men are not interested. Male business partners say that if there is a loss in the business, women are fully responsible for it. Now, a lot of women are facing similar problems in lockdown.

- To start any business it requires a lot of groundwork. You have to meet more than ten people a day. Sometimes workplace harassment pulls their morale down. Having worked so hard to bring up the business, Corona has brought such women entrepreneurs back to square one. Now they are worried that they will have to face more problems to cultivate their businesses again.

A girl may be well educated and doing a good job, starting a business and earning lakhs, still people tend to look down on her. Another big problem is that most men hesitate to come forward to work with a woman. In many interviews, women entrepreneurs say that even if they work, the respect they give to the male supervisor is not given to the female managing director.

(Translated from Telugu)



Digital revolution or ‘exclusion through technology’?

Ninglun Hanghal

The Sangai Express/The Hindu Business Line

Imphal, August 19, 2020

A common scene in every household in Manipur during the Coronavirus pandemic lockdown is that of a mother and children sharing a smartphone.

The children are working on the task given by teachers through the mother’s phone on WhatsApp. This is virtually the norm as schools in urban and semi-urban areas resort to online classrooms.

For a mother like Mamta Lukhram, a resident of Imphal east, it is her smartphone that she and her daughter share for all online purposes. “My daughter has to miss her class if I am taking online classes or out for my field study as I have to move with my phone,” says Lukhram, a sociology teacher at Maram Don Bosco College in Senapati, 100km north of the capital Imphal. Lukhram said she was hesitant about online classes but as schools and colleges are unlikely to open anytime soon, she grudgingly used the mobile phone.” I could not reach many students because either they do not have a smartphone or the required connectivity,” rues Lukhram.

In the new internet classroom, India’s northeast is on the last bench so to say. When TRAI gives its connectivity figures, Northeast’s 11m wireless subscriber statistic is clubbed under a single heading, “Northeast” comprising seven states barring Assam. Even a state-wise break-up of statistics for the Northeast is difficult to spot.

Meanwhile, in small towns, every family mostly shares one or two mobile phones. Majority of women in rural Manipur usually own simple feature phones. Biakmoi, a mother of two in Lamka town, Churachandpur, has a phone but without any app or internet. “My elder son has it, so he helped his younger sibling,” she said. Her elder son has just graduated.

Ningyami in the hill town of Ukhrul says that her daughter studying in class III uses her phone. “Her teachers send us video clips or homework on my WhatsApp number,” said Ningyami, who is also a school teacher. She says online classes or engaging children on their parent’s phones is not effective, “Children are not interested. Most children want to play games or watch YouTube.” Ningyami felt that conducting online classes in rural tribal areas is impossible. One finds that even parents and particularly the mothers, let alone students do not have smartphones which are a requirement for online classes.

In interior tribal hill districts, online classes are a far cry. With schools closed due to pandemic lockdown, most children helped their parents in domestic chores or in the fields during the sowing and wedding season.

Ronica Vungmuankim, a resident of Lamkain Churachandpur observed that information technology is very new for the people of rural Manipur. A TISS alumnus and development practitioner, Ronica says that

tribals are community-oriented and their physical spaces are owned and managed collectively in societal and familial platforms. On the other hand, online education demands a quiet and individual space for learning. This, coupled with limitations in access to resources and technology is a huge challenge. Ronica finds that the new Digital Information Technology is not interactive. “Even though you attempt to interact online, children, especially girls, would hide their faces or not respond,” she said.

For independent researcher Achan Mungleng in Ukhrul, Information Technology (IT) is not a necessity. Mungleng who works on traditional handloom and textiles said that her work requires personal interaction which is not possible through technology. According to her, “In my engagement presently, I don't need digital technology as I'm working with older women.” Mungleng said that she is not organising a conference/seminar, so the question of IT does not arise.

“My work requires information to be passed on from person to person, not through any technological medium,” said Mungleng.

The “new normal” has worried women activists and development workers. Marybeth Sanate, secretary of Rural Women Upliftment Society in Churachandpur said there is no way they can work digitally / online. Sanate feels that it is discriminatory and said, “What will happen to rural women? We'll be left out.”

As Ronica observed, the new modes of IT are still alien to people in these parts of the world. This is not only true about rural women. Sanate said that even women's organisation leaders, who access the internet on their cellphones are not keen to go online or use technology. For instance, Sanate explained that if she were to take initiative to organise a webinar or online sessions, women tribe leaders, mothers' association leaders may just not participate.

Similar sentiments are echoed by Hechin Haokip, secretary of the Center for Women and Girls. “It is impossible for me to work online.” Haokip, whose work covers Chandel and Tengnoupal tribal districts along the border with Myanmar, said that she goes online only on matters related to communication with the NGO partners or if it is required to speak at a conference.

Infrastructure in the region is already inadequate and adding to that internet connectivity is also extremely poor. Haokip relies on her airtel mobile internet connection. “Since the lockdown, the internet connectivity has gotten even worse so I never go live with any video and instead only keep the audio on,” she said.

According to Haokip, if one is based in cities or metros, digital and online work is feasible, rather than compulsion and necessity. That is not the case in most of Manipur. For instance, even if Haokip's women members or stakeholders have the gadgets, they do not have the capacity/skills to use them.

“This is exclusion through technology. If you are insisting on digital or online technology, you are leaving out a large section of the people,” insists Haokip.

Even as a large section of the population uses social media or mobile phones, the traditional means of communication is still the means of information dissemination in Manipur. Public announcement through microphone along the roads, street corners in colonies, specific locations are still the norm and practice. This is particularly conspicuous during the pandemic lockdown.

The present state of information technology penetration and usage in Manipur shows where women, a large majority of them stand.

The Council for Social Development (CSD) New Delhi, undertook an impact assessment of the National Digital Literacy Mission during April-July 2016. NDLM was implemented in 2014. According to the survey conducted with a total sample of 222 respondents in Manipur, there were only 15 females as against 24 males in the age group of 14-29 who could use or operate a computer. In the age group of 30-45, there were four females as against eight males.

Of the target of 6,666 persons in Manipur for digital training by the NDLM, 13% of the trainees had no one in the family who is IT literate. Another 40% had just one member who was IT-literate and 37% had two to four members. Only 8% had four and more members who were IT-literate.

The survey found that across India not even half the job-seekers in urban areas were able to operate a computer. The rural scenario is even worse. Similarly, the number of women who can operate a computer is far below that of their male counterparts in every age group.



Why Indian Women Don't Pursue Paid Employment?

Raksha Kumar

Forbes

Mumbai, September 18, 2020

Three out of four women in India do not work as paid employees. Crucially, they do not seek paid employment. India's Female Labour Force Participation rate - the share of women aged 15-64 who report either being employed or being available for work - is 24.8% in 2020. This number is down from 34% in 2006. A high female labour force participation rate is indicative of a robust economy. In a pandemic-affected world, there are two reasons for this rate to be shamefully low in India.

First, women are busy doing unpaid work at home, including cooking, cleaning and caregiving. Second, women employees populate the informal economy in large numbers. They are paid smaller amounts and in cash, which they do not consider to be 'work.'

Mamta Sharma, a business executive who lives in a Mumbai suburb, lost her job in April this year after India entered a strict pandemic-induced lockdown. As an employed woman, her routine was fixed. She woke up at around 6 am to spend some time with her 2-year-old, cook meals and head to work. The 33-year-old worked in the office between 10 am and 6 pm with lunch and coffee breaks. Returning home by 7 pm, she had the evening to herself. "Since the lockdown, I have been working 24x7 to run the household," she said. The difference? No breaks, no pay. Worse, the cooking and cleaning are not considered work, let alone accounting for emotional labour she puts in to run the family of three.

It is well documented that certain tasks are considered 'feminine' and hence women are engaged in more unpaid work at home. In India, for every 36 minutes of unpaid care work a man does, a woman does more than six hours.

However, the moot question is, why does Sharma not want to try getting paid employment again? "Because I am certain to not land a job," she said. There are many people as qualified as she is and there aren't enough jobs in the market. Even if she got a job, she would be paid much less than what she was making, she said.

Women who can afford to stay at home, prefer to do so in a contracting job market. The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown pushed the Indian economy off the cliff, shrinking the Gross Domestic Product by 23.9% for the April to June quarter. For context, the US's GDP shrank by 9.1%. For a country whose economy was contracting even before Covid-19 hit, the lockdown was a body blow. The country will not recover from this in a hurry.

India's unemployment rate hovers around 8%, however, the lockdown has moved the jobs significantly into the informal sector, where there are no pay guarantees.

When the Female Labour Force Participation rate is calculated, large parts of the informal economy go unaccounted for. Susheela Kamble, a 27-year-old domestic worker from Dombivali near Mumbai used to clean and cook in three households until April this year. Her services were terminated in all three homes. When asked if she has worked since then, she says no.

However, since April, Kamble has bought a small cane basket full of vegetables from a wholesale merchant every day. Sitting on a pavement near a multi-storied residential complex, she has sold them. “How is this work?” she asked. For her, work was when she got regular pay every month.

Her customers pay her in cash, in turn, she pays the wholesale merchant in cash. Her contribution to the economy cannot be easily accounted for. Since her 17-year-old daughter takes turns at vegetable vending, Kamble doesn't consider this 'work'.

To be sure, women across the world have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Between February and May close to 12 million women lost their jobs as opposed to 9 million men. According to The Guardian, by the end of April, women's job losses had erased a decade of employment gains.

But, it is time for India to double up and increase the number of women in paid employment to catapult its economy back onto the growth track. A 2020 United Nations Global Compact study found that raising women's participation in the labour force to the same level as men can boost India's GDP by 27 %.

How many women get paid employment depends on how safe public transport is, how narrow the gender pay gap is, access to good childcare and women's health. It is not difficult to figure out where India's policy priorities should be. But there have been no indications yet that the government is doing anything substantial in this regard.

On Prime Time television news when an economic analyst tried to make a point about the nation's dipping GDP, the anchor reprimanded him by asking him “not to waste the nation's and the viewers' time.”



The 'invisible' hands that feed 1.2 billion people

Raksha Kumar

Forbes

Mumbai, September 21, 2020

Raigad is rather green during the monsoon months. To the southeast of Mumbai, the district is peppered with coconut trees and flanked by the western ghats range of mountains, which are on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Majority of vegetables and some food grains for Mumbai's 30 million people are sourced from Raigad.

In April, after losing her job in a Mumbai beauty parlour, Sujata Gawde returned to her village in Raigad. She has been working in her uncle's paddy fields since then. Gawde, along with seven other women in her extended family, does all the farm work - from sowing seeds to harvesting the produce - other than driving the tractor to plough the land.

Traditionally, farm work that women have done has not mechanised as much as the workmen have done. This has meant more and more women work on the fields, while men are slowly being replaced by machines. Almost 84% of women in rural India depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Between 2001 and 2011, the female workforce in agriculture increased from around 54% to 63%, while the male workforce decreased by 9% to 37%, for the same period. A good indicator of how indispensable women are to the Indian agricultural sector is the government funded child care facility.

Anganwadis - or village child care centres - are run by government-appointed and trained women who care for children when the women work. They were started in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services programme to combat child hunger and malnutrition. Such centres are not very common in urban India.

Despite all this, women's contribution to agriculture and food security is rarely recognised. There are many reasons for this. First, the lands are owned by men. Less than 13 % of women own any land. So, the benefits of land ownership are reaped by men, while women toil away. Second, men are at the forefront of selling farm produce in markets and taking money back home. Therefore, women become the 'invisible' farmworkers who put food on the plates of all Indians.

The lockdown made matters worse for female farmers in India. Here's how.

The nature of employment changed after Covid-19 hit. When a strict lockdown was announced in March, economic activities in the country came to a standstill and the unemployment rate shot up to 23.5% in April and May. As the country began to open up and businesses re-started, the rate went down around 11% and still hovers around that figure.

The strict nationwide lockdown was announced with only a four-hour heads up. Buses, trains and flights were suspended. People were stuck where they were without a clear indication of how long they might have to stay put. This started what some have called the greatest migration since the subcontinent's partition in 1947 when about 15 million people were displaced.

Most daily wage workers who had migrated to the cities could not afford to live in them without sufficient financial support. They needed to return to their villages for sustenance. People walked back thousands of miles to their villages. Many died on the way. But, those who managed to survive reached their villages to mainly work on farmlands.

As a result, since August, there are many more farmers than salaried people. According to the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy, farmers and daily wage earners together account for nearly two-thirds of the Indian working population.

22-year-old Gawde returned to her village packed in a private minivan with 14 others. She used to send money to her family back in the village since she was unemployed, she became financially dependent on them. "I wanted to ensure I am not a burden on my family," she said and hence decided to take up the farm job. Although she slogs for about 10 hours a day, even when it rains incessantly, it is not considered 'work' because she is paid a lot less than what she used to make. "What I used to spend in a week earlier is what I earn now if I slog for a month," she said. And her pay is irregular as she has not been paid for two weeks in August at all.

With more and more people returning to their villages, competition for farm work has increased, pulling wages down considerably

This is not new for her family. Her mother, Lalita Gawde, takes care of all the household chores and spends an average of six hours in the fields. "But, her contribution to the household is never credited," said Gawde. "And now I know how that feels."



Young women face the brunt of Indian economic downturn

Raksha Kumar

Forbes

Mumbai, September 25, 2020

India's economy is in big trouble. In the last week of August, the federal government admitted that the GDP had shrunk by around 24%. For context, the GDP of the U.S. contracted by about 9%. For a young population like India's, the biggest fear in a shrinking economy is fewer jobs. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, in April and May, about 120 million people lost their jobs. While many of the jobs were regained, most people are out of salaried positions and many others have settled for lesser paying gigs.

Unsurprisingly, in the pecking order of employment, young women (below the age of 29) rank considerably lower. And they are the worst affected. In 2019-20, 20% of people employed were aged below 30 years. Between April and June 2020, that came down to 18.8%. But, here's the clincher. For every eight young men employed in 2019-20, four young women were also employed. This year, between April and June, that ratio became 9:1. (Source: CMIE data)

Mariyam Daga graduated from a Mumbai college in May 2019, majoring in commerce and accounts. "I used to go to at least two job interviews in a week," she said. She has stopped going to job interviews since the lockdown in March.

The social cost of younger women not being in paid employment are many. Early marriages and the early birth of the first child being two of the most important. According to UNICEF, 27% of girls in India are married before their 18th birthday and 7% are married before the age of 15.

Activists believe the figures could be much higher.

Apart from employment, education has proven to be an antidote to early marriages. Daga is now thinking of pursuing her Masters in Commerce and Economics. However, the pandemic threw the academic calendars out of the window, with many universities being shut till the end of September. And most offered online classes even when they reopen.

In the absence of a job or higher studies, Daga's mother thinks it best for her daughter to be married off. "There is no guarantee of a job and higher studies were not her first choice anyway," the mother said.

The situation is worse off in rural India, particularly among vulnerable communities. In a blog for The Centre for the Study of Global Human Movement, a PhD Candidate at the University of Cambridge Centre for Gender Studies, Reetika Revathy Subramanian recounts the plight of 14-year-old Sakhi who belongs to the historically oppressed Banjara caste in Maharashtra's severely drought-affected Marathwada region.

“Following the overnight imposition, Sakhi’s parents, employed as migrant sugarcane cutters in the neighbouring state, lost their jobs and had little money to trek their way back home. The government-run school in her village that she attended had also shut down, eliminating her only secure meal for the day.

Driven by debt and distress over the next few weeks, Sakhi’s family now considered her marriage a necessary decision for the very survival of their migrant household. It was to be solemnised in the “safety” of their house without dowry – in the absence of both guests and the authorities,” Subramanian writes.

Authorities received 5,584 phone calls to prevent underage marriages across the country between March and June, according to the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development. This story indicates that not only are younger women not easily employable but the unemployment of the male members in their families affects them adversely.

A joint report by Bain & Company and Google warned that the prospect for female employment doesn’t look all that bright - pandemic or no pandemic. “Women hold most of the administrative and data-processing roles that artificial intelligence and other technologies threaten to usurp,” the report cites a 2019 study by the Washington-based Institute of Women’s Policy Research. “As routine jobs become automated, the pressure on women will intensify and they will experience higher unemployment rates.”

The way to reverse this is to exert social pressures by resisting patriarchal practices and beliefs. Daga has decided to look for jobs in a few months when the economy picks up pace. “I work hard at home now. I cook. I clean. That is work too. And it should be looked at as such,” she said.



Out of work, her future in doubt, a woman finds refuge in TikTok

Revati Laul

thewire.in

Shamli (U.P.), May 15, 2020

The funniest people in this world are those who don't know it.

As a factory worker who has not been paid her last month's salary, you would think Arti would be angry or frustrated or wrung out, tired at the very least. And she may be all of that. But on the hugely popular social media app TikTok, a whole other persona is unleashed.

A worker by day and TikTok queen when off the clock, she has 2000 videos to her credit, most made in the post-Covid-19 lockdowns. An archive of those would be on display here if it hadn't been for the fact that Arti's phone was stolen a day before this interview. And she does not remember her TikTok ID, so all her artistry is lost for now.

Not being able to keep up with such sundry details is part of the mix and has to do as much with her tough background as her individual quirks. She does not know how old she is, for instance, or the name of the factory she works in.

In her life, those details are of little consequence.

Arti lives in a tiny two-room tenement with her two young sisters. It's opposite a spoon-making factory where she and one sister have jobs as assembly-line workers. She gets paid Rs 8,000 a month. It was about to become Rs 10,000 when the lockdown happened. Her factory sent her rations for a few weeks and said, sorry, they couldn't pay her salary for now.

This much of her story is like hundreds, probably thousands, of workers in Shamli district in western Uttar Pradesh. Shamli is an industrial wasteland with mounds of unclaimed garbage framing its horizon. You cannot walk down a single road without fleas and faeces and the powdery bits of both getting stuck as grey grit in your nose, your hair and all over your skin. People were out of work here long before three lockdowns took the bottom out of the place.

There aren't that many women factory workers; most work is on a 'dehadi' basis, subject to the arbitrariness and machinations of contractors who get a cut of the daily wages. They are not on any employment exchange; most do not have Jan Dhan accounts, nor ration cards, as the number of days of work lost in procuring one didn't seem worth it to many, until now, when rations are the new gold.

Arti had counted herself lucky to still have her job, or that's what she was made to believe.

When the initial lockdown was enforced with a four-hour notice period on March 25, Arti and her three sisters were in Panipat in Haryana to see relatives. They were stuck. They needed to find a way back home.

Three times, in the middle of the night, the sisters – along with an infant niece deposited in their care – rode pillion with their uncle and cousins to the Haryana-UP border. Each time, they were turned back. The fourth time, they decided to walk.

On day one, their relatives took them on the bike through long circuitous routes inside villages to the last motorable point, Samalkha in Haryana, where they spent the night. That was still 52 kilometres away from Shamli.

The next morning, they figured out how to cross the Yamuna river – sitting on a used rubber tyre and rowing it across. “We got on at 5 am and reached the other side at 9 am. It took a long time because we had a child with us so no one wanted to ferry us on a tube and take such a big risk,” Arti said. They walked the rest of the way, eight hours a day for two days, till they were home.

There is so much in Arti’s life that might break her, but she’s saved it all up for her new escape vault – TikTok.

It came out quite matter-of-factly, almost in an undertone, “TikTok bana lete hain, bas aur kuch nahi (I make TikTok videos, not much else).”

Everything about Arti, from the way she carries herself to her clothes point towards inner defiance. She is not one to be reduced to a sum of her circumstances. The person who could wade across a river on a tyre if she had to, would use the make-believe to live out an altogether different life online. It wasn’t original and it wasn’t the stuff that Indian Idol is made of. But the performance was in the doing and in what its afterglow left on Arti’s face.

I saw this in the two videos she made with a new ID we created, on my phone. As I requested her to do a demo, I saw the drama unfold. Her eyes shone like two stars in her face and she sprung off her single-bed-cum-sofa, picked up a hand mirror and comb and disappeared into the adjoining room, slamming the door behind her.

She recorded her solo video in secret, shared at the top of this story. The second was a duet we recorded together, that allowed both of us to momentarily forget the traumas Arti had dealt with.

You wouldn’t know by seeing this, how Arti lost her father early in life and spent her adolescent years washing dishes in people’s homes with her mother. That nine months after their son was born, her husband disappeared without a trace. That her son, Dipanshu, would have been nine now, but he died of undiagnosed cancer. There is a portrait of him above the bed and the shelves on the wall opposite were stuffed with teddy bears from his birthdays.

Arti lost her mother in 2015 and now lives with the only close family that’s left, her sisters Jyoti and Manisha. She lives from one day to the next and tries to get on with the business of living. “If this factory doesn’t re-open for some reason, we’ll just find another job elsewhere,” she said. She and her sisters already have one mapped out, just in case they need it.



(Arti (centre) with her sisters, Jyoti, to her left and Manisha to the right. Photo: Revati Lau)

आधी आबादी से अब भी दूर है, 'की-बोर्ड' और 'टचस्क्रीन' Adhi abadi se ab bhi door hai keyboard aur touchscreen

Sachin Shrivastava

spsmedia.in

Bhopal, September 27, 2020

आप चाहें, न चाहें, 'डिजिटल मीडिया' धीरे-धीरे सभी की बुनियादी जरूरत बनता जा रहा है। लेकिन क्या महिलाओं की हमारी आधी आबादी तक भी विज्ञान का यह चमत्कार पहुंच पा रहा है? क्या वे उतनी ही आसानी से 'स्मार्ट-फोन' की मार्फत अपनी 'दुनिया' मुट्ठी में कर पा रही हैं जितनी आसानी से पुरुष? प्रस्तुत है, लाडली मीडिया फैलोशिप के तहत इस विषय की पडताल करता सचिन श्रीवास्तव का यह लेख।

मध्यप्रदेश की राजधानी भोपाल के पडौस में बसे गांव बिलखिरिया की शांता चाची कोरोना के बारे में पूरे आत्मविश्वास से बता रही हैं कि यह बीमारी सिर्फ शहरों में और अमीर लोगों के बीच फैलती है। यहां बताते चलें कि मध्यप्रदेश के बाशिंदों की किस्मत तय करने का केंद्र यानी प्रख्यात और खूबसूरत अरेरा हिल शांता चाची के घर से महज 19 किलोमीटर दूर है। अरेरा हिल पर बनी 'मध्यप्रदेश विधानसभा' और करीब स्थिति सचिवालय की इमारत 'वल्लभ भवन' में बैठे अधिकारी मध्यप्रदेश में कोरोना के दौरान डिजिटल माध्यमों से सूचनाओं की विस्तार पर पूरे उत्साह से बात करते हैं, लेकिन महिलाओं तक सूचना की पहुंच सुनिश्चित करने के बारे में वे चुप्पी साध जाते हैं। सूचना तकनीक की पहुंच में भी दोगम दर्जे की नागरिक

असल में, यह एक उदाहरण मात्र है। पूरे देश में कमोवेश यही हाल है। डिजिटल तकनीक पर सवार सूचनाओं की जो खेप गांवों, देहातों, कस्बों में पहुंचाई जा रही है, उसमें आधी आबादी यानी महिलाओं तक सूचना की पहुंच सुनिश्चित करना सरकार और प्रशासन की प्राथमिकता में नहीं है। दिलचस्प यह है कि जब इस बारे में अधिकारियों से बात की गई तो उन्होंने 'आफ द रिकॉर्ड' कहा कि पहले पुरुषों तक ही सूचना पहुंच जाए, तो काफी है। यानी प्रशासन की प्राथमिकता सूची में भी महिलाएं दोगम दर्जे की नागरिक हैं।

कोविड—19 में कैसे पहुंची महिलाओं तक सूचना मध्यप्रदेश में कोरोना के बारे में सूचनाएं जनता तक पहुंचाने के लिए सरकार ने व्हाट्सएप से लेकर ट्विटर तक का सहारा लिया है। प्रदेश स्तर पर अधिकारियों के डिजिटल समूह बने और फिर जिला स्तर के अधिकारियों को उनसे जोड़ा गया। जिला स्तर पर अधिकारियों को जिम्मेदारी दी गई कि वे अपने ट्विटर हैंडल के अलावा व्हाट्सएप व अन्य माध्यमों से ब्लॉक और फिर नीचे पंचायत स्तर तक सूचनाएं पहुंचाएं। हालांकि इस पूरी कवायद के बावजूद गांव में सूचनाएं अक्ल तो बहुत देर से पहुंचीं। फिर मुश्किल से उनके सही मायने चंद लोगों के जेहन में दर्ज हुए। इसमें भी महिलाओं तक सीधे सूचना पहुंचाने की कोई जोर आजमाइश नहीं की गई। यह मान लिया गया कि परिवार के पुरुषों के पास सूचना पहुंच गई है, तो वह महिलाओं तक पहुंच ही जाएगी। डिजिटल इंडिया में महिलाओं की स्थिति

'डिजिटल इंडिया एज इफ वुमन' शीर्षक से प्रकाशित अपनी रिसर्च में अनीता गुरुमूर्ति और नंदनी चामी बताती हैं कि देश में डिजिटल मिशन के 6 साल बाद भी सूचना तकनीक तक पहुंच का पलड़ा पुरुषों के पक्ष में झुका हुआ है। डिजिटल मिशन से लाभान्वित कुल आबादी में पुरुषों की हिस्सेदारी 64 प्रतिशत है, तो महज 36 प्रतिशत महिलाओं तक ही यह 'बयार' पहुंची है। इसमें भी ग्रामीण भारत में हालात और भी खराब हैं।

घर में स्मार्ट फोन है, लेकिन महिलाओं की पहुंच सीमित गांव—गांव में स्मार्ट फोन पहुंचने के शोर के बीच हकीकत यह भी है कि महिलाओं की टचस्क्रीन तक पहुंच बेहद सीमित और लगभग न के बराबर है। बम्होरी गांव के किसान अनिरुद्ध सिंह अपने परिवार की महिलाओं के बारे में गर्व से बताते हैं कि उनकी तीन भाभियां ग्रेजुएट हैं और बहनों ने पोस्ट ग्रेजुएशन किया है। लेकिन उनके घर में भी महिलाओं तक तकनीक की पहुंच सीमित है। स्मार्टफोन के बारे में अनिरुद्ध कहते हैं कि सभी के पतियों और बेटों के पास स्मार्ट फोन है और उसी के जरिये वे परिवार के अन्य सदस्यों से वीडियो चैट आदि करती हैं। बातों-बातों में वे यह भी

बताते हैं कि महिलाओं से वीडियो चैट आदि करती हैं। बातों-बातों में वे यह भी बताते हैं कि महिलाओं के सोशल मीडिया आईडी को उनके बेटे या पति ही आपरेट करते हैं। यह सिर्फ एक परिवार का मामला नहीं है। ज्यादातर ग्रामीण परिवारों में महिलाओं की सीधी पहुंच सोशल मीडिया तक नहीं है। यहां तक की उनके अकाउंट के पासवर्ड भी बेटे या पति ही बदलते हैं। घर से बाहर काम कर रही हैं, लेकिन मोबाइल नहीं हाथ में

आमतौर पर माना जाता है कि जो महिलाएं घर से बाहर काम कर रही हैं, उनके हाथों में मोबाइल पहुंच गया है। यह भी आमधारणा है कि शहरी इलाकों में महिलाओं की पहुंच मोबाइल या इंटरनेट तक बढ़ी है, हालांकि यह आंशिक सच्चाई और भ्रम है। हकीकत यह है कि आर्थिक रूप से बेहतर घर हों या फिर घरेलू काम से आजीविका चलाने वाले परिवार, सभी में टचस्क्रीन पर पुरुषों का कब्जा ज्यादा है। घरेलू कामगारों में जहां 95 प्रतिशत पुरुषों के पास फोन है, तो घरेलू सहायक महिलाओं में से महज 30 प्रतिशत ही अपने साथ फोन रखती हैं। उनसे संपर्क परिवार के पुरुषों के जरिये ही संभव हो पाता है।

नया फोन आया तो पहले उसे बेटा ही चलाएगा अशोकनगर जिले के बहादुरपुर कस्बे के एक परिवार से बात करने पर पता चला कि घर में जो सबसे नया फोन आता है, उसे पहले 23 वर्षीय बेटा इस्तेमाल करता है। उसके बाद वह छोटे भाई या पिता के हाथ में पहुंचता है। उसके बाद ही बहन के हाथ से होता हुआ मां के हाथ में पहुंचता है। हालांकि तब तक उसके ज्यादातर फंक्शन आउटडेटेड हो चुके होते हैं। इस तरह महिलाओं के हाथ में तकनीक पहुंच तो रही है, लेकिन पिछड़ी हुई।

पंचायत के इंटरनेट तक नहीं है, महिलाओं की पहुंच देश की कई पंचायतों को इंटरनेट की सुविधा से लैस किया गया है, लेकिन यहां भी महिलाओं की पहुंच नहीं है। ज्यादातर पंचायतों में पुरुषों का कब्जा है। अगर कोई महिला सरपंच है भी तो इंटरनेट आदि से जुड़ी सारी कार्यवाही को उनका बेटा या परिवार का कोई अन्य पुरुष ही देखता है। इससे गांव की अन्य महिलाएं सहज नहीं हो पातीं और वे इंटरनेट से दूरी बना लेती हैं।

महिलाओं की इंटरनेट और डिजिटल पहुंच पर लेखक और पत्रकार सचिन कुमार जैन कहते हैं कि महिलाओं की इंटरनेट तक पहुंच बेहद सीमित है और इसके लिए किसी प्रमाण की जरूरत नहीं है। यह नजरिये और सोच से जुड़ा हुआ मामला है। पहली बात तो किशोरियों और महिलाओं को इंटरनेट से दूर रखा जाता है। अगर पहुंच बनती भी है तो उसमें कई किस्म के बंधन लगाए जाते हैं।

‘विकास संवाद’ संस्था से जुड़े सचिन जैन कहते हैं कि कई परिवार एक ही फोन रख सकते हैं और उस पर परिवार में कमाने वाले का कब्जा रहता है। इसमें पुरुषों की दावेदारी ज्यादा है। घरेलू मजदूर की बात करें तो जहां 95 प्रतिशत पुरुषों के पास अपना फोन है, तो महिलाओं के मामले में यह पहुंच महज 30 प्रतिशत ही है।

कौन करता है किस लिए इस्तेमाल ‘विकास संवाद’ संस्था ने मध्यप्रदेश में ‘डिजिटल-लिटरेसी’ कार्यक्रम चलाया था। इसमें किशोर लड़के—लड़कियों का डिजिटल तकनीक से परिचय कराते हुए रोजमर्रा के जीवन में तकनीक के इस्तेमाल पर जोर दिया गया था। इसके अनुभवों के बारे में बताते हुए सचिन जैन कहते हैं कि लड़कों और लड़कियों के यूट्यूब इंटरनेट यूजर का डेटा देखने पर साफ पता चलता है कि किशोरियों ने जहां ज्यादा समय ज्ञान-आधारित, जीवन-यापन सेजुडी या अपनी जरूरत के वीडियो देखने में डेटा खर्च किया, वहीं लड़कों ने मनोरंजक वीडियो पर अपना समय ज्यादा बिताया। इंटरनेट पर फ्राड का खतरा

इंटरनेट पर महिलाओं की पहुंच को कम करने के बारे में एक आम तर्क दिया जाता है कि वर्चुअल दुनिया में तमाम तरह के खतरे हैं, लेकिन ये खतरे पुरुषों के लिए भी उतने ही हैं, जितने महिलाओं के लिए। इस बारे में सचिन जैन कहते हैं कि इंटरनेट के सुरक्षित इस्तेमाल के जरिये ही इससे निपटा जा सकता है। महिलाओं की पहुंच सीमित करना इसका सही हल नहीं हो सकता। (सप्रेस)



आधी दुनिया की नौकरियों को लील गया कोरोना

Adhi duniya ki naukariyon ko leel gaya corona

Sunil Sharma

Chhattisgarh Khabar

Raipur, September 23, 2020

कोरोना ने छत्तीसगढ़ के बिलासपुर शहर की रहने वाली विमला शर्मा की दुनिया बदल कर रख दी. कोरोना काल से पहले सब कुछ ठीक-ठाक चल रहा था. वे 10 महिलाओं के साथ मिल कर मसाला उद्योग चला रही थीं. घर-गृहस्थी की गाड़ी अपने रफ्तार से चल रही थी.

लेकिन मार्च के बाद, जैसे जीवन थम-सा गया. विमला वर्मा कहती हैं कि कोरोना ने उन्हें कहीं का न छोड़ा. काम धंधा बंद हो गया है. गरीब महिलाएं उनसे जुड़ी थीं. सभी त्रस्त हैं. बेटी के स्कूल की नौकरी छूट गई है. उधार लेकर किसी तरह जीवन बसर कर रहे हैं.

बिलासपुर की महिला आईटीआई में 1500 महिलाओं व युवतियों को रेगजीन बैग व पर्स बनाने का प्रशिक्षण दे चुकी राधा परिहार खुद बेरोजगार हो गई हैं. वे कहती हैं कि उनके सामने भूखों मरने की नौबत है. बेटी थोड़ा बहुत कमाती थी. सेलरी काट ली गई तो उसने काम छोड़ दिया. बैग-पर्स बनकर घर में रखे हैं. कोई लेने के लिये तैयार नहीं है.

राधा परिहार खुद ही कहती हैं-"लोगों के पास खाने के लिए पैसे नहीं है. तो वे बैग-पर्स कैसे खरीदेंगे."

विमला शर्मा और राधा परिहार केवल नाम भर नहीं हैं. ये छत्तीसगढ़ के अलग-अलग शहरों में रहने वाली उन हज़ारों महिलाओं की तस्वीर हैं, जिनके सारे रंग कोरोना काल ने छीन लिये हैं. ये वो महिलायें हैं, जिन्होंने बड़ी मुश्किल से घर-गृहस्थी से बाहर सांस लेना शुरू किया था. बड़ी मुश्किल से इन महिलाओं ने छोटे-छोटे रोजगार-धंधे शुरू किये थे. बूटिक, ब्यूटीपार्लर, मोमबत्ती, आयुर्वेद दवायें, आर्टिफिशियल ज्वेलरी और साफ्ट ट्वायज बनाकर उन्होंने आत्मनिर्भर होने की कोशिश की थी.

ऐसा नहीं है कि कोरोना ने केवल महिलाओं के ही सपने तोड़े. लेकिन अपने आस-पास नज़रें घुमाने पर पता चलता है कि कोरोना काल की बेरोजगारी की बाढ़ ने पुरुषों की तुलना में महिलाओं को कहीं अधिक प्रभावित किया.

निशाने पर महिलायें

मॉल से लेकर प्राइवेट स्कूल और निजी दुकानों के अध्ययन से यह पता चलता है कि कोविड 19 महामारी की वजह से इन संस्थानों ने आर्थिक संकट का हवाला देते हुए कई कर्मचारियों को बड़े पैमाने पर नौकरी से निकाला. पर अधिकांश संस्थानों में नौकरी से निकाले जाने वालों में पहली सूची महिलाओं की सामने आई.

यहां तक कि जिन उपक्रमों में महिला और पुरुष दोनों बराबर थे, वहां भी महिलाओं की नौकरी पर ही गाज गिरी. इनमें भी दैनिक वेतन भोगी महिलाएं सर्वाधिक निशाने पर रहीं.

अब 36 साल की बिलासपुर की संगीता को ही लीजिए. इनकी शादी 15 साल पहले एक शिक्षाकर्म से हुई थी. कुछ ही साल में पति गुजर गए. इनकेदो बच्चे हैं. उन्होंने सोचा था कि इस बार बेटी-बेटे को किसी प्राइवेट स्कूल में तो दाखिला करवाएंगी पर वे जिस सरकारी प्रशिक्षण केंद्र में दैनिक वेतन भोगी थी, वहां ताला लटक गया. रोजगार छीन गया. थोड़ी मा पूंजी. किराए के घर में चली गई. वह झाड़ू, पोछा, बर्तन का काम करने के लिये तैयार हैं. पर 5 माह से रोजगार नहीं मिल रहा है.

बिलासपुर की ही नीलम एक प्राइवेट स्कूल में टीचर थीं. वहीं उनके पति सुरेश ठाकुर भी पढ़ाते थे. संस्थान ने दोनों से इस्तीफा लिखवा लिया गया. कोरोना के कारण स्कूल बंद हुए तो कई महिला शिक्षिकाओं की नौकरी चली गई. 5 से 10 हजार रुपए मासिक आय बंद हो गई. 5 माह से उनके पास कोई काम नहीं है. कुछ तो ऐसे भी हैं जिनके पति की भी नौकरी चली गई.

32 साल की राशि बिलासपुर की एक प्राइवेट शैक्षणिक संस्थान में भृत्य थी. उसे लिव विदाउट पे (एलडब्ल्यूपी) पर भेज दिया गया. राशि बताती हैं कि एलडब्ल्यूपी पर जाने वाली वह अकेली नहीं बल्कि दर्जनभर महिलाएं हैं. जिनकी नौकरी बच गई है, उन्हें संस्थान आधी तनखाह दे रहा है.

शालिनी शॉपिंग मॉल में सफाईकर्मी थीं. अब वह बेरोजगार हैं. बारात में सिर पर लाइट रखकर रौशनी बिखरने वाली तारा के लिए शादियों का सीजन आर्थिक रूप से अंधकारमय ही था.

राजधानी रायपुर में भी शॉपिंग माल, डिपार्टमेंटल स्टोर्स, होटल, रेस्तरां में काम करने वाली महिलाओं व युवतियों की नौकरियां चली गई. यही स्थिति कोरबा, रायगढ़, दुर्ग जैसे शहरों की हुई. अप्रैल में बेरोजगार हुई महिलाओं को सितंबर में भी नौकरी नहीं मिली. लिहाजा उन्हें गांव लौटना पड़ा. शहर आकर काम करते हुए पढ़ाई करने और अच्छी नौकरी पाने का सपना टूट गया.

कई महिलाओं ने बातचीत में बताया कि छंटनी की शुरुआत संस्थानों में उनसे हुई. वे नौकरी से निकालनेकी आसान शिकार रहीं. विरोध करने पर उनकी आवाज दबा दी गई.

घट रही है नौकरी

कोविड 19 ने नौकरियों में लैंगिक असमानता को और साफ़ कर दिया. अलग-अलग संस्थानों में छंटनी के लिए महिला होना बड़ी वजह रही. यह हालत तब है, जबकि अधिकांश संस्थाओं में बराबर काम के लिये पुरुषों की तुलना में स्त्रियों को कम तनखाह मिलती है.

सेंटर फॉर मॉनिटरिंग द इंडियन इकोनॉमी का हालिया सर्वे बताता है कि भारत में कम से कम 12 से 13 करोड़ लोगों की नौकरियां मई महीने के शुरुआत में ही जा चुकी हैं. लॉकडाउन खत्म हो चुका है पर वायरस के तेजी से प्रसार के कारण व्यवसायिक संस्थान में काम शुरू नहीं हो रहा है और नौकरियां रोज जा रही हैं. इस संकट का नकारात्मक असर देश के कामगार तबके की लैंगिक समानता पर पड़ना शुरू हो चुका है.

कई शोधार्थी बता चुके हैं कि कामकाजी महिलाओं की संख्या में भारी कमी आ सकती है. संयुक्त राष्ट्र ने भी अपनी हालिया रिपोर्ट में चेताया है कि ये महामारी महिलाओं के समाज में बराबरी हासिल करने के दशकों पुराने संघर्ष पर पानी फेर सकती है. इस महामारी के दौरान महिलाओं के अनपेड वर्क यानी बिना पैसे वाले काम में बेहद बढ़ोतरी हुई है.

2 लाख मजदूर महिलाओं का भी छीन गया रोजगार

छत्तीसगढ़ के आंकड़ों को देखें तो करीब 5 लाख मजदूरों की कोरोना के कारण राज्य में वापसी हुई. इनमें करीब 40 फीसदी महिला मजदूर हैं. वे वापस आईं और अब बेरोजगारी का दंश उन्हें झेलना पड़ रहा है.

10 दिन की बच्ची के साथ पुणे के ईट भट्ठे से लौटी जांजगीर-चांपा जिले के पामगढ़ के पास कोसा गांव की फिरतिन हो या फिर बिलासपुर के बहतलाई की रानी, सभी की हालत खराब है. उन्हें अब काम नहीं मिल रहा है.

ये बताती हैं कि जब वे बाहर रोजी-मजदूरी करती हैं तो उनके हाथ में पैसा रहता है. वे पति की कमाई पर आश्रित नहीं होतीं लेकिन कोरोना ने उन्हें आश्रित बना दिया. यह पूछने पर कि मनरेगा में तो उन्हें काम मिलता होगा, इस पर वे फिरतिन कहती हैं कि मनरेगा में भी पुरुषों को ज्यादा काम दिया जाता है.

अब बात सरकार दावों की. प्रदेश की 9883 पंचायतों में मनरेगा में 18 लाख 51 हजार 536 श्रमिकों के काम करने का दावा राज्य सरकार ने किया. प्रदेश में सर्वाधिक 1 लाख 17 हजार मजदूर अविभाजित बिलासपुर जिले में लौटे. 90 हजार का जॉब कार्ड जून तक बना. कुछ को काम मिला लेकिन फिर 12 जून को मानसून आ गया और काम बंद हो गए.

छत्तीसगढ़ में गिरती बेरोजगारी दर और बढ़ती बेरोजगारी

सेंटर फॉर मॉनिटरिंग इंडियन इकोनॉमी (सीएमआईई) की रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि छत्तीसगढ़ की बेरोजगारी दर सितंबर 2018 में 22.2 फीसदी थी, जो घटकर अप्रैल 2020 में 3.4 फीसदी हुई है। यह राष्ट्रीय बेरोजगारी दर (23.5 फीसदी) से काफी कम है।

छत्तीसगढ़ के मुख्यमंत्री भूपेश बघेल ने 4 अगस्त को ट्वीट किया, “आप सबको बताते हुए संतोष हो रहा है कि छत्तीसगढ़ में लॉकडाउन के दौरान भी चल रही आर्थिक गतिविधियों के कारण बेरोजगारी की दर में उल्लेखनीय कमी आई है। सीएमआईई से जारी आंकड़ों के अनुसार प्रदेश में बेरोजगारी की दर जून माह में 14.4 थी जो घटकर जुलाई माह में 9 प्रतिशत के स्तर पर आ गई है।”

इधर सीएमआईई के जुलाई माह के आंकड़ों के अनुसार छत्तीसगढ़ की स्थिति बेरोजगारी के मामले में कई राज्यों से बुरी रही। छत्तीसगढ़ में जुलाई माह में बेरोजगारी की दर 9 फीसदी है। जबकि इसी माह में आंध्रप्रदेश में यह आंकड़ा 8.3 फीसदी, असम में 3.2 फीसदी, गुजरात में 1.9, झारखंड में 8.8, कर्नाटक में 3.6, केरल में 6.8, मध्यप्रदेश में 3.6, महाराष्ट्र में 4.4, मेघालय में 2.1, ओडिशा में 1.9, सिक्किम में 4.5, तमिलनाडु में 8.1, उत्तरप्रदेश में 5.5 और पश्चिम बंगाल में यह 6.8 फीसदी रहा।

इस लिहाज़ से देखा जाए तो असल में छत्तीसगढ़ बेरोजगारी दर कम करने के मोर्चे पर कई राज्यों से पीछे रह गया है। इधर प्रदेश में 22 लाख 11 हजार रजिस्टर्ड शिक्षित बेरोजगार पहले से हैं। इसमें 35 फीसदी महिलाएं हैं।

कुटीर उद्योग की महिलाएं कर्ज में डूब रहीं

छत्तीसगढ़ लघु एवं सहायक संघ के अध्यक्ष हरीश केडिया बताते हैं कि छोटे-छोटे एक हजार उद्योग तो बिलासपुर जिले में ही हैं, जिनमें अधिकांश महिलाओं द्वारा संचालित हैं। ऐसा कोई दिन नहीं होता, जब उनके पास परेशान महिलाओं के फोन न आते हों।

हरीश केडिया कहते हैं-“कोरोना के कारण उनकी बिक्री शून्य हो चुकी है। उनसे सामान खरीदने वालों में भय का वातावरण है। वे कर्ज में डूब चुकी हैं। अपने काम के लिए नहीं, घर चलाने के लिए सूद पर रुपए ले रही हैं। कोरोना के पहले वे आत्मनिर्भर बन रही थीं, लेकिन इस महामारी ने उन्हें कई साल पीछे धकेल दिया। न सरकार, न शासन न समाजसेवी संगठन उन्हें मदद कर रहा है।” संयुक्त महिला संगठन की अध्यक्ष विद्या केडिया बताती हैं कि मध्यमवर्गीय परिवार की महिलाएं जो अचार, पापड़ आदि बनाकर आर्थिक रूप से सक्षम बन रही थीं, उन्हें कोरोना ने बेरोजगार कर दिया। उनका पुराना स्टॉक ही पड़ा-पड़ा खराब होने को है। टिफिन बंद होने से कई महिलाओं का रोजगार छीन गया। निम्नवर्गीय महिलाओं को खाने के लाले हैं। कई लोगों ने तो अपनी सेविकाओं को तनख्वाह तक नहीं दीं। हमने जरूरतमंद महिलाओं को 25 सिलाई मशीन दिए। मॉस्क बनाकर वे गुजारा कर रही हैं। पर सब ऐसा नहीं कर पा रही।

समाजसेवी संगठन 'एक नई पहल' की रेखा आहूजा के मुताबिक अकेले शहर में ही ऐसी महिलाओं की तादाद हजारों में है, जिन्हें कोरोना ने बेरोजगार बना दिया। वे काम के लिए फोन करती हैं। होटल में खाना पकाने वाली बिमला चौहान बेरोजगार हुई तो उसे सिलाई मशीन हमने दिया। कड़ियों को मोबाइल व साइकिल दिए। पर सब तक पहुंच पाना और उन्हें मदद कर पाना असंभव है।

सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता डॉ. अनिता अग्रवाल कहती हैं कि महिलाओं को आज सबसे ज्यादा मदद की जरूरत है। सरकार भी मदद करती नजर नहीं आ रही है। अब तक जिन चंद लोगों को लॉकडाउन के बाद रोजगार सरकार द्वारा उपलब्ध कराया गया है, उनमें महिलाओं की संख्या उंगलियों में गिनी जा सकती है। आधी आबादी और आधी दुनिया जैसे विशेषणों में समानता तलाशने वाले, इस कोरोना काल के अंधेरे को देख पा रहे हैं?



कोविड काल मे अपने गांव लौटी हजारों प्रवासी महिलाएं अब तक कर रही रोजगार का इंतजार **Covid kaal mein apne gaon lauti hazaron pravasi mahilayein ab tak kar rahi rojgar ka intezar**

Vikas Jain

www.patrika.com

Jaipur, September 03, 2020

प्रदेश में कोविड प्रकोप के बाद 25 मार्च से लॉकडाउन और उस बीच प्रवासी मजदूर परिवारों की अपने कार्यस्थल से मूल निवास की ओर पलायन ने वंचित वर्ग के हजारों परिवारों की आय को आधा कर दिया है। कोरोना अनलॉक के बाद प्रदेश में रोजगार व काम धंधे शुरू तो हुए, लेकिन अभी भी बेरोजगारी और रोजगार विहीन लोग बड़ी संख्या में हैं, जिनमें बड़ी संख्या महिलाओं की भी हैं। ये ऐसी महिलाएं हैं, जो कार्य स्थल शहरों में अपने पति और परिवार के साथ रहती थीं, लेकिन अब अपने मूल गांव लौट जाने के बाद ये बेरोजगार हो गई हैं। कि प्रदेश में कोविड काल के दौरान करीब 20 लाख प्रवासियों की आवक अपने घरों के लिए हो चुकी है। जिनमें से करीब 60 प्रतिशत वंचित वर्ग के ही माने जा रहे हैं, जो दूसरे राज्यों में रहकर मजदूरी करते थे।

राजस्थान पत्रिका संवाददाता ने प्रदेश के सर्वाधिक प्रवासी आवक वाले जिलों में ऐसी प्रवासी महिलाओं से बातचीत की तो उनका दर्द फूट पड़ा। उनका कहना था कि कोविड ने उन्हें रोजगार विहीन कर दिया, अब उनके पास इंतजार और सूख चुके आंसुओं के लिए अलावा कुछ नहीं है। उन्हें अपने नियोक्ताओं से वापस काम के लिए या तो जवाब नहीं मिल रहा है, वहीं कुछ को तो सापफ जवाब मिल गया है कि या तो इंतजार करें या नौकरी भूल जाएं...।

सरकार ने की थी तैयार, लेकिन इनका इंतजार कब तक

पिछले माह सरकार ने दूसरे राज्यों से आए मजदूरों व अन्य श्रमिकों व कामकाजी लोगों के लिए राजस्थान में काम धंधे उपलब्ध कराने की योजना पर काम किया था, इसके लिए राज कौशल श्रमिक रोजगार एक्सचेंज शुरू करने की बात कही गई थी। जिसमें करीब 11 लाख से अधिक फैक्ट्रियां, कारखाने, उद्योग इकाइयां पंजीकृत बताई गई थी। लेकिन अभी तक भी जमीनी स्तर पर ऐसे प्रभावित परिवारों को इसका फायदा मिलना शुरू नहीं हुआ है। इनका कहना है कि हो सकता है, सरकार इस योजना पर काम कर रही हो, लेकिन उनका तो अभी मासिक तौर पर परिवार चलाना मुश्किल हो रहा है।

इस तरह के काम करती थी ये महिलाएं अपने कार्य स्थल पर

प्रदेश में कोविड काल के दौरान बेरोजगारी का सामना कर रही अधिकांश महिलाएं अपने कार्यस्थल शहरों में निर्माण साइटों पर मजदूरी, घरों में कामकाज, निजी नौकरी करती थी। लेकिन अब गांवों में लौटने के बाद इनके पास ये विकल्प खत्म हो गए हैं। प्रदेश में बड़ी संख्या में महाराष्ट्र से प्रवासियों की आवक हुई, जहां प्रवासी और उनके परिवार की महिलाएं छोटा मोटा काम करती थी। इसी तरह सूरत से आई प्रवासी महिलाएं कारखानों में मजदूरी करती थी। इनके अलावा प्रवासी परिवार पूर्वोत्तर के राज्यों, पश्चिम बंगाल, तमिलनाडू और आंध्रप्रदेश से भी प्रवासी आए हैं।

प्रदेश में इन 10 जिलों में हुई प्रवासियों की सर्वाधिक आवक
पाली 957
जयपुर 750
जालोर 711
जोधपुर 790
डूंगरपुर 509
चूरू 500
झुंझुनू 484
नागौर 482
भीलवाड़ा 381
बाड़मेर 367

हम जहां काम करते थे, वहां से हमें घर भेज दिया गया। हमारा रोजगार बंद हो गया। जिसके कारण अभी हमारी गृहस्थी की आमदनी का बहुत नुकसान हुआ है। सबसे अधिक प्रभाव हमारे बच्चों की पढ़ाई पर पड़ा है। क्योंकि वे हमारे कार्य स्थल पर ही स्थित स्कूलों में जाते थे। घर चलाने के नाम पर हमें सरकार से बस दो बार 20 किलो गेहूँ मिला है।

- संगीता, खेरवाड़ा, डूंगरपुर

पहले हम ठेकेदार के यहां मजदूरी करते थे। कोविड बंद के कारण हम घर आ गए हैं। अभी तक ठेकेदार का फोन या जवाब नहीं आया है। इससे हमारा रोजगार छिन गया और आमदनी ठप सी हो गई है।

- रमीला, खेरवाड़ा

मैं लॉकडाउन से पहले अहमदाबाद में एक हॉस्पिटल में नौकरी करती थी। बंद के कारण हमें घर भेज दिया गया। मैं जो नौकरी करती थी, वह भी छूट गई। मदद के नाम पर सरकार की ओर से अब तक 10 किलो गेहूँ एक माह के लिए।

- रूकमणी, भाटड़ा

एक्सपर्ट व्यू

डूंगरपुर सहित प्रवासियों की सर्वाधिक आवक वाले क्षेत्रों की महिलाओं के लिए अब अपने रोजगार पर लौटना मुश्किल हो रहा है। कई को नियोक्ताओं से अब जवाब मिल चुका है कि उनके लिए अब आगे की नौकरी मुश्किल है। ये ऐसी महिलाएं हैं जो अपने परिवार के लिए करीब आधी आमदनी अपने रोजगार के जरिये उपलब्ध करवा रही थी। अभी तक भी इनका पुर्नवास शुरू नहीं हुआ है।

- अंजू कंवर, सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता, डूंगरपुर क्षेत्र

महिलाओं को अनलॉक के बावजूद रोजगार वापस प्राप्त होने में आ रही समस्या को हम दिखवाएंगे और इस पर अधिक फोकस हमारे विभाग और सरकार के माध्यम से करेंगे।

सरकार का फोकस सभी प्रवासी लोगों के पुर्नवास व रोजगार का है, हर योजना में महिलाओं के लिए विशेष प्राथमिकता है। ममता भूपेश, महिला एवं बाल विकास मंत्री, राजस्थान सरकार



C. Stories of the marginalised - sex workers, LGBTQI+ community, and persons with disabilities

The deleterious effects of the Corona pandemic and the strict lockdown enforced thereafter have brought immense misery and risks for those who continue to be at the margins and fringes of Indian society, even without Covid-19. These marginalised sections include the transgender community, the disabled, street children, sex workers, and others. The imposition of lockdown has not only aggravated precarity in their everyday survival but has also created more odds and obstacles in their efforts to earn their living and lead a 'normal' life.

For a large number of these communities, the streets of cities and towns have become their main sites to earn their livelihoods. Begging and selling petty goods are the two main sources, and these have not been chosen by them but have been thrust upon them. Each of these sections is vulnerable in its way. The disabled hawkers in public transport and on the streets make a living for their entire families. Several transgender persons, sex workers and the disabled have formed associations and organisations to pressure policymakers and governments to heed their rightful demands. These organisations petitioned the courts and governments to ensure access to basic services like food, medicines, etc, during the lockdown.

Sachin Shrivastava and Yogesh Pawar have both highlighted difficulties faced by the sex worker community following the lockdown. Their reports - the former from Madhya Pradesh and the latter from Maharashtra - looked at how sex workers had been robbed of their livelihoods and often faced the prospect of themselves and their families going hungry. Sachin Shrivastava also looked at the plight of the transgender community who generally face invisibilisation from most welfare initiatives even without Covid. The lockdown meant they couldn't go out for sex work or even beg for alms. Since marriages/birth ceremonies where they are given money and gifts also became low-key, they were robbed of that option to make money too.

Ultimately, if the organisations that work with them and their collectives had not intervened many would have died of hunger. There were some instances where a ray of hope was seen like around Bhopal where Shrivastava found transgender persons finding employment as farm labour.

Yogesh Pawar also called out a study by academicians from Yale School of Medicine and Harvard Medical School which said Indians were at a much lower risk of getting Covid-19 if red light areas shut after the lockdown. The study came under a scanner from decision-makers concerned, academics, activists, representatives of sex worker collectives, various advocacy groups within the sex workers' community and women's rights groups for making scapegoats of sex workers and blaming them for the spread of Covid-19.

Covid-19 has flattened the curve for online dating robbing many of the freedom and agency the internet and dating apps had normalised found Yogesh Pawar in his subsequent story. The lockdown and resultant lack of mobility meant that people just couldn't visit each other to have sex. This meant being back on the watch of parents or society to be chaste and live a life of abstention. The report also looked at how the lack of safe private places had hit the LGBTQIA community the worst due to the pandemic and the resultant lockdown

amid fears of infection. Already facing jeers and discrimination, Covid-19 had pushed the community back into the era of 'no place to do it.' Then, open spaces the community had owned in pre-covid times were a thing of the past. Covid-19 restrictions on movement and congregation meant the community couldn't go back to using even these public places.



कोरोना-काल में सेक्स वर्कर्स

Corona kaal mein sex workers

Sachin Shrivastava

spsmedia.in

Bhopal, October 02, 2020

भोपाल से करीब 40 किलोमीटर दूर रायसेन जिले का एक गांव (अज्ञात रखने की खातिर गांव का नाम नहीं दिया जा रहा) आसपास के अन्य गांवों की तरह ही कोरोना काल में उनीदा-सा है। गांव की गलियों में साईकिल के पुराने टायर को घुमाते हुए बच्चे हैं, दालानों में बैठे बुजुर्ग और मोबाइल की टचस्क्रीन पर नजरें गडाए युवा हैं। लेकिन हालात असामान्य हैं। इस गांव के ज्यादातर परिवारों की आजीविका सेक्स वर्क के जरिये चलती है, जिस पर कोरोना का कहर बुरी तरह टूटा है। बात करने पर ग्रामीणों ने शुरुआत में सब कुछ सामान्य होने की दुहाई दी। लेकिन जब डायरी और पेन एक तरफ रखा तो परेशानियों और मुश्किलों का गुबार जुबान पर आने लगा। साहूकारों के उधार के चंगुल में फंस रहे इन परिवारों के पास न ठीक से खाने को है, न दवा और दूध का बंदोबस्त है। ऊपर से सामाजिक तौर पर बहिष्कार और लोगों की चुभने वाली नजरों का सामना भी हर रोज करना पड़ रहा है।

सेक्स वर्कर न होते तो हालात बेहतर होते सेक्स वर्कर के तौर पर आजीविका कमाने वाली कमला (परिवर्तित नाम) कहती हैं कि हमारे पास और कोई काम नहीं है। सालों से इसी काम से जो थोड़ा बहुत पैसा मिलता है, उससे घर चलता है। कोरोना ने काम छीन लिया है और अब बीमारी के डर से कोई आता भी नहीं। ऐसे में उधार लेकर पेट भरने के अलावा कोई चारा नहीं है।

नहीं मिलता कोई और काम वे बताती हैं कि यहां महिलाओं को तो और कोई काम मिलता ही नहीं है, पुरुषों को भी लोग कोई काम नहीं देते हैं। कोरोना के पहले भी घर के पुरुषों ने अन्य जगहों पर काम करने की कोशिश की है, लेकिन कोई काम नहीं देता है। अगर कोई काम देता भी है, तो वह पहले घर की महिलाओं से मुफ्त में सेक्स की मांग करता है।

बचत खत्म, अब तीन गुने ब्याज पर उधार लॉकडाउन खुलने के बाद धीरे-धीरे अन्य पेशों में कामकाज सामान्य हालात की तरफ बढ़ रहा है, लेकिन सेक्स वर्कर्स की हालत बद-से-बदतर होती जा रही है। इस कारण बचत और उधार पर ही सेक्स वर्कर्स की जिंदग चल रही है। कमला (परिवर्तित नाम) ने बताया कि गांव और कस्बे के साहूकार उन्हें उधार तो दे रहे हैं, लेकिन इसके लिए दो और तीन गुना तक ब्याज ले रहे हैं। उन्होंने हाल ही में 15 प्रतिशत ब्याज पर 12 हजार रुपए उधार लिए हैं। गांव में ज्यादातर परिवारों ने मई-जून के बाद ही उधार लेना शुरू कर दिया था। यहां सेक्स वर्क से जुड़े हर परिवार के ऊपर लॉकडाउन के दौरान करीब 30 से 40 हजार रुपए का उधार है। पुरुष को नहीं देते पैसा, महिलाओं को बुलाते हैं एक अन्य गांव की एक सेक्स वर्कर ने बताया कि जिन लोगों से उधार लेते हैं, अगर उनके पास हमारे परिवार के पुरुष जाते हैं, तो पैसा नहीं देते हैं। पैसा न होने का बहाना भी बना देते हैं, या फिर सीधे-सीधे कह देते हैं कि अपनी बहन, बीवी को भेज देना।

उधार देने वाले करते हैं शारीरिक शोषण

एक सेक्स वर्कर ने बताया कि आमतौर पर उधार देने वाले उन्हें गलत जगह छूते हैं और वे यह भी अपेक्षा करते हैं कि हम उधार तो चुकाएं ही, साथ ही उनके साथ मुफ्त सेक्स भी करें। कई तो खुले तौर पर यह कहते हैं कि पूरा पैसा और ब्याज के अलावा उनके साथ समय भी गुजारना होगा। घूरना है आम

इसी गांव में सेक्स वर्क करने वाली रामकली (परिवर्तित नाम) बताती हैं कि लॉकडाउन के दौरान आसपास खाना बंटता था, तो हम लेने जाते थे, लेकिन लोग अच्छी निगाह से नहीं देखते। पुलिस भी टोकती है। लोग हमें घूरकर देखते हैं। इसलिए ज्यादा बाहर नहीं निकलते।

बड़े शहरों से लौटी गृह-राज्य लॉकडाउन के दौरान मुंबई, दिल्ली जैसे शहरों से अपने गृह-राज्य लौटे परिवारों में सेक्स वर्कर्स भी शामिल थे। एक गांव में मुंबई से लौटी सोनम (परिवर्तित नाम) ने बताया कि अप्रैल के महीने में हमने तीन दिन बिस्कुट खाकर गुजारा किया था। उसके बाद एक ट्रक से मध्यप्रदेश की सीमा तक पहुंचे। उन्होंने बताया कि वहां काम करने वाली 50 से 60 प्रतिशत सेक्स वर्कर्स अपने गृह-राज्यों की ओर लौट गई हैं।

कोरोना का डर और काम ठप

कोरोना की भयावहता के कारण सेक्स वर्कर्स के संपर्क में कोई भी नहीं आना चाहता। इससे हजारों लोगों के सामने खाने का संकट पैदा हो गया है। मध्यप्रदेश में कई गांव ऐसे हैं, जहां के निवासियों की आजीविका सीधे तौर पर सेक्स वर्क से जुड़ी है। इनका काम बीते छह महीने से पूरी तरह ठप है और गुजारे के लिए वे उधार और मदद पर निर्भर हैं।

बुनियादी दवाओं की भी किल्लत

कई सेक्स वर्कर्स परिवारों में बुजुर्ग हैं, जिनको प्रतिमाह 300 से 700 रुपए की दवा जरूरी होती है। इन्हें दवाएं मिलना मुहाल हो रहा है। गांव में ऐसे दर्जनों परिवार हैं, जहां बुजुर्गों ने अपनी रोजाना की दवाएं बंद कर दी हैं, क्योंकि उनके पास दवाएं खरीदने के लिए पैसे नहीं हैं।

बच्चों को नहीं दे पा रहे दूध गांव की एक सेक्स वर्कर ने बताया कि उनके घर में पिछले दो महीने से बस दाल, रोटी और आलू ही खाने को है। वे तीन महीने पहले ही अपनी पांच वर्षीय बेटी का दूध बंद करा चुकी हैं। आगे हालात कब सामान्य होंगे, कह नहीं सकते।

इक्का-दुक्का ग्राहक, लेकिन दाम हुए आधे सेक्स वर्कर्स बताती हैं कि बीमारी के कारण अब पहले की तरह लोग नहीं आते। पहले जहां हर रोज एक—दो ग्राहक आ जाते थे। अब सप्ताह में एक-आध ही कोई आता है। वह भी पहले के मुकाबले आधा दाम ही देता है।

परिवार के अन्य सदस्यों को नहीं मिलता काम

सेक्स वर्कर सरिता (परिवर्तित नाम) बताती हैं कि हमें तो गांव या शहर में कोई और काम मिलता नहीं है। परिवार के पुरुषों को भी लोग इसलिए काम नहीं देते हैं कि हमारा परिवार सेक्स वर्क के जरिये आजीविका चलाता है। सरिता कहती हैं, मेरे मां-बाप साथ रहते हैं। उनका खर्च मेरे काम से ही चलता है। गांव में ज्यादातर परिवारों की हालत बेहद खराब है।

सामाजिक दूरी, हमारी हकीकत सेक्स वर्कर का काम करने वाली सुनीता (परिवर्तित नाम) बताती हैं कि लॉकडाउन में सामाजिक दूरी के बारे में खूब बातें हुईं, लेकिन हमें तो पहले ही समाज ने दूर कर रखा है। जिन परिवारों के पुरुष शाम होते ही हमारे दरवाजे पर खड़े रहते थे, उनसे भी मदद मांगी तो मुकर गए। कोरोना फैलाने का भी लगा आरोप ग्रामीण महिलाओं ने बताया कि हम पर कोरोना फैलाने का आरोप भी लगा। मई के महीने में व्हाट्सएप पर यह अफवाह फैली कि सेक्स करने से कोरोना होता है और हमारे गांव से कोरोना फैलने की बात कही गई। इससे काफी दिक्कत हुई।

30 लाख से ज्यादा परिवार जुड़े हैं, सेक्स वर्क से

‘नेशनल एड्स कंट्रोल ऑर्गनाइज़ेशन’ (NACO) के आंकड़ों के मुताबिक देश में करीब 9 लाख सेक्स वर्कर हैं। हालांकि सेक्स वर्कर्स के बीच काम करने वाले सामाजिक संगठनों की मानें तो पूरे देश में करीब 30 लाख से ज्यादा परिवारों की रोजी-रोटी सेक्स वर्क के जरिये चलती है। हमारे समाज में सेक्स वर्क को सामाजिक तौर पर मान्यता नहीं है, इसलिए कई परिवार छुपकर यह काम करते हैं।

मध्यप्रदेश में सैकड़ों गांवों में सेक्स वर्क है, आजीविका पश्चिमी मध्यप्रदेश के नीमच, मंदसौर, रतलाम, तो उत्तर में मुरैना और श्योपुर और मध्य के इलाके में विदिशा, रायसेन, राजगढ़ के सैकड़ों गांवों में हजारों परिवार सेक्स वर्क के जरिये रोजी-रोटी चलाते हैं। इन जिलों की कई जातियों को भी सेक्स वर्कर्स समुदाय में रखा जाता है। हालांकि हकीकत यह है कि एक जाति के सभी लोग सेक्स वर्क से नहीं जुड़े हैं। दिक्कत यह है कि उक्त जाति से ताल्लुक रखने के कारण अन्य परिवारों को भी दूसरे रोजगार नहीं मिलते हैं, जिस कारण मजबूरन उन्हें भी सेक्स वर्क करना होता है।

लॉकडाउन में बढ़ा है भेदभाव

लॉकडाउन के असर के बारे में सेक्स वर्कर्स बताती हैं कि काम की परेशानी तो पहले भी थी और आजीविका की मुश्किल भी थी। लॉकडाउन में यह और बढ़ गया है। आजीविका का संकट, रोजमर्रा की चुनौतियां, मानसिक तनाव, हिंसा और भेदभाव में कोरोना के कारण और बढ़ोत्तरी हो गई है।



कोविड का असर: बधाई देने को तरसी जुबानें

Covid ka asar: badhai dene ko tarsai jubanein

Sachin Shrivastava

spsmedia.in

Bhopal, September 30, 2020

कोविड—19 और इसके कारण लगे लॉकडाउन के दौरान विभिन्न समुदायों और वर्गों की मुश्किलों का कोई अंत नहीं था। इनके बारे में कमोबेश लिखा भी खूब गया, लेकिन जिन समुदायों की मुश्किलों पर बेहद कम ध्यान गया है, उनमें से एक ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) हैं। दूसरों की खुशियों को अपनी हंसी से गुलजार करने वाले ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) समुदाय की मुश्किलों पर अक्ल तो बात ही कम हुई, और अगर हुई भी तो बेहद सतही ढंग से।

इसी दर्द को चेहरे पर लाये बिना भोपाल की रवीना (परिवर्तित नाम) कहती हैं— शुरू में थोड़ी दिक्कत हुई लेकिन बाद में खाना और राशन की समस्या ज्यादा नहीं थी, लेकिन भैया सिर्फ पेट की जरूरत नहीं होती। आसपास के लोग जब देखकर भी अनदेखा करते हैं, दूरी बनाते हैं, तो उसकी तकलीफ बड़ी होती है। रवीना के इस दार्शनिक विचार को खोलते हुए उनकी दोस्त सुमन बताती हैं कि कोरोना के पहले सारे शहर को बधाई देते थे, तो सबसे हंसते—बोलते भी थे। अब किसी के घर में लल्ला या लक्ष्मी आती है, तो वे दूर से ही आशीर्वाद देने को कहते हैं। बच्चे को छूकर उसके गालों को सहलाकर जो खुशी हमें मिलती थी, अब वो न जाने कब मिलेगी। वे कहती हैं— बड़े घरों में पहले भी सेनिटाइजर से हाथ साफ करके ही हम बच्चों को गोद में लेते थे, लेकिन अब तो चाहे एक—दो सप्ताह से बधाई देने तो जाने लगे हैं, लेकिन बच्चों को छूने पर पूरी तरह पाबंदी है। रवीना और सुमन के साथ भोपाल के सुभाष फाटक इलाके में बधाइयां देने वाली रज्जो, कपूरी और निशा भी कुछ इसी तरह की बात करती हैं। रज्जो बताती हैं— सामने भले ही कुछ न कहें लेकिन एक दूरी बनाकर तो सभी पहले भी रखते थे। अब कोरोना ने उन्हें अच्छा बहाना दे दिया है। उन्होंने बताया कि मार्च के आखिरी सप्ताह में लॉकडाउन के बाद खाने पीने के सामान की समस्या आई थी। लेकिन बाद में कुछ संस्थाओं ने और कुछ हम लोगों ने अपने संपर्क से व्यवस्था कर ली। हालांकि सरकार की ओर से मिलने वाली मदद से वे इनकार करती हैं। लेकिन दिक्कत अब शुरू हो गई है। अभी तक तो जमा पूंजी के जरिये खर्च चलाया है, लेकिन आगे न तो बहुत बधाई से कमाई होने वाली है, और हम लोगों को और कोई काम तो मिलता नहीं, तो देखते हैं आगे क्या होता है। वे कहती हैं कि हमारा मुख्य काम तो लोगों की खुशियों में शामिल होकर उनकी खुशी को बढ़ाना ही है। लेकिन अब लॉकडाउन खुलने के बाद भी ज्यादा कार्यक्रम तो हो नहीं रहे हैं, तो कमाई पर भी असर पड़ा है। सामान्य दिनों की अपेक्षा 20 प्रतिशत ही बधाई राशि मिल रही है। वह भी बहुत मित्रों के बाद।

निशा कहती हैं कि शादी और पारिवारिक कार्यक्रम न के बराबर हो रहे हैं। गीत-संगीत के कार्यक्रम भी कम ही होते हैं, तो काम पर असर तो बहुत पड़ा है। छह महीने से जमा पूंजी के जरिये जैसे तैसे खर्च चलाया है, लेकिन अब हालत खराब होने लगी है। आगे मुश्किलें बढ़ेंगी इसका अंदाजा तो होने लगा है।

कोरोना से मौत हुई तो था डर का माहौल देश में ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) समुदाय में कोरोना से पहली मौत भोपाल में ही दर्ज की गई थी। मई के दूसरे सप्ताह में इस दुखद खबर के बाद स्थानीय ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) समुदाय में डर था कि कभी भी प्रशासन उन्हें उठाकर कोविड सेंटर ले जा सकता है। उस दौरान लगातार कई लोगों के कोविड टेस्ट भी हुए और कई साथी पॉजिटिव आए। उस दौर को याद करते हुए निशा कहती हैं— बस सांस अटकी हुई थी। रात—रात भर जागते थे। लगता था कि आज जिसे देख रहे हैं, उसे कल देख भी पाएंगे या नहीं।

बाहर निकलना हुआ था दूधर सुमन कहती हैं कि हमें पुलिसवाले जानते हैं। इसलिए जब हम कोई सामान खरीदने या किसी को दवा लेने भी निकलते हैं, तो पुलिसवालों को लगता था कि हम अपने काम से किसी के घर बधाई लेने जा रहे हैं, और वो सख्ती से हमें अपनी गली में रोक देते थे। यह बहुत से ट्रांस साथियों के साथ हुआ। वे कहती हैं कि हमारी गली में खाना बांटने वाले जो आते थे, उनको भी पुलिस दूर से भगा देती थी। दूसरी गलियों में खाना बांटने पर पुलिस परेशान नहीं करती थी, लेकिन हमारे पास आने देना उन्हें गंवारा नहीं था।

कई लोग रहते हैं एक साथ इसलिए कोरोना है घातक भोपाल में ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) समुदाय के साथी ज्यादातर तंग बस्तियों में एक ही मकान में दर्जन और दो दर्जन की तादाद में रहते हैं। इस कारण इनमें कोरोना फैलने का खतरा ज्यादा होता है। आइसोलेशन भी बस नाम के लिए ही होता है। ताली बजाना मजबूरी है, शौक नहीं सुमन कहती हैं कि अक्सर लोग मानते हैं कि हमारी कमाई बहुत होती है, लेकिन यह भ्रम है। असल में तो हमें ताने ही ज्यादा सुनने को मिलते हैं कि बस ताली बजाकर ही कमा लेते हो। लेकिन यही समाज के लोगों से और कोई काम मांगो तो नजरें फेर लेते हैं। वे कहती हैं कि हम तो घरों में झाड़ू—पोंछा भी करने को तैयार हैं, लेकिन लोग हमें बस अपने आंगन तक ही आने की इजाजत देते हैं। इसके आगे तो हमारे लिए कोई जगह है ही नहीं। कोरोना ने तो आंगन की जगह भी छीन ली है।

यह हैं ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) समुदाय की मुश्किलें

- मांगलिक उत्सव, शादी विवाह में नहीं मिल रहा है बधाई का काम
- बच्चों के पैदाइश पर छूने और घरों में जाने से हैं महरूम
- छह महीने में जमा पूंजी हुई खत्म, अब आगे कमाई लगभग शून्य
- कई ट्रांसजेंडर हैं बीमार, इलाज में आ रही मुश्किलें
- राशन कार्ड नहीं तो कोई सरकारी सहायता भी नहीं मिलती
- कोई अन्य रोजगार करने पर समाज का सहयोग नहीं मिलता



कोरोना का असर: खेती से मतदान की अपील तक के कामों में जुटा ट्रांसजेंडर समुदाय

Corona ka asar: kheti se matadan ki appeal tak ke kamon mein juta transgender samuday

Sachin Shrivastava

spsmedia.in

Bhopal, October 1, 2020

कोरोना ने समाज के सभी वर्गों से रोजगार छीना है। ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) समुदाय भी इससे अछूता नहीं रहा। ट्रांस (Transgender) समुदाय के लिए अपना रोजगार बदलना अन्य वर्गों की अपेक्षा खासा मुश्किल होता है। समाज का नजरिया उनके प्रति बेहद तकलीफ पैदा करने वाला है। कोरोना काल में लोगों ने इस समुदाय से अपनी सामाजिक दूरी कई गुना बढ़ा ली है। ऐसे में हालात और मुश्किल हो चुके हैं, लेकिन अब ट्रांस (Transgender) समुदाय ने इससे पार पाने की कवायदें भी शुरू कर दी हैं।

बधाई राशि में कमी, तो खेती की ओर किया रुख ट्रांस (Transgender) समुदाय के लिए दूसरे काम करने में खासी सामाजिक मुश्किलों से गुजरना पड़ता है, लेकिन कोरोना काल में बधाई राशि में कमी के कारण आजीविका के लिए दूसरे कामों की ओर रुख कर रहे हैं। हाल ही में गुना के महावीरपुरा में रहने वाली गुरु बन्नो और उनके 25 शिष्यों ने बागरोदा गांव में 15 बीघा के खेत में खुद ही सोयाबीन की बुआई कराई। इससे पहले वे इसे बटाई पर देती थीं। अब वह फसल पककर तैयार हो चुकी है। इसमें करीब 20 से 25 क्विंटल सोयाबीन उत्पादन का अनुमान है।

दतिया में करेंगे मतदान के लिए प्रचार कोरोना के कारण कमाई का असर ट्रांस (Transgender) समुदाय पर काफी पड़ा है। ऐसे में उन्होंने अब कमाई के दूसरे रास्ते पर भी ध्यान दिया है। सीधी राजनीति से दूर रहने वाले ट्रांस (Transgender) समुदाय के साथी अब मतदान के लिए प्रचार करते दिखाई देंगे। मध्य प्रदेश में इन दिनों विधानसभा उपचुनाव की तैयारी चल रही है। कोरोना काल में मतदान प्रतिशत बढ़ाना एक बड़ी चुनौती है। हालात यह हैं कि पिछले चुनाव के बराबर मतदान हो तो भी इसे अच्छा माना जाएगा। ऐसे में प्रशासन ने ट्रांस (Transgender) समुदाय की मदद ली है। ट्रांस (Transgender) समुदाय किसी पार्टी का प्रचार तो नहीं करेंगे, लेकिन प्रशासन को मतदान प्रतिशत बढ़ाने में मदद करेंगे। वे टोलियां बनाकर घर-घर जाकर गली मोहल्लों में मतदान करने की अपील करेंगे।

दूसरे कामकरना खासा मुश्किल

यह दो उदाहरण ताजगी तो देते हैं, लेकिन हालात में बहुत ज्यादा बदलाव आएगा, ऐसा नहीं लगता। देश की पहली ट्रांस (Transgender) विधायक शबनम मौसी मध्य प्रदेश की थीं और सरकारी नौकरी पाने वाली पहली ट्रांसजेंडर संजना सिंह भी भोपाल में ही रहती है, लेकिन इसके बावजूद ट्रांस (Transgender) समुदाय के लिए काम के हालात बिल्कुल नहीं बदले हैं। इस बारे में ट्रांस समुदाय की रज्जो (परिवर्तित नाम) कहती हैं— एक दो नाम तो बस उदाहरण के लिए होते हैं। देश में लाखों ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) हैं, उनके लिए तो अभी भी कोई और काम करना नाकों चने चबाने जैसा है।

इस साल पारंपरिक जुलूस की रौनक रही फीकी रक्षाबंधन के तीसरे दिन ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) समुदाय हर साल पारंपरिक जुलूस निकालता है, लेकिन इस बार कोविड गाइडलाइन के कारण इसकी रंगत फीकी रही। महज 15 ट्रांस साथियों ने इस परंपरा की रस्म अदायगी की। मिथ के मुताबिक, करीब हजार साल पहले राजाभोज के शासन में सूखा और अकाल पड़ा था तब से ट्रांस (Transgender) समुदाय यहां भुजरिया पर्व मनाता है और अच्छी बारिश की दुआ करता है।

कानून की नहीं है जानकारी भारत में आधिकारिक रूप से ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) की जनसंख्या 49 लाख के करीब है। 2011 में अलग से ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) समुदाय की जनगणना में यह आंकड़े सामने आए थे। उसके बाद 2019 में ट्रांसजेंडर के अधिकारों को ध्यान में रखते हुए ट्रांसजेंडर (Transgender) पर्सन्स (प्रोटेक्शन ऑफ़ राइट्स) कानून बनाया गया, लेकिन दिक्कत यह है कि इस कानून के बारे में ट्रांस (Transgender) समुदाय के ज्यादातर सदस्यों को जानकारी ही नहीं है। इस बारे में रज्जो हंसते हुए कहती हैं— हमारे अधिकार क्या हैं, इस बारे में हमारे बजाय समाज के दूसरे तबकों को बताया जाए तो ज्यादा अच्छा होगा। हम तो बस अपने कर्तव्य जानते हैं कि दूसरों की खुशियों में ही हमें खुश होना है।



Coronavirus in Mumbai: Mumbai's sex workers argue that they fought HIV scare; ask how Covid-19 is any different

Yogesh Pawar
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Najma Nurbash, a sex worker from the Hanuman Tekdi, the red light area of Bhiwandi (the powerloom town on Mumbai's outskirts, nodally located at the intersection of two major highways connecting the country's financial capital to Western and Northern India) says she's desperate to start working despite risks due to the Covid-19 virus.

"How long can I live like this?" says the 24-year-old pointing out how the free foodgrains and household essentials distributed once in her area since the lockdown is running out. "Even before the lockdown began, work had reduced to a trickle as rumours led to a scare about the Corona pandemic and sex workers and brothel owners said that they'll not entertain clients. Though some were clandestinely still providing services initially, heavy police security after March 25th put a stop to that too."

She says, of the 350-plus sex workers in the neighbourhood, the brothel owners are better off. "Most sex workers here are indebted to them. A large chunk of their earnings goes in paying off debts often dating back to when they were first sold to the brothel owner. Of the Rs 250-500, most sex workers make per session the brothel owner gets to keep more than 50%. The ones who send money home scrimp on their food and health expenses to do so. Now since work has stopped due to the Corona pandemic the brothel owners say they're obliging us by letting us stay on."

The Nizamabad, Telangana-native and her sister Zuleka were in for a rude shock when within two months of her mother's death, their father remarried in 2015. "I was only 19 and did not like the unwelcome attention I got from my stepmother's brother Razak who would come visiting often. When I complained, my father and stepmother beat me up and accused me instead. After I escaped a rape attempt by Razak a few months later, I fled to a distant uncle (mom's cousin)'s place in Karimnagar thinking his family would give me refuge and rescue Zuleka too."

But her aunt resented my being there. She was also against her working saying it would shame her family. One of her uncle's family friends Rizwan Chacha (who she knew since her visits to her uncle's as a little kid) offered to bring her to Mumbai to work as a domestic help. "I liked the idea as I felt I could ask Zuleka to come to live with me."

Najma only made it to Mumbai's outskirts, Mumbra in 2017. Here she faced slave-like torture as domestic help. "I wouldn't be given food or even allowed to rest enough. The large family of 12 continuously had some chore or the other. Any delay meant being abused or even slapped." An autorickshaw driver Nahid she had confided in while going back and forth to the grocer's told her of the brothel at Hanuman Tekdi and after a week of dithering, she fled.

“I have no sad backstory. I knew this was a brothel. I also knew the owner won't give me refuge for free and maybe the autorickshawala also made money, but after the initial awkwardness I made peace with this life.” With a large population of male migrant power loom labourers (who live here by themselves without spouses often sharing spaces as small as a 10x12 feet room amongst 10-12 of them taking turns to sleep), truck drivers (who queue up outside Mumbai around Bhiwandi since they are allowed to only ply in non-peak hours to avoid traffic congestion) and the warehouse/godown (which are spread over 25 square km around Bhiwandi reaching Thane) security personnel business has always been good at Hanuman Tekdi.

“But on March 20th with fears and rumours of the Coronavirus, many sex workers said they wanted a break to prevent infection and contagion.” She confides in defying the ban since last week by lying about a gynaecological problem. “They think I'm going to the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital. But I go to the truck depot where I offer services to the truck drivers in the back of their trucks.” When asked if she is scared of getting infected by Covid-19, she grins nervously.

“There are other fears... of going hungry, not making money... which are bigger,” she says but admits, “Sometimes these men are quite hefty. I'm scared because they can refuse to pay me or even sexually assault me. But I have to take my chances.” 44 km away in Mumbai's red light district of Kamathipura too this story repeats itself. “Given that this is a conglomeration of several brothels and a community which is more or less mobilised, finding food aid and other doles has not been a problem after the initial fortnight,” says Malati Kaikadi a brothel owner who pointedly adds, “But we also need to make a living. Do you think this dole-giving will last forever? But the police have been raining lathis on any man who walks into the street so we are stuck.”

Work from home gone wrong

At a time when technology is enabling 'work-from-home isn't there a way of making sex work also virtual? Kaikadi scoffs at the idea. “One of my girls had a regular client, a middle-aged builder, who would come from Lokhandwala in Andheri in a fancy car and take her out. Mid-April he suggested the idea of phone sex to her and she was ready. I was sceptical when she told me wondering if he'd make good on the payment but when he paid upfront I foolishly agreed,” she recounts still lamenting the temptation.

“That scoundrel made her expose and pleasure herself for nearly half an hour and recorded it. At the beginning of May, one of his friends sent a clip to her. We later found out that it has been put up on several sites on the internet. I don't even understand all this fully but my girl has been distraught since then. Back in her village in Gorakhpur, no one knows she is into sex work. She fears the clip may be found by someone back in her village leading to a backlash against her family.”

But why hasn't she made a complaint to the cops? After all, this is a violation and an offence under the Information Technology Act and several sections of the Indian Penal Code.

“Are you joking? She is a sex worker! Even if she was gang-raped she'd have a hard time even going to the police station to make a complaint. Can you imagine the laughs and barbs she'll have to endure if she even approaches the police?” So is she going to let the man go scot-free? “We can't do anything. But if he ever comes here I'll ensure that he goes home without his penis,” she says launching into a volley of choicest abuses.

But it is not like localised sex workers working quietly out of flats in “respectable housing societies” have it any better. Ruchira Mandal who has been working out of a flat in the distant Mumbai suburb of Goregaon East, nearly 28 km away says her earnings have been seriously hit because of the vigilantism in her housing society.

“They've always had problems that I have too many male visitors, too many late-hour visitors and keep asking me what I do for a living, or whether I eat non-vegetarian food, consume alcohol or smoke,” she says and adds, “Now the Corona pandemic has come as a Godsend excuse for these self-appointed upholders of morality and values. Like other residents, I was captive in the building compound for over a month. As others began going out after speaking to the secretary I also called him. He wanted to know where I was going, who I will meet and if I'll take responsibility if anyone on my floor got infected. He got back to asking me what I do for a living and where my office was.”

While she lied and got out of the situation, she feels vulnerable offering sex to clients in their vehicle or empty offices. “Being in their place or car leaves me always feeling more vulnerable,” she says. “I was with this man who has been more or less decent till now when he came home. But the other day when he took me to a desolate spot in the Aarey Forests he was insisting that I let him have anal sex with me. He even thought nothing while abusing me for 'acting fussy.' 'Randi hai toh itna nakhra kyun kar rahi hai?' he asked me,” she says, her voice quivering with repugnance at the memory.

“My heart was in my mouth and I froze. I remember silently praying that he doesn't force himself on me. Thankfully he didn't. He paid me and dropped me back to my building gate.” She brushes off a question about whether she told him off. “He never bargains and pays me my price and even tips me extra. I don't think I want to piss off a regular generous client... not in these times when we all have to take risks.” But what if he asks her to do something non-consensual again, “I can only hope and pray he doesn't. Maybe the relaxations in the lockdown will see more clients showing up and things might improve.”

Being at the epicentre

While the Corona pandemic has opened up a whole Pandora's box of problems for sex workers across India, in worst-hit Maharashtra they are worst off. While the first Covid-19 case in the state was confirmed on March 9th, 2020, it now accounts for over one-third of the total cases in India and nearly 40% of all deaths. Since the epicentre of this pandemic are the congested cities of Mumbai and Pune, alert levels in the state and these cities, in particular, are at an all-time high.

Meena Seshu, from the National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW) whose organisation SANGRAM - (Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha), based in Sangli, has been working in Maharashtra and North Karnataka for more than 30 years, mainly on the health and rights of sex workers and transgender population and their children, since the days when the HIV infection began spreading its tentacles in India - points out how authorities and policymakers who are looking at sex work as merely a “non-essential” activity need to wake up to the fact that for the sex workers' community whose lives they sit in a decision on, sex work is their bread and butter.

“The lockdown placed on the block livelihoods of tens of thousands of sex-workers, their physical and mental well-being and that of those dependent on them. Sex work is defined as the provision of sexual services in cash or kind within a commercial context. Sex Workers from the SWASA network (Sex Workers and Allies South Asia, which works in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh) across the region challenge the articulation that sex work is selling sex or selling bodies. Instead, they provide services directly to clients as independent workers or through third parties.”

Seshu says sex workers need to be placed on par with sections of society whose livelihood itself depends upon physical human contact. “Besides the medical profession, other professions dependent on physical contact, such as beauty parlours, massage parlours, hairdressing salons, etc. are all facing the brunt of the lockdown. Sex work is one such profession – a huge population that earns its livelihood from this work has been gravely affected and the looming uncertainty about when this could end has left them in a lurch.”

According to her sex work will remain endangered for as long as a vaccine/drug for Covid-19 is not found. “India has hundreds of thousands of women who depend on sex work to support their families. And the number of men who regularly use their services is even larger.” She should know. Her organisation SANGRAM's initiatives helped women sex workers in the Western Maharashtra town of Sangli, come together to form Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad (VAMP), a collective of sex workers which implements several schemes of the state government for the benefit of its members. VAMP has contributed a lion's share in arresting the spread of HIV and its members, who once carried out sex work in slums or the dark alleys of the town, are now implementing government schemes as health workers. Sex workers from various states in India have mobilised to form the national level apex body NNSW.

The Covid-19 impact

When discussions on Covid-19 emerged, it was clear that this would badly hit the sex workers' livelihoods. That such a pandemic would affect their physical as well as mental well-being, was certain. Women in the profession began to talk. Would medical services be available to women who were already suffering from various conditions? Would HIV treatment, only available in government hospitals, continue to be available? The long, unplanned, ad-hoc-ly announced lockdown has cruelly underlined the perils of those whose livelihoods are directly dependent on their day's work. In the times of Corona, these have been further intensified.

The horrific humanitarian tragedy that was brought to visit upon the migrant workers has made for too many disturbing headlines and images to be forgotten anytime soon. Anticipating the looming danger, as soon as the lockdown was announced, though basics like groceries and other essentials like medicines were being provided on priority, the tension in the community in Sangli has been spiralling.

“The streets which would overflow with customers every evening, are now deserted like a graveyard. This was unprecedented. The women were familiar with day-long, state or nation-wide 'bandhs,' when by evening their neighbourhoods would bustle with activity again. By contrast, the current lockdown has dealt a severe blow to the women in this profession,” laments lawyer Aarthi Pai, currently director of the Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalisation (CASAM). “The curfew enforced during lockdown has meant a loss of customers and hence loss of livelihoods. And the struggle for survival begins anew. And some did not survive.”

She talks of a sex worker in the community who VAMP believed had died of a Covid-19 infection. “But that death was a suicide committed with the fear of being infected. This 34-year old mother of a six-year-old earned her livelihood through sex work. Left with no work and no customers she was driven to death by depression and succumbed to 90% burn injuries after setting herself ablaze,” recounts Pai, “Sangeeta, VAMP's fieldworker, had met her only a day before for a survey undertaken to estimate the extent of relief to be undertaken. Her name was on the list of beneficiaries. However, before relief could reach her she ended her life, fearing the impending doom of the virus.

Both her child and family were in their native village in Karnataka where last rites had to be performed,” says Pai. “Only one person accompanied the body in the hearse to the native village. There were restrictions on the number of persons at the funeral and hence all VAMP workers were deeply saddened that none could pay tribute despite belonging to such a large support system.”

This is not an isolated case, points out Pai. “Many sex workers live with co-morbidities. This puts them at an added risk to Covid-19. Many are also immunocompromised as they are living with HIV. Alcohol and drug dependency are also issues of concern. Mental health issues faced by sex workers is on the rise during this period. Many sex workers report depression and suicidal tendencies.”

Difference in approach

Anti-trafficking activist Dr Pravin Patkar, co-founder and co-director of Prerana, the organisation which works with sex workers and their children says the long shadow over sex work is here to stay. “Since any interface involves oral to oral, oral to genital or genital to genital intimate contact and exchange of body fluids, unless a treatment is found in a hurry this could completely wipe out the profession,” he says.

According to him the women in the profession will face increasing scrutiny and questions from the society and system. Both Pai and Seshu agree with this. “The compounded stigma that the pandemic brings in its wake is real. The clientele men will never open up about contact with a sex worker since it's a social taboo. This means that all sex workers will be painted with one broad brush of suspicion. As it is there is so much prejudice against sex work and sex workers. Before long this will lead to targeting just like all Muslims were targeted in the wake of the Tablighi Jamat Markaz at Delhi's Nizamuddin.”

At the heart of it, all is the idea that sex work is not work, but an unhealthy, immoral lifestyle threatening to taint the “innocent.” Interestingly, the advent of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s saw governments make great efforts to target sex workers in the global and national responses to the HIV epidemic. Sex workers were targeted as vectors of the spread of HIV (in what could be mirrored in the coming days with Corona) and governments were determined to save the ‘bridge population’ of men, using sex work interventions only as a means of protecting ‘respectable’ women from HIV. In many parts of the country, sex workers turned this around and made it an opportunity to mobilise attention to their health, safety and rights.

However, this picture is complicated by politically powerful faith-based constituencies, an anti-trafficking movement that denies the agency and rights of sex workers, and powerful funders. UN positions demonstrated some leadership on sex worker rights early in the epidemic but later appeared to acquiesce to prohibitionist views.

“Anti-trafficking activists and those working for sex workers' rights to livelihood have often bickered about the distinction between adult sex work and trafficked women forced into prostitution,” admits Dr Patkar who feels the Corona dynamic might give a fillip to this difference of approach and opinion. “Scores of women - victims of discriminatory hierarchies of caste, class, status, gender, disadvantaged by several layers of marginalisation from drought to gender-based violence and affected by personal tragedies like orphaning, domestic violence, sexual harassment at workplace - become easily available for sex trade that exposes them to fatal infections and condemns them to a life of indignity, stigma and discrimination. Projecting that as voluntary work chosen by the women adds insult to injury. That will need to be countered and we will have to work with the community to find the best way of rehabilitating them.”

Both Seshu and Pai disagree. According to them “anti-trafficking moralists” do not want to recognise sex workers who are in sex work of their own volition and the process refutes the realities of thousands of India's sex workers. “For sex workers to access and enjoy rights, these massive misgivings and stereotypes about sex work need to be broken down,” they point out and add, “Corona or no Corona, sex workers do not necessarily need or want to be rescued, or treated as victims; they are not a threat to the greater “chaste” society, nor are they all walking cases of HIV then or Corona now.

Furthermore, they are capable of advocating for themselves and demanding their rights. While they certainly face discrimination and hardships, people in sex work do not need futile pity.”Both sides of the intervention strategy divide however are in agreement that the government has to take decisive steps to resolve this crisis caused by the lockdown without adequate planning for the most vulnerable. “Even as it starts relaxing the lockdown, the government must show sensitivity towards the sex workers’ community

and design and implement policies and schemes for them as they will continue to be affected for a long time to come. Currently, none of the schemes declared by the Central government includes this particular section of society.

“Relief measures can only be of help for a short-term,” says Seshu who adds, “Sex workers move frequently to escape identification by family or for better-earning opportunities. They also hide their identity due to the stigma attached to their work. This makes it very difficult to provide relief work through government channels that ask for ration cards and other identity and address proof.” According to Seshu: “Women in sex work have to be acknowledged as 'workers' first and be accorded due status to accrue the necessary government assistance.”

Transforming social perception and accepting sex workers as an integral part of society could help enlist them as Covid warriors just like they joined the battle against HIV three decades ago.
(Some names have been changed on request)



Yale-Harvard study scapegoats marginalised sex workers for Covid-19 spread

Yogesh Pawar

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A study by academicians from Yale School of Medicine and Harvard Medical School which says Indians are at a much lower risk of getting Covid-19 if red light areas shut after the lockdown has come under a scanner from concerned decision-makers, academics, activists, representatives of sex worker collectives, various advocacy groups within the sex workers' community and women's rights groups for making scapegoats of sex workers and blaming them for the spread of Covid-19. Titled 'Modelling the Effect of Continued Closure of Red-Light Areas on Covid-19 Transmission in India,' the report - authored by Sudhakar V Nuti of Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, along with Jeffrey P Townsend, Alison P Galvani, Abhishek Pandey, Pratha Sah, and Chad Wells at the Yale School of Public Health – claims to have been carried out in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Pune, Nashik, Jalgaon, Meerut, Muzaffarpur, Munger, Puri, Silchar, Satara, Siliguri, Nagpur, Kolkata, Durgapur Thane, Sonapur, Guntur, and Sangli. It was shared with government bodies with recommendations on continued closure of red-light areas even after full and complete nationwide normalisation and reopening of all operations across the board.

Disturbing claims

The study claims such a step can reduce cases by 72% for three fortnights and even delay the peak of Covid-19 cases by 17 days. It further claimed there could be a 63% reduction in the number of deaths in the first 60 days after the lockdown ends if red-light areas are kept closed. To protect citizens against these potential hotspots, the study underlines the need to close red light areas indefinitely during the Covid-19 pandemic. Only the pandemic, looks like it is here to stay for a lot longer than earlier envisaged and the study does not indicate how sex workers are supposed to

feed themselves if their primary source of livelihood is suddenly snatched away. Meena Seshu the general secretary of SANGRAM, a grassroots health and human rights NGO working with sex workers for more than two decades pointed out how 140 concerned decision-makers academics, activists, representatives of sex worker collectives, various advocacy groups within the sex workers' community and women's rights groups have written to Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Harvard Medical School Dr. George Q Daley; Dean for Faculty and Research Integrity, Harvard Medical School, Gretchen Brodnicki; Senior VP for Research, Massachusetts General Hospital, Dr. Harry W. Orf; Dean, Yale School of Public Health, Dr Sten H Vermund and Associate Dean of Research, Yale Medical School Dr. Melinda Irwin had written to complain about the study. "The recommendations of this study whose methodology itself is circumspect and unethical essentially invites the state to use its coercive powers - police raids and evictions - to victimise the most marginalised of slum-dwellers in the name of public health," she points out

Poor methodology & ethics

The letter strongly denounces the study for “its lack of rigorous methodology and transparency, misleading assumptions about sex work, and egregious disregard for the rights of the urban poor in India.” It also equally strongly expresses the writers' outrage at “the sensationalistic and suspect way the study has been publicly promoted in India, leading to dozens of news reports with headlines like: 'Keep red light areas closed post- coronavirus lockdown: Yale School of Medicine.’” The letter demands this paper be retracted until it has been peer-reviewed and made publicly available to other academics for critique.

On the study authors' claims that 522 stakeholders in the red light areas were interviewed over the past few months, with two rounds of research, Seshu says, “Yet there is no detail on the ethics approval for the study, the informed consent and recruitment procedures, or the partner organisations that facilitated the research. It is also unclear whether informants were told about the objectives of the study or its possible risks for them, including the closure of red light areas and threats to their very livelihood and living,” and adds, “Since a lockdown has been in place since 24th March 2020 in India international research boards have mandated all human subjects research be virtually conducted. In this case, the study was conducted through suspect means, making its findings inadmissible. Because of the lack of transparency, the findings are also impossible for third parties to verify. The authors should have been aware of the risks posed by their own research.” It is unethical for researchers from big-name institutions like Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts General Hospital, and Yale School of Public Health to influence policy in the Global South without consulting sex worker collectives says Seshu who explains why this is particularly true in India. “India's sex workers have been leaders and equal partners in combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic for three decades. The authors ignored multiple requests from academics to make the findings available, bypassed civil society organisations completely and hurriedly shared key findings directly with media outlets and political leaders. This action smacks of prejudice, not science, ultimately scapegoating marginalized sex workers for the spread of Covid-19.”

Those protesting the study have pointed out how it suffers from enormous methodological shortcomings and flawed assumptions. Like the estimates of the number of sex workers in India which the study bases on highly variable sources. The secondary literature too is outdated, and cites studies from Pune (1996) and Surat (2003), reflecting a poor understanding of the current realities of sex work in India. Sex work is currently provided in a range of locations in India, and only a very small percentage of it takes place in brothels. Most sex work takes place on highways, railways, construction sites, bus stations, farmlands, lodges, and residential homes and sex workers frequently migrate between these settings. Major red-light areas now only exist in three states in India: Delhi, West Bengal, and Maharashtra. Even there, brothel-based sex work has sharply declined since the 1990s, with the rise of abolitionist anti-trafficking movements, police crackdowns, and real-estate redevelopment interests. Much sex work has migrated to streets or become internet and phone-based.

Solutions to create more problems

One of the three co-authors of the report, Dr Sudhakar Nuti from the department of medicine, Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School has said: “It is important to remember the sex workers who work in red light areas and the impact that Covid-19 and the continued closure of red light areas have on them. We suggest three measures to address the health, safety, and well-being of sex workers in red light areas: ensure sex workers receive payments as part of the government's financial relief scheme for the poor during Covid, ensure these women are not taken advantage of by criminals, such as by preventing high-interest lending schemes that entrap them in debt bondage, and investment in reintegrating sex workers into other occupations, with a particular focus on reinvesting money generated through the closing and redevelopment of red light areas into sex worker reintegration and the health care system.

On the last point, Covid-19 may present the ideal natural opportunity to help sex workers exit their trade and find out alternative livelihoods.” Lawyer and director of the Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalisation (CASAM), Aarthi Pai is livid at “the underdeveloped and impracticable ameliorative measures” suggested by the study. “The suggestion that sex workers be rehabilitated and provided with alternative occupations is naïve since ample research demonstrates that most of them already have experience in other occupations such as domestic work and petty trading. Most choose sex work out of necessity and individual choice. Evidence from the past three decades of HIV/AIDS prevention interventions also clearly demonstrates coercive strategies like raiding brothels and placing sex workers in “rehabilitation homes” violates the human rights of sex workers, and are also economically unsustainable in today’s neoliberal economy, “ she says and adds, “The authors acknowledge most sex workers lack government documentation and bank accounts. Yet they still vaguely suggest sex workers be given cash transfers and credit access from the government, without suggesting how at all this might be achieved. No government agency has, till date, spoken of relief measures for sex workers.”

The study's suggestion that “reintegration expenditures could be offset by profits generated via the redevelopment of red light areas” has generated massive outrage. Pai points out how this amounts to pushing for greater gentrification, violent “slum clearances,” placing sex workers and poor residents in precarity and at greater risk for police harassment. “The push to “redevelop” RLAs appears to be driven not by science but by a morally charged abolitionist condemnation of sex work itself,” she underlines.

When asked about the alternative occupations that sex workers could be integrated, given the social stigma and ostracisation they face is when Dr Nuti washes his hands off all responsibility. “These are aspects that the policymakers, NGOs, and experts in India will need to design. These bodies will be the right people to identify the skills these workers need, train them, and support them to become economically self-reliant in new jobs or as self-employed entrepreneurs,” he says and offers, “We hope these programmes will be able to compassionately mitigate the stigma that is globally attached to sex workers.” Incidentally, he is completely quiet about how the study reinforces such stigma and widens its scope by blaming sex workers for the spread of the pandemic.

The study's finding that “social distancing is impossible while having sex,” completely overlooks the fact that in India, 40-50% of urban residents live in dilapidated conditions in slum areas, where thanks to a lack of basic civic amenities, water supplies and overcrowding, means social distancing is next to impossible regardless of residents’ sexual activity. The authors of the study draw comparisons to countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and Australia, where sex work is regulated in specific jurisdictions, and therefore “shutdowns” are possible. Given the mixed-use nature of urban Indian slums, however, they cannot be “shut down” like red-light areas in Western countries. “In India, brothels inhabit an ambiguous legal position, since the term is defined broadly to include a range of areas inhabited by sex workers and the urban poor. The recommendations of this study essentially invite the state to use its coercive powers - police raids and evictions - to victimise the most marginalised of slum-dwellers in the name of public health,” says Seshu.

She also points out how the study touts a wholly unsubstantiated claim that red-light areas are a major source of Covid-19 infection. “The authors aver that the states with the highest number of sex workers are also those with the greatest numbers of Covid infections, thereby positing a causal link between the two. However, in the absence of widespread testing and contact tracing, there is no clear evidence that sex workers are a point-source for the spread of Covid-19,” she says and underlines, “The same could be hypothetically claimed of any close-contact occupations where a safe social distance of 2 meters cannot be maintained, including shop owners, domestic workers, care workers, waste-pickers, beauticians, hairstylists,

sanitation workers, bus conductors, street-vendors, delivery personnel, NGO workers, and, for that matter, even field researchers.”

In fact, there has been virtually no business in redlight areas since 24th March 2020, when the lockdown was enforced, yet Covid-19 cases have been rapidly climbing, she points out. “This shows brothels are not contributing to the spread of Covid-19 at all. The steep climb in cases is a matter to be investigated, but it must not be arbitrarily blamed on what is already one of the most marginalised among marginalised communities in India.”

Questions from this writer to Dr Nuti on whether the study was peer-reviewed, whether it was made clear to the 522 respondents that the study had possible risks for them, including the closure of red light areas and threats to their very livelihood and living and a reaction to the letter written by 140 concerned decision-makers, academics, activists, representatives of sex worker collectives, various advocacy groups within the sex workers' community and women's rights groups who have written to Yale and Harvard over the study's ethics and methodology went unanswered despite repeated reminders.



Love in the times of coronavirus: How Covid-19 has flattened the curve for online dating

Yogesh Pawar

Free Press Journal

Mumbai, October 18, 2020

Vedika Rao, a marketing executive with a major FMCG brand, lives by herself in Mumbai and self-admittedly has used dating apps ever since she moved here. “My parents are in Bangalore. I knew of the dating apps there but was living with ultra-conservative (the no-garlic-no-onion type vegetarian) parents so I curbed the urge to use them. Especially since my mom's given to ever-so-casually going through my phone even in my presence,” shrugs this 30-year-old Bangalorean who turned Mumbaikar three years ago following a promotion. “I was ecstatic about finally living independently, wearing and eating what I want. Its been so liberating in Mumbai where people are relatively less nose-y and commuting on public transport is safer for women,” she adds. A whole nine years younger than her only sibling Avantika who lives in Boston with her husband and kids, this self-proclaimed “rebel-without-a-pause” says, “I love my parents, but their relentless pressure to marry and 'settle down like Avantika as a homemaker-mom' is quite stifling. That I'm economically independent and that there is more to life than marriage and kids is beyond my parents. They want me to dress in a salwar-kurta-dupatta or sari all the time, follow rituals, keep fasts and will probably have simultaneous heart attacks to know how much I love non-vegetarian food now. The big drama they created over an all-girls trip with colleagues to Cambodia at the end of 2016 made me resolve to move out.”

It still took her two months to get on to the dating app Bumble after moving to Mumbai mid-2017. “My friends recommended it because it has a relatively decent crowd. Not people who want to hit the sack right away like other apps,” she says but is quick to add, “If safe and consensual, casual sex isn't such a bad thing.” She says she has gotten “lucky” couple of times. “In the first instance the guy was engaged to another girl in Chandigarh and the next, I realised he was becoming too familiar in tone and behaviour (he thought nothing of breaking wind loudly without so much as a sorry, though I was right there) soon after sex.”

That was in the first week of February. She hasn't dated anyone since. It is not the stench of the 'over-familiar experience' but the Coronavirus which has kept her away. She has been stuck at home during the Covid-19 related lockdown from March onwards. “It is like my love life has reduced to a big zero since we are all scared of getting infected. I have been forced to go back to living like a nun.”

If you thought this is a problem only cis-women are stuck with, think again. David Kariketa who was part of the corporate communications with a Mumbai construction major was retrenched just before Diwali. “Through my network, I heard of this opening in Panjim, Goa and jumped at it despite a nearly 10% cut in pay. It wasn't like offers were pouring in given the terrible job market and the idea of tanned bodies, the beach and the sea just made me grab the offer,” says this openly gay 31-year-old. The Cuttack-native -

estranged from his family since they reacted unpleasantly to his coming out - says it took him a while to find his feet at the new job since it is a completely different sector. “So I lay low. Just when I began to go back to Grindr (a gay hookup/dating app) to find hook-ups the Corona pandemic began making headlines.” After he was told he could work from home, he headed back to Mumbai where he feels “the gay scene is more happening.”

Among the lucky few who crossed state borders by the road just before PM Narendra Modi announced the lockdown, he says his love-life has come to a standstill even in Mumbai. “The risk of getting infected is really bad and real. I know so many who have contracted the disease because of throwing caution to the wind. Also, most housing societies are not allowing outsiders yet. Even when they do, they want all your details and that can be scary if you want to keep it quiet and not draw attention.”

Equal rights activist and one of the prominent voices of the gay community Harish Iyer laments how the lack of safe private places has hit the LGBTQIA community the worst due to the pandemic and the resultant lockdown and fears of infection. “Already we face jeers and discrimination and Covid-19 means we have gone back to the era of no place to do it. The pandemic has hit us hard,” he says and adds, “The pre-mobile open spaces the community had owned to cruise (like Maheshwari Udyan in Matunga or The Wall along the Apollo Bunder promenade in Mumbai) are now a thing of the past. Covid-19 restrictions on movement and congregation mean that one can't go back to using these public places to cruise.” He draws parallels with the community's protracted 71-year-long (since Independence) battle for reading down of Sec 377 which criminalised non-peno-vaginal sexual activity even among consenting adults. “One of the major contentions was that criminalisation pushes people further into the closet and the indulgence in high-risk behaviour goes up. This was directly translating into the rise in sexually transmitted diseases including HIV infection.”

According to Iyer, Covid-19 is creating a parallel situation. “While most want to stay safe, some members in the gay community are tired of this enforced abstention and desperately want sex. But such quickies often have safety low down on priority,” he says and adds, “With housing societies either disallowing entry to outsiders or being high on surveillance many seek places without assessing risks. The number of cases where a hook-up ends up as robbery (people are beaten up and taken to ATMs to withdraw money) or even gang-rape has risen,” he points out and adds, “I have myself found people on Grindr asking me to come to some dark maidan for sex. Though I know not to fall for such traps, unfortunately, some do.”

Vedika and David are not alone. There are many (especially of a certain vintage) caught in the same boat as one of humanity's biggest health challenges has also ended up shutting several doors that technology had opened up, admit experts like Professor Lakshmi Lingam who heads the School of Media and Culture Studies at TISS. This leading Indian Gender Studies voice led a 2018 study with UNICEF India, to understand the psychosocial and socio-cultural impact of cell phones on adolescents, particularly the girl child. The study provides insights even as a debate ensues in the area of adolescents and young people in the digital space - looks at safety, surveillance, sexual and gender identity assertion, cyber patriarchy and the oral panic components of this impact. Professor Lingam should know. “While it is true there are concerns about the loss of agency the mobile phones and internet access had brought in its wake with many, especially youngsters exploring both the dating and hook-up space for casual sex. If you compare this with the situation abroad, things are still pretty conservative in India. While it is true that both young women and men want to explore this space, if push comes to shove they still want to go back to the traditional paradigm of an arranged 'socially accepted' marriage,” she says and explains, “The youth themselves are aware of this and often experience a certain trust deficit about each other when they meet through these dating apps and interact.” She does admit that this sets the clock back for women in a largely patriarchal society. “In our study two years ago we had found that the reach of women to information and communications is changing.

Coupled with information technologies, mobile phone technologies are likely to revolutionise social relations and interactions. Youth and particularly young women who were denied equal access to the outside world, who are one of the largest users form the group that with potential to redefine social norms, practices and beliefs and have a far-reaching impact on social structure. It is not for nothing that owning a mobile phone brings a sense of identity, personhood, privacy and freedom to women,” she says.

She further underlines how the same mobile revolution heralded by the markets and projected as hip, happening and sexy, the sexual revolution it brings in its wake has generally been viewed through moral anxieties and health implications. “This is important given that Indians (54% under 25 and over 70% under 35 years) form the 2nd largest mobile phone users in the world. The study said (in 2018) of the 371 million Indian smartphone users total about 50% of smartphone users are under age 25,” she explains and adds, “With the arrival of Covid-19 many of these moral anxieties and health implications become more accentuated. And no surprises that women are more often at the receiving end of the resultant censorship, considering their limited scope to explore this space even otherwise.”

What about the apps themselves? How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the traffic on them? This writer reached out to the dating app Bumble which felt this has led to the dating scene transcending from the hook-up to something more meaningful. “The pandemic has changed the perception of online dating. Now with limited chances of meeting in real life, we have seen our Bumble community navigate these challenging times by continuing to seek more thoughtful conversations and meaningful connections,” said the communique from the app which added, “Our recent survey shows almost 70% of our Bumble community in India claims there is a change in their behaviour and attitude towards dating as compared to before the pandemic. 81% claim they are more open to taking their time getting to know someone. 78% of single Indians feel the need to trust their match before meeting them in real life—so, people are talking for long periods, and having better quality chats, using our Voice Call and Video Chat features in the app. People in India are spending an average of 20 minutes on a video chat or voice call on Bumble.”

The communique also spoke of the team at Bumble being excited that women in India have now made the first move on Bumble over 15 million times and are sending twice the number of messages on Bumble compared to women in the rest of the world. It, however, cautioned all user of the app to look to medical experts and local authorities for guidance on meeting people in public during this time.

While attempts to get a formal response from the Grindr team which runs the popular gay social media dating website for gay men drew a blank, sources close to the team admitted concerns over reduced traffic. “While other apps may look at working on selling the meaningful longer interaction, let's admit that most users come to Grindr, looking for someone to have sex. And long periods of mere interaction does not help,” said a senior executive in Grindr's India team who admits “The reduced traffic has directly impacted our ad revenue.”

He reminds this writer of how despite the massive show of support from some who see themselves as “leading voices of the rainbow community” for Narendra Modi in the run-up to the 2014 election, the same BJP - which had opposed any move to nullify Supreme Court's order re-criminalizing consensual sex among consenting adults, dealing a huge setback to any move to scrap or dilute Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) - thought nothing of placing a party ad on Grindr with the party's lotus symbol and their prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi's photograph asking for votes to stop price rise.

“While we know what happened to that promise on inflation, it underlined how even homophobic party like that took us seriously given our traffic numbers.”

He also lamented how the website is still to arrive at strategy on a post-Corona world. “Our resources still talk about STDs, HIV, PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis and even poppers but there is no word on Covid-19. And this virus is not going anywhere in a hurry. Given the characteristic of our community, it is a huge challenge to work around it. I hope this is addressed soon.”

(Vedika's name has been changed on request)



D. Harmful practices- Child marriages, domestic violence, trafficking

Up to 2.5 million more girls around the world are at risk of marriage in the next 5 years because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Save the Children has warned. In its Global Girlhood Report 2020, it warned of 2020 being a year of “irreversible setbacks and lost progress” for girls, predicting that 5,00,000 more girls are at risk of being forced into child marriage this year alone and a million more are expected to become pregnant. This increase will bring the total number of child marriages to around 1.25 crores in 2020.

An investigation by Childline - the national helpline for children set up by the Ministry for Women and Child Development - too said that 1.92 lakh on-ground interventions were recorded between March and August 2020 as compared to 1.70 lakh interventions during the same period last year. Within these six months, Childline received about 27 lakh distress calls. In contrast, the organisation got 36 lakh calls last year, alarming the officials as they had expected numbers to dip sharply following the nationwide coronavirus-induced lockdown.

Over 10,000 cases of child marriage were tracked during the same period of which most were prevented, the report said. The organisation actively intervened in at least 32,700 cases of trafficking, child marriage, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, begging and cybercrime.

Poverty's connection to child marriage is well known. A sudden upsurge in absolute and abject poverty following the pandemic and the resultant lockdown saw many vulnerable and poor families feeling that it is better to get their girls married at the 'first good proposal,' Bhubaneshwar based Akhand, Raipur based Sunil Sharma and Pune-based Anuradha Mascarenhas observe in their reports from Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra respectively. Parents of such children also feel they will be rid of the responsibility to save the girl child from sexual abuse by getting them married given the times we live in. Fortunately, as the reports show, authorities could intervene in time to prevent these marriages in both Odisha and Beed district in Maharashtra. It is nevertheless worrying that mindsets still see child marriage as an easy way out.

With a rapid increase in the number of Covid-19 cases in 2020, several international organisations took cognisance of a global rise in Domestic Violence cases as a result of the lockdowns. Many countries reported as much as a 30% hike in the number of distress calls received from women who are confined in closed spaces with abusive partners.

Studies, over the years, have shown a direct link between times of crisis like these and interpersonal violence. Pandemics provide for an enabling environment of fear and uncertainty that may exacerbate diverse forms of violence against women. Moreover, economic insecurity, financial instability, and isolation are also some of the factors that contribute to making domestic violence even more prevalent. Unfortunately, domestic violence cases are underreported across the world, especially in times of global emergencies like Covid-19.

Women often consider informal channels as their first point of reporting in the case of domestic violence. The first respondent is often the family, and the police are the last resort.

In India, the National Family Health Survey-4, conducted in 2015-16, revealed that 33% of married women in the age group of 15-49 experienced physical, sexual or emotional spousal violence. Of these, only 14% sought help and 77% never spoke about it. Among those who sought help, 65% reported to the natal family and only 3% reported to the police. Lucknow-based Mohini Singh, in her report, highlighted the surge in calls regarding domestic violence on the UP police helpline 112. She shows how the instances and brutality of such violence became more intensified towards the second half of the lockdown as the abuser was confident that the victim would have nowhere to go.



The result of Covid-19 Crisis: School Girl became victims of child marriage

Akhand

localwire.me

Bhubaneswar, August 08, 2020

The Corona epidemic has broken people's financial backbone and exacerbated some of the social ills that already exist. On the one hand, the whole administration and the police are busy dealing with Covid-19, while on the other hand, instances of child marriage have come to the fore. Poverty is one of the main causes of child marriage in our country. At this point, people's financial situation has worsened. Covid's lockdown has shattered many girls' dreams.

Schoolgirls most affected:

In our country, the age limit for marriage is 18 years for women and 21 years for men. The marriage of a minor is considered a child marriage and is a punishable offence. However, Indian girls are more likely to be victims of child marriage. Parents want to get rid of the financial burden by marrying them at an age when they should be in school. According to Indian traditions and customs, a wedding celebration costs a lot of money and the groom has to be paid dowry, though it is a punishable offence. To get rid of these troubles, minors are married off if there is a so-called 'good proposal.' There has been a lot of effort to get children married in a rush even when there is fear among the people during Covid. Some have been exposed and others have been forced to face family burdens at an early age.

Similar incidents were reported to the District Child Welfare Committee (CWC) in Puri district. All of these child marriages have been prevented and brought forth the social reasons behind the practice. A similar marriage was reported on May 7, 2020, in the Godarbindha village of Kandagoda panchayat under the Brahmagiri block. The incident revealed that the family was marrying a 14-year-old girl studying in Grade X. The student's father, a migrant working in Delhi, returned home during the Corona lockdown period. All his money was spent on repaying a previous debt. Just then, a marriage proposal came up for his daughter, and the family quickly agreed. She was being married to a 34-year-old man from a nearby village working as a class four temporary employee at a bank. The feast was in a temple. Fortunately, CWC members and police arrived and stopped it. The girl has now passed the Grade X exams. She is interested in pursuing higher education. Her hopes may not have been fulfilled if she had been married.

Another incident in that block is from Gadarodang village. A 16-year-old who was pursuing her intermediate studies was forcibly being married on May 20 to a man more than twice her age. The man took Rs 35,000 for this. The girl's father is an abjectly poor, daily wage labourer. He said he wanted to get rid of a huge burden of money borrowed by getting his daughter married to the lender of the money, The CWC was able to prevent this marriage also.

Marriage in exchange for borrowed money

Two girls, aged 15/17, arrived at Puri Kumbarpada police station on July 21. They told the police that their parents wanted to marry one of them. The bridegroom dropped out of school in Grade IX. A young man from Balasore was a regular visitor to their house. He lent their father Rs 50,000. During the Covid-19 pandemic, he wanted his money back. The girl's civic worker father is an alcoholic with no savings. The

young man said that if the girl was married to him, he would waive off the Rs 50,000 loan. The father agreed but his 15-year-old daughter was not ready to marry a 30-year-old. She called her friend and reported the matter to the police. The girl was rescued by CWC. The girl is now at home and her father has been directed to visit the Child Welfare Committee every week with his girl, said Ramashkar Patra, a member of the CWC.

CWC directed officials

The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) said there was a risk of child marriage, child trafficking and child abuse in the time of Covid-19. The child rights body instructed all states to be vigilant and to tighten monitoring at the block and panchayat levels. According to CWC member Mr Patra, in Puri district, especially in the Brahmagiri and Krishnaprasad blocks, the situation had been closely monitored. BDO, CDPO and police officers were given written instructions for this. As the sarpanches are the chairpersons of the Panchayat Shishu Kalyan Samiti. They were alerted. As a result, we had more and more reports of child marriage. We have prevented marriages in more than 10 such cases since last July. "In most cases, poverty is the key factor," he said. The cases are also being monitored by Anganwadi workers and PRI members.

Odisha ranked 15

Odisha ranks 15th in the country in terms of child marriage. The rate is now more than 21% based on the reported marriages of girls. Nationally, the rate is about 28%. In the case of boys, the rate of child marriage is 11% in the state and 20% nationally. Many argue that a number of cases go unreported. In Odisha's neighbouring states like West Bengal, Jharkhand, the rate of child marriage is higher. In 2019, the state government has come up with a plan to prevent child marriage. Efforts will be made to reduce girls' child marriages by 10% and boys' by 8% by 2024. It aims to end child marriage in the state by 2030. However, social activist Sudarshan Pradhan said there were not enough precautions to prevent child marriage during the Covid-19. Due to crisis and poverty, girls are forced to marry at a very tender age, he alleged.

Awareness required

There is still a great requirement of awareness about child marriage. Otherwise, the change in mentality will take many years to happen. Former district judge Umacharan Mishra says, "The girls are still considered a burden and parents want to get them married as soon as possible. Girls are not a burden to society. All are citizens of the country and all have equal rights. So the family should give them the same benefits as the sons," he said. Similarly, in the case of child marriage, the police need to take action against them. "If the Juvenile Justice Act is implemented properly, it will reduce child abuse and child marriage," he added.

(Translated from Odia.)



Maharashtra: Beed child marriages back in focus during pandemic, activists fear trafficking of girls

Anuradha Mascarenhas

Indian Express

Pune, July 06, 2020

At 14, Sonali Bade from Loni village in Shirur-Kasar taluka of Maharashtra's drought-prone Beed district was starved, beaten and forced to work long hours at farms, simply because she dared to rebel against the age-old tradition of child marriage. Today, Sonali, now 20, has completed a course in nursing and works as a doctor's assistant in Pune.

Sonali managed to chart her own future, but not everyone gets that chance. Meenal, (name changed), a 13-year-old from Pimpla village in Beed, did not even get a second chance at life. A week ago, she was strangled to death by her own father, a poor sugarcane farm labourer, who was unwilling to let her come back home after she was married off last year. He has been arrested and charged with murder.

Child marriages have been common in the Beed district and other rural parts of Maharashtra and, over the years, several measures have been taken to do away with this practice. However, there is scant data on how the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has affected this harmful practice.

"Till June this year, two cases have been registered under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006," Beed District Superintendent of Police Harsh Poddar told The Indian Express. Poddar said police have taken steps to activate 'village intelligence', including the sarpanch and local police patils, and intervened in seven such cases.

Beed District collector Rahul Rekhavar said the situation can't be neglected and the administration has started getting reports of child marriages performed "secretly".

A major reason behind the high number of child marriages is the fact that of the district's total population of over 30 lakh, at least five lakh are farm labourers who migrate to work as sugarcane cutters to districts across western Maharashtra and northern Karnataka. Poddar said while families take their sons along for the farm work, minor girls are left behind with older members of the family. "During this time, we also see a spike in cases of molestation, mainly by family members," said Poddar. To avoid such situations, the families prefer to marry off their young girls.

Kailas Tupe, a Zilla Parishad primary school teacher in Shirur-Kasar taluka of Beed district who has helped the Lek Ladki Abhiyaan stop local child marriages, said, "Even during the lockdown, a few villages in Beed got their young daughters married secretly".

"In some cases, the wedding was performed with just 10 people gathered together at the ceremony at somebody's house," said an Anganwadi worker in Shirur Kasar, on condition of anonymity.

Varsha Deshpande, an advocate with the National Commission for Women who embarked upon the Abhiyaan campaign a couple of years ago, said tackling cases of child marriage in the Marathwada region

(Aurangabad, Beed, Jalna, Hingoli, Nanded, Osmanabad and Parbhani districts) has been a major challenge as most weddings take place due to socio-economic causes.

“Migration happens around November when entire families leave and return only by March. Despite being illegal, there are many child marriages due to the poor economic conditions here in Marathwada region, as against other districts in western Maharashtra,” said Deshpande, whose team has been able to stop as many as 173 child marriages in the last few years.

Worldwide, the prevalence of child marriage is around 21 per cent. According to the National Family Health Survey data 2015-16, approximately one in four girls marry before the age of 18 in India. NFHS 2015-16 data for Beed shows that at least 51 per cent of women aged between 20 and 24 were married before they turned 18.

“There has been increasing awareness about the issue, but the economic crisis needs to be dealt with foremost. Even if the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 is implemented stringently, the main reasons why these child marriages take place has not been addressed. Farm labourers’ earnings have come down and this livelihood crisis due to the pandemic is even likely to lead to trafficking of young girls,” said Deshpande, who has trained 500 local girls to enrol for short courses like driving, and learn vocational skills.

The recently-released UNFPA’s State of the World Population Report 2020 has also indicated that a one-year average delay in interventions to end this practice may lead to an estimated 7.4 million more child marriages worldwide. In addition, the pandemic-caused economic downturn is projected to result in an estimated 5.6 million additional child marriages taking place between 2020 and 2030.

The total effect of the Covid-19 pandemic is therefore projected to result in 13 million additional child marriages, UNFPA Executive Director Dr Natalia Kanem said during the launch of the report.



लॉकडाउन में घरेलू हिंसा का शिकार हो रही हैं महिलाएं, तेजी से बढ़े आंकड़े

Lockdown mein gharelu hinsa ka shikar ho rahi hai mahilayein, teji se bahdhe ankde

Mohini Singh

Navbharat Times

Lucknow, May 01, 2020

कोरोना संक्रमण को लेकर हुए लॉकडाउन के चलते हर परिवार तमाम परेशानियों का सामना कर रहे हैं। लेकिन यह लॉकडाउन उन महिलाओं के लिए और भारी साबित हो रहा है जो पति या रिश्तेदारों द्वारा घरेलू हिंसा का शिकार बनाई जा रही हैं। आपातकालीन सेवा यूपी 112 हो या विमेन पॉवर लाइन, राज्य महिला आयोग हो या महिलाओं के हित में काम करने वाली स्वयंसेवी संस्थाएं हर जगह घरेलू हिंसा से जुड़ी शिकायतों का अंबार लॉकडाउन के दौरान महिलाओं के साथ होने वाली घरेलू हिंसा उजागर कर रहे हैं।

लॉकडाउन के दूसरे फेज में तेजी से बढ़े मामले यूपी 112 के आंकड़ों के मुताबिक 25 मार्च से लागू हुए लॉकडाउन के बाद घरेलू हिंसा के मामलों में तेजी से गिरावट आई। मार्च 2019 में जहां घरेलू हिंसा की घटनाओं का प्रतिदिन का औसत आंकड़ा 793 था वहीं मार्च 2020 में एक दिन में आने वाले शिकायतें गिरकर 205 तक पहुंच गईं। लेकिन जैसे-जैसे लॉकडाउन बढ़ा घरेलू हिंसा की घटनाओं में तेजी से बढ़ोत्तरी हुई। खासतौर से 14 अप्रैल के बाद शुरू हुए लॉकडाउन के दूसरे फेज में घरेलू हिंसा की घटनाओं में तेजी से बढ़ोत्तरी हुई। 14 अप्रैल को यूपी 112 में घरेलू हिंसा से जुड़ी 709 कॉल आई थीं। लेकिन 15 अप्रैल को इनकी संख्या बढ़कर 790, 16 अप्रैल को 793, 17 अप्रैल को बढ़कर 908, 18 अप्रैल को 815 और 19 अप्रैल को 899 कॉल्स आईं।

घरेलू हिंसा बढ़ी , लेकिन शिकायतें आ रहीं कम इसके अलावा विमिन पॉवर लाइन में भी घरेलू हिंसा से जुड़ी शिकायतें आ रही हैं। एडीजी विमिन पावर लाइन अंजू गुप्ता के मुताबिक सात अप्रैल से अब तक 1090 पर आई शिकायतों में से घरेलू हिंसा के 120 मामले निपटाए जा चुके हैं। वन स्टॉप सेंटर की प्रभारी अर्चना सिंह के मुताबिक बेशक घरेलू हिंसा के मामले बढ़े हैं, लेकिन पहले की बजाय हमारे पास शिकायतें कम आ रही हैं। इसका कारण लॉकडाउन भी है। पहले महिलाओं खुद ही शिकायत लेकर हमारे पास पहुंच जाती थीं। उन्हें पता था कि शिकायत करने पर तुरंत कार्रवाई होगी, लेकिन अब हम भी फोन पर ही काउंसलिंग कर पा रहे हैं। रोज आ रहीं 15 से 20 शिकायतें महिला आयोग की अध्यक्ष विमला बाथम के मुताबिक लॉकडाउन के दौरान उनके यहां भी रोज 15 से 20 कॉल्स आ रही हैं। इनमें से ज्यादातर कॉल्स पति-पत्नी के विवाद और घरेलू हिंसा से जुड़ी होती हैं। जिन मामलों को फोन पर ही काउंसलिंग करके सुलझाया जा सकता है उनका निस्तारण करवा देते हैं। बात ज्यादा बढ़ने पर पुलिस की मदद लेते हैं। विमला कहती है कि यह समय ऐसा है कि पति-पत्नी दोनों को संयम बरतना चाहिए। लॉकडाउन के दौरान ज्यादा दिक्कत होने पर महिलाएं 9810492224 पर कॉल कर सकती हैं।

महिलाओं की मदद को हेल्पलाइन नंबर किया जारी लॉकडाउन के दौरान महिलाओं के साथ घरेलू हिंसा की घटनाएं बढ़ने पर एडवा ने विशेष तौर पर हेल्पलाइन शुरू की। एडवा की मधु गर्ग के मुताबिक हेल्पलाइन के अलावा उनके निजी नंबर पर 10-12 ऐसी कॉलें आ चुकी हैं, जिनमें पति और ससुरालीजनों द्वारा मारपीट और घर से निकाले जाने की शिकायतें थीं। उन्होंने बताया कि प्रदेश के अलग-अलग हिस्सों में रहने वाली एडवा की वॉलिटियर हेल्पलाइन नंबर पर महिलाओं की शिकायतें सुन रही हैं और उनकी शिकायत पुलिस तक पहुंचा कर उनकी मदद कर रही हैं।

जानिए क्या कहते हैं डॉक्टर

लॉकडाउन में बढ़ रही घरेलू हिंसा के कई कारण हैं। समय बीतने के साथ पुरुषों में कमाई को लेकर तनाव बढ़ रहा है। इससे वे तनावग्रस्त हो रहे हैं। थोड़ी-बहुत कहासुनी में भी पुरुष आक्रामक होकर महिलाओं के साथ हिंसा कर रहे हैं। झगड़े बढ़ रहे हैं। ऐसे वक्त में जब पति-पत्नी को साथ रहने का इतना मौका मिला है तो उन्हें समझदारी से रहना चाहिए। पुरुषों को भी घर के काम में महिलाओं का हाथ बटाना चाहिए। -डॉ. आदर्श त्रिपाठी, अडिशनल प्रफेसर, मनोचिकित्सा विभाग, केजीएमयू घरेलू हिंसा की खबरें हमेशा से आती रही हैं, लेकिन लॉकडाउन में ऐसे मामलों में उछाल आया है। लोग 24 घंटे एक-दूसरे के साथ हैं। हर बात में परिवार के सभी सदस्यों की मानसिकता एक जैसी नहीं होती। ऐसे में अगर कोई असहमति जताए तो इसका मतलब यह नहीं कि उससे मारपीट की जाए। इस वक्त परिपक्वता की जरूरत है। लड़ाई झगड़े की बजाय प्यार से रहें ताकि बुरा वक्त आसानी से गुजर जाए। -डॉ. साहू, एचओडी सोसियॉलजी डिपार्टमेंट, एलय



लॉकडाउन की आड़ में बाल विवाह

Lockdown ki aad mein Bal vivah

Sunil Sharma

Chhattisgarh Khabar

Raipur, September 14, 2020

इस साल दसवीं की परीक्षा में 77 फीसदी अंक लाने वाली सुनीता की आंखों में बड़े-बड़े सपने पल रहे थे. खूब अच्छे नंबरों से पास होने के बाद अब आगे कॉलेज की पढ़ाई के सपने. रात में पढ़ते-पढ़ते चांद-तारों से बात करती सुनीता सोचती थी कि पढ़ाई ठीक से हो जायेगी तो कोई अच्छी-सी नौकरी भी मिल जायेगी.

लेकिन कोरोना वायरस से बचने के लिये देश भर में किये गये लॉकडाउन में उसके सारे सपने तार-तार हो गये. लड़की की पढ़ाई-लिखाई और नौकरी के बजाये उसकी शादी को ज़रूरी मानने वाले सुनीता के परिजनों ने लॉकडाउन की आड़ में ही सुनीता से दुगनी उम्र के एक युवक से उसकी शादी करा दी.

लॉकडाउन में पहले दो माह 15 लोगों को ही शादी में शामिल होने की छुट थी. फिर यह संख्या 50 हुई. सरकार ने कोरोना का संक्रमण रोकने के लिए ऐसा किया था लेकिन लॉकडाउन में कम लोगों की उपस्थिति के नियम और आवाजाही बंद होने का रुढ़ीवादियों ने फायदा उठाया और कई छोटी बच्चियों के हाथ पीले कर दिये गये.

मुंगेली ज़िले के एक गांव की रहने वाली 16 साल की सुनीता (बदला हुआ नाम) को यह बात पता नहीं थी कि उसके घर वाले उसकी शादी की तैयारी में जुटे हैं. वह तो दसवीं के बोर्ड एग्जाम की तैयारी में लगी थी. उसने खूब मन लगाकर पढ़ाई की और 77 प्रतिशत अंक हासिल किए लेकिन कुछ ही दिनों बाद उसकी उससे दोगुने उम्र के युवक से शादी कर दी गई. उसे जब पता चला तो उसने विरोध भी किया लेकिन उसकी आवाज दबा दी गई.

दरअसल सुनीता के पिता ने बचपन में ही एक संपन्न बुजुर्ग दंपति को उसे परवरिश के लिए सौंप दिया था. उस बुजुर्ग दंपति ने एक युवक को अपना वारिस बनाने का फैसला किया और सुनीता से उसकी शादी करवा दी. यह शादी छत्तीसगढ़ के अनुसूचित जाति बाहुल्य इलाके मुंगेली के पास एक गांव में हुई.

इसका पता इसलिए भी नहीं चला क्योंकि गांव की लड़की, गांव में ही ब्याह दी गई. ज़ाहिर है, गांव में भी लोगों को देर से ही खबर हुई. गांव की सरहद से इस खबर के बाहर जाने का तो सवाल ही नहीं था क्योंकि इस तरह के बाल विवाह को अभी भी कई गांवों में असामान्य नहीं माना जाता. पड़ोस के ही एक गांव में एक बुजुर्ग दंपति ने अपनी दो बेटियों की शादी लॉकडाउन में की, जिसमें एक बेटे आशा (बदला हुआ नाम) नाबालिग थी. बुजुर्ग दंपति का तर्क है कि दोनों 75-80 के होने को आये, कब सांस उखड़ जाए, ऐसे में कन्यादान कर दिया. उनकी तैयारी है कि अगले साल 14 साल की एक और बेटे का ब्याह कर के वो दुनियाबी कर्तव्यों से मुक्त हो जायें.

मुंगेली से कबीरधाम ज़िले की ओर जाने वाली सड़क पर बसे एक गांव में ब्राह्मण परिवार ने अपनी नाबालिग बेटे सुकन्या (17 वर्ष) की शादी केवल इसलिए कर दी क्योंकि वह किसी दूसरी जाति के लड़के से प्रेम करती थी. यह बात उन्हें नागवार गुजरी और आनन-फानन में लॉकडाउन में शादी कर दी. लड़की मां के सामने खूब गिड़गिड़ाई लेकिन उसने भी साथ नहीं दिया. बता दें कि उसकी मां का भी बाल विवाह हुआ था.

हालांकि इस कहानी में शादी तक तो परिजनों की चली लेकिन शादी के कुछ दिनों बाद सुकन्या अपने प्रेमी के साथ कहीं चली गई और अब उसके मां-बाप दुखी और परेशान हैं. सुनीता (16), आशा(17) और सुकन्या(17) अकेली नाबालिग नहीं हैं, जिनकी इस लॉकडाउन में शादी हुई. छत्तीसगढ़ के अलग-अलग इलाकों में लॉकडाउन के दौरान बड़ी संख्या में बाल विवाह के मामले सामने आए. छोटी उम्र की लड़कियों को दोगुने उम्र के युवकों के साथ ब्याह दिया गया. दरअसल लॉकडाउन को महिला एवं बाल

विकास विभाग के अधिकारियों ने छुट्टी समझ लिया और उन्होंने शादियों को रोकने की दिशा में कोई काम नहीं किया। सूचनाएं उन तक पहुंची नहीं और उन्होंने इसके लिए प्रयास भी नहीं किया। कानोकान खबर नहीं हुई और धड़ाधड़ शादियां होती रही। ग्रामीण इलाकों में शादियों के लिए अनुमति तक नहीं ली गई। अनुमति लेने पर डर था कि प्रशासन को इसकी खबर लग जाएगी और शादी रुक जाएगी। बच्चों की शादियों को रोकने के लिए 1928 में शारदा एक्ट बनाया गया था। उसके बाद 1978 में हिंदू विवाह अधिनियम और बाल विवाह अधिनियम में संशोधन करके लड़की की शादी की उम्र 18 साल और लड़के की शादी की उम्र 21 साल निर्धारित की गई। शारदा एक्ट के उल्लंघन पर कड़ी कानूनी कार्रवाई का प्रावधान किया गया।

छत्तीसगढ़ हाईकोर्ट की अधिवक्ता निरुपमा बाजपेयी कहती हैं, “ शारदा एक्ट बना है लेकिन कानूनी पेचीदगियां इतनी अधिक हैं कि इसका लाभ नहीं मिल पाता। इसे सरलीकृत करना चाहिए। लड़की विरोध भी कहां करे, उसके घरवाले ही उसे निकाल देंगे, फिर वह कहां जाएगी। सामाजिक ढांचे में भी बदलाव की जरूरत है।”

हर साल 350 से अधिक बाल विवाह रोके गये लॉकडाउन बाल विवाह के लिए सुअवसर के तौर पर सामने आया। पुलिस लॉकडाउन को सफल बनाने में व्यस्त रही। महिला एवं बाल विकास विभाग ने आंखें मूंद ली और इस बीच खासतौर पर दूरस्थ अंचलों में सैकड़ों बाल विवाह हुए। हालत ये है कि हर साल साढ़े तीन सौ से अधिक बाल विवाह के मामले रोकने का दावा करने वाले जिम्मेदारों के पास ये आंकड़े भी नहीं हैं कि उन्होंने इस बार कितने मामले रोके।

सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता नवनीता सेन कहती हैं- "भविष्य में घरेलू हिंसा, अनवांटेड प्रेग्नेंसी, कुपोषण जैसे मामले बढ़ेंगे और इससे निपटने के लिए भी सरकार के पास पुरखा इंतजाम नहीं हैं।" ज़ाहिर है, ऐसी जिम्मेदारियों के कारण ही राज्य की महिला एवं बाल विकास विभाग की मंत्री यह मानने तैयार नहीं हैं कि राज्य में इस साल लॉकडाउन के दौरान बाल विवाह हुए हैं। लॉकडाउन में अक्षय तृतीया यानी मिल गया मौका छत्तीसगढ़ में अक्षय तृतीया के दिन बच्चों द्वारा गुड्डे-गुड्डियों की शादी रचाने की परंपरा रही है। लेकिन अक्षय तृतीया को शुभ मुहुर्त वाला दिन बता कर नाबालिग और यहां तक दुधमुँहे बच्चों तक की शादियां कर देना, इस खेल का भयावह पहलू है। ऐसी मान्यता है कि अक्षय तृतीया के दिन मुहुर्त निकालने, गन मिलाने और यहां तक कि शादी करवाने के लिए पंडित की भी ज़रूरत नहीं पड़ती। न्यूनतम रस्मों के कारण इस दिन शादी में रुपए भी कम खर्च होते हैं। छोटे बच्चों की शादी में दहेज की मांग भी नहीं के बराबर होती है और उस पर यह धार्मिक आस्था भी कि इस दिन दान देने से सात जन्मों के बराबर का पुण्य मिलता है और कन्यादान महादान है। इस बार जब छत्तीसगढ़ में चौथा लॉकडाउन था तब सर्वाधिक शादियां अक्षय तृतीया (26 अप्रैल 2020) को हुईं। गुड्डे-गुड्डियों के खेल भी हुए लेकिन इससे अधिक शादियां हुईं।

गुरु घासीदास केंद्रीय विश्वविद्यालय के समाज कार्य विभाग की एचओडी प्रतिभा जे. मिश्रा कहती हैं “लॉकडाउन में परिवारों के आय की साधन सीमित हुई और अपने सिर से लड़की की शादी का बोझ उतारने के लिए भी लोगों ने अपनी नाबालिग लड़कियों की शादी कर दी पर लड़कों की नहीं की। दरअसल पढ़े लिखे लोग जरूरी नहीं कि समझदार हों और लड़के-लड़की को समान मानते हों। ऐसे लोग दिमागी तौर पर अभी भी रुढ़ीवादी हैं। लड़कियों को आज भी बोझ समझा जाता है और उसी का नतीजा है कि लॉकडाउन में शादियां हुईं।”

छत्तीसगढ़ और बाल विवाह

छत्तीसगढ़ में बाल विवाह कोई नई बात नहीं है। 2011 की जनगणना के विश्लेषण से यह बात सामने आई कि समाज में बाल विवाह की मानसिकता में बदलाव नहीं आया है। छत्तीसगढ़ में दो लाख तीन हजार 527 बालिका वधुएं हैं। इनमें से 22 हजार 728 बच्चियों की उम्र 14 साल से भी कम है। प्रदेश में बाल विवाह का रुझान ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में अधिक है। 10 से 19 वर्ष तक की आयु में शहरों में जहां 37 हजार 94 लड़कियों की शादी हुई, वहीं ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में यह आंकड़ा बढ़कर एक लाख 65 हजार 433 तक जा पहुंचा है। आंकड़ों के मुताबिक 10 से 19 वर्ष तक आयु वर्ग की कुल आबादी 54 लाख 33 हजार 855 है। इनमें से पांच प्रतिशत मतलब दो लाख 60 हजार 601 लोग शादीशुदा हैं। इनमें से 57 हजार 74 पुरुष हैं और दो लाख तीन हजार 527 महिलाएं शामिल हैं। दुर्भाग्यजनक यह कि इन लोगों में से 37 हजार 629 लोगों की शादी 10 से 14 साल की उम्र में हो गई।

बाल विवाह रोकने के दावे और हकीकत

अंधश्रद्धा निर्मूलन समिति के शोध में यह बात सामने आई थी कि छत्तीसगढ़ में हर साल साढ़े तीन से चार हजार बाल विवाह हो रहे हैं। वहीं बाल अधिकार संरक्षण आयोग ने यह दावा किया था कि बाल विवाह की संख्या में कमी आई है। सरकारी दावा ये है कि बाल चौपाल कार्यक्रम के माध्यम से लोगों में जागरुकता आई और आयोग के प्रयास, चाइल्डलाइन की सूचनाओं और महिला

एवं बाल विकास विभाग और पुलिस की मदद से 2019 में एक साल के भीतर छत्तीसगढ़ में 350 से अधिक बाल विवाह रोके गए. प्रदेश में 2 हजार बाल मितान भी हैं जो बाल विवाह होने की सूचना आयोग के अधिकारी-कर्मचारियों को देते हैं लेकिन लॉकडाउन में यह सारा सिस्टम ठप्प पड़ा रहा. बाल अधिकार संरक्षण आयोग की अध्यक्ष प्रभा दुबे कहती हैं “ वीडियो कांफ्रेंसिंग के माध्यम से लगातार बाल विवाह पर नजर रखने के निर्देश दिए गए थे. सामाजिक जागरुकता की कमी बाल विवाह के पीछे बड़ी वजह है. बाल विवाह के बाद भी अगर सूचना मिलती है तब भी उसे अवैध घोषित कर कानूनी कार्रवाई की जाती है. इस बार बाल विवाह की सूचनाएं बहुत कम मिली. वैसे भी लॉकडाउन में बहुत कम शादियां हुई होंगी. पुलिस लॉकडाउन में व्यस्त रही और लॉकडाउन के कारण मैदानी स्तर पर जागरुकता लाने वाले कार्यक्रम नहीं कर सके.”

इधर महिला एवं बाल विकास विभाग की मंत्री अनिला भेड़िया लॉकडाउन में बाल विवाह होने से ही इनकार करती हैं. वे कहती हैं “ बाल विवाह नहीं हुए. मेरे संज्ञान में तो नहीं आए. बाल विवाह जितने रजिस्टर्ड हुए, वे रोके गए होंगे.”



E. Women and girls' access to services- education, general health care, reproductive services, counselling services for women facing domestic violence, etc.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is observed in every sector of the service delivery systems – education, health, food and civil supplies and even welfare - around the world. Given the huge gap between the haves and have nots in India, this situation gets compounded several times over. An apathetic, unresponsive system, of course, hasn't helped. Akhand reported on a hunger death from Kaliamba in the Jakeda panchayat in the Nuagaon block of Nayagarh district on June 26 where authorities have been in denial. His story movingly uses this case study to highlight how the poor and homeless women in rural Odisha live trying to desperately eke a livelihood in face of governmental apathy and neglect.

Anuradha Mascarenhas has highlighted the problems faced by women from slums due to lack of privacy during the lockdown, especially when they were menstruating. Not only changing and cleaning themselves but they faced great difficulty in disposing of the sanitary pads. The report highlights how women and girls should have access to reproductive and sexual health commodities, including menstrual hygiene products despite the pandemic. Diganta Sarma of Guwahati and Sunil Sharma of Raipur documented travails of HIV-positive women who found access to both life-saving medicine and nutritious food severely limited due to the lockdown.

Mohini Singh has documented the impact of the lockdown on women's access to sexual and reproductive health services. Fears of picking up a Corona infection in an institutionalised healthcare centre and the difficulty in finding a bed in a hospital have increased the instances of women seeking relatively unsafe over-the-counter alternatives to terminate pregnancies with demand for the same going up by a whopping 25-30% across most cities in Uttar Pradesh.

Vikas Jain also highlighted how the poor access to contraception in Rajasthan during lockdown was translating into a dangerous situation for desperate women stuck with unwanted pregnancies who were then seeking any way of getting an abortion, however unsafe.

Jain also found that several girls in the desert-state were either being moved from private schools to government ones or being completely taken out of schooling. This was because of the immense hardships faced by parents who did not have enough money to even feed the family. Since schools shifted classes online it became necessary to provide the children with mobile phones, tablets or computers with a working broadband internet connection to attend class. While there were a few instances when poor parents completely took out children from school since they couldn't afford such devices, this was largely true about girl children. Age-old patriarchal prejudices which question why girls need formal education when they have to merely marry, have children and manage home and hearth seem to come into play in Covid times, found Jain's report

The story that didn't come to the fore in Corona: After four days of going without food the woman died, and the government did nothing

Akhand

localwire.me

Bhubaneswar, September 07, 2020

Many people have been deprived of government services due to the administration's preoccupation with the Corona pandemic. The lights of their lives have also been extinguished in the lockdown. Women living alone are more likely to be victims.

In one such incident a woman, Dukhi Jani (46), who was begging for government benefits for a long time, died of hunger in the village of Kaliamba in the Jakeda panchayat in the Nuagaon block of Nayagarh district on June 26.

More than two months later, there has been no investigation to establish responsibility. Meanwhile, government documents have been prepared to prevent starvation deaths. This story focuses on how poor and homeless women in the village live struggling not to go hungry.

Her mother-in-law's house is in nearby Nelisahi. Just like several Adivasi girls who are still married off very early Dukhi too had a child marriage. Unable to bear her mother-in-law's torture, she migrated to Jhansi to work as a labourer. There too she faced torture and was not paid her wages. After seven years of this misery, she returned broken in heart and spirit.

By then, all her family had died. She had two utensils, a plastic bucket and other bamboo items as assets. "It then came to our notice that she had no rice, no vegetables or any food in her house. An Aadhaar card acknowledgement, a voter card, an Annapurna card, land patta (ROR) documents were all stored in a polythene bag."

All the government offices need a middleman for jobs to be done. But who will do all this work for single women? However, in 2014, she got a house under the Prime Minister's Housing Scheme, said local Sarpanch Trilochan Sahu. But that was not completed. She also received the Annapurna card in 2014. She was expected to receive 10 kilograms of rice. The last time she received rice was in November 2017. Going by entries on the card, no rice was given since. Despite making repeated visits to all the government offices, she was not given an Antyodaya Anna Yojana card. Following a complaint with the district collector, she received one on February 26. But she never received any foodgrains under this card. She was also not issued a job card under the MGNREGA and had no work. During the lockdown, she did not receive any assistance from the Prime Minister's Garib Kalyan Yojana. Social activist Samit Panda alleged that she had starved to death.

Four days of starvation, then death

According to her neighbour Shishila Jani, she brought wood, fruit, etc. from the forest and sold it and

survived on that. She didn't beg for food and often slept hungry. Shantilata Mallick, a village ASHA worker, confirmed that Dukhi was too thin and weak, but pointed out how she had no other disease. While Anganwadi worker Basanti Behra insists the poor were provided with cooked food for some days in the first phase of the lockdown, neighbours refute her claims. Since June 21 Dukhi had not eaten a morsel. Seven days later she died of starvation. With no one to perform her last cremation rites, she was buried.

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had said no one will starve. But Dukhi died. Block-level officers have prepared documents to absolve themselves of any responsibility without any investigation.

According to the Odisha Relief Code, in case of an allegation of starvation death, it shall be investigated by the tehsildar or a higher authority. The post-mortem report needs to be taken into account during the investigation. But none of this has been done in Dukhi's case. Why is the government afraid to face the truth? Why forget the slogan 'No one will be allowed to starve to death?' And what about the special provisions for women? The government should know that there are many starving like Dukhi. Act before more people die and bring shame to the government and society.

(Translated from Odia)



Pune: Women in slums battle ‘monthly cycle shame’, poor access to menstrual products

Anuradha Mascarenhas

Indian Express

Pune, May 26, 2020

At Khulewadi slum in Chandannagar, 25-year-old Reshma and 16-year-old Raina (names changed) recall ‘embarrassing’ moments when they had to wait the entire day to dispose of their sanitary napkins in the garbage bin near the community toilet. “During the day, there was always a group of boys at the spot, and we would feel shy. There was no option but to wrap the sanitary pads in a paper, put a red dot on them and then wait till late to throw them with other garbage,” the sisters said.

At Thane’s Patalipada slum, a 26-year-old married woman spoke of the ‘nightmarish experience’ of waiting in long queues to use the community toilet during the ongoing lockdown. “The situation was really bad in April and I would get cramps during my menstrual period. To wait in a long queue was a nightmare. Now, several people from the area have gone to their native places. So, thankfully, there are just 10 people in the queue,” she said.

Sixteen-year-old Manisha (name changed), who stays at a slum in Vimannagar and attends Pathara school run by the PMC, said they were careful about maintaining cleanliness at their small home. “We have heard of many cases of the coronavirus disease in the area and I really do not want to go out. We have a small mori (washing place) in our one room. So we keep washing our hands frequently,” she said. She has three sisters and, due to the lockdown, their father, an autorickshaw driver, is sitting at home. “My stomach hurts a lot when I get my period and I feel shy when there are so many people at home,” she said.

At Ramwadi slum near Ambedkar school, 16-year-old Anita (name changed) has a disabled brother and a younger sister. Her mother cannot afford to buy sanitary napkins and Anita is grateful for the supply from an NGO. “I have three children to feed. So, at times, I give her old cloth to use,” says Anita’s mother.

For most of the adolescents and young women in slum areas, relief camps and smaller houses, challenges are manifold when it comes to menstrual health and hygiene. Dr Geeta Bora, the founder of city-based Spherule Foundation that conducts awareness programmes on menstrual hygiene across the country, said awareness sessions, workshops and distribution of sanitary napkins in government-run schools had come to complete halt.

“Now more than ever, lower middle class and economically poor families are reluctant to spend on sanitary pads and, in our interactions, a majority said they have gone back to their previous ways of handling periods. For ration distribution, there are long lines but when it comes to sanitary napkins we have to convince them to come out and take them,” Dr Bora told The Indian Express.

Dr Bora said sanitary pads could be distributed from door to door but there was a need to challenge “shame”. She pointed out that it took two to three hours to explain the process but when distribution started,

some women would come for the supply and this motivated others. At some places, male members of the family also collected the supply, she added.

“Pandemic or no pandemic, women and girls should have access to reproductive and sexual health commodities, including menstrual hygiene products,” said Argentina Matavel Piccin, country representative of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Ahead of World Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28, Piccin pointed out that it was extremely significant that sanitary pads had been included in the list of essential services.

On their part, a group of city youngsters in the age group of 18 to 20 – Anjali Dalmia and others co-founded an organisation four years ago — under ‘Project Amara’ have helped more than 2,000 women/girls switch to sustainable menstrual products, such as menstrual cups, cloth pads, and biodegradable pads.

“At some of the bastis and labour camps, women still don’t have access to basic menstrual hygiene products and use dirty rags, which are a health hazard. We will be visiting various urban slums in the city and distribute free cloth pads and menstrual cups and have raised Rs 1.2 lakh through crowdfunding,” Dalmia said. The products will be handed out when women gather to collect food and they will also be educated on how it was important to be self-reliant in managing periods, Dalmia added.



Lockdown Impact on HIV-positive women: cries for life-saving medicine and nutritional food

Diganta Sarma

biriyaa.com

Guwahati, September 11, 2020

Rupa Das (name changed), a 45-year-old was identified as HIV positive five years ago. She lives in a village in Cachar district, located at the inter-state border of Assam and Meghalaya. It is not easy to travel to the district headquarter, Silchar from that rural area. At first, Rupa stayed in district headquarters with her husband, but after the death of her husband, she moved to the rural area. Once a month, the widow comes to the ART (Antiretroviral Therapy) centre of Silchar town alone to collect her medicine. In the past, Rupa came to the ART centre alone because she did not want to reveal her HIV positive status. Rupa Das has been surviving with the support of a voluntary organisation. But the imposed lockdown for the Covid-19 pandemic in the last week of March 2020, plunged her into a major crisis. Lack of funds made it impossible for Das, the widow of a daily wage labourer, to travel 100 km from her village to the ART centre for medicines. Hiring another person would force Das to reveal the truth. Also, going to collect medicine herself when everyone stayed home would lead to a host of questions about her HIV-positive status.

The government's Covid-19 safety slogan of 'Stay home, Stay safe' simply didn't work for Das. A volunteer with an NGO had first offered to send Das her medicine, but when he got to know about the distance to Das' house of more than 100 km, he developed cold feet. Das has since run out of medication and discontinued it.

About 200 widows have been identified as HIV-positive in Barak Valley and the Dima Hachao district of Assam. Most collect medicines from the Silchar ART centre.

Ironically, though the same lockdown announced to prevent the spread of Covid-19, pushed Das to the brink, leaving her weak and very sick.

Mansur Alam, a counsellor working with HIV positive people, told this writer how Assamese living in the remote, hilly, border areas of Assam-Mizoram and Assam-Nagaland were unable to collect medicines during the lockdown. "I ride 60-70 km on a motorcycle to a nearby district or part of Karimganj district to reach medicines to people. But it is difficult to reach everyone. While men find it relatively easier venturing out on motorcycles for getting ART medication, women are not so lucky and have to go without medication. Some HIV-infected people who collected medication from the ART centre of Guwahati Medical College Hospital found themselves unable to reach the hospital due to the lockdown. Again the number of women who faced this problem far outnumbers the number of men.

A young woman from a village of Baksa district was working in a private company in Guwahati and was regularly collecting medicines from the ART centre in Guwahati. During the lockdown, the company suspended its operation and the young woman also went home. She was not able to return to Guwahati from her village to collect medicine. One of the counsellors in Guwahati called her mobile phone and asked her to come about 50-60 km to collect the medicine. But she couldn't manage.

The saddened young woman said, “I worked in a beauty parlour. We followed all safety rules and advice for HIV-positive people. I had been collecting medicine from the ART centre and taking it. I lived alone in a rented house. There was no problem, but as soon as the lockdown was announced, our parlour downed shutters. I returned home. I didn't want to tell anyone, even my family members, that I am HIV-positive. When I ran out of medicines I was frantic. The government shut down all modes of commute, and I was unable to continue my medication. Such discontinuation might necessitate a second-line medication with a doctor's advice and another costly blood test. There is also the threat of other physical ailments at a time when there is so much uncertainty on whether I can rejoin work. I am also unable to afford nutritional food due to the lockdown. Inadequate nutrition and discontinuation of medication can prove quite dangerous in my condition.”

She is not alone. Most HIV-positive people facing problems with continuing medication and accessing nutritious food to sustain themselves are women, confirmed volunteers and counsellors working with the HIV-positive community in Assam.

One HIV-positive woman Morzina Begum (name changed) is a mother of one, separated from her husband after being a victim of domestic violence. She returned to her mother's house in Kokrajhar district, about 250 kilometres away from Guwahati, before the lockdown. Due to the lockdown, it was impossible to collect medicines from the ART centre or the district hospital from the village of Kokrajhar district. Moreover, Margina never told her family she was HIV-positive so she could not ask anyone else to collect her medication.

Some volunteers tried hard to get the HIV-infected women to get medicine, although many of them had changed addresses and contact numbers and now live in difficult-to-access remote areas.

Jintu Kalita, a counsellor of ART centre says, “Due to the lockdown, many people have left Guwahati and gone to far off interior places, many have lost jobs. In such cases, there are increased risks for HIV-positive people.”

4,500 adults collected medicine from Guwahati ART Centre alone with 50% of them being women. The number of children is also more than two hundred.

Jahnabi Goswami, president of ‘Assam Network of Positive People’, an NGO says, “The lockdown was announced to prevent the spread of Covid-19 but it has created many problems for the HIV-positive community. Medicines are only available at district headquarters and vehicles are not plying as the administration has enforced curfew,” and adds, “As a result, when a person goes to the main hospital to collect medicine, s/he has to show the HIV-positive person's medicine collection card. This compromises her/his privacy and many avoid coming to the district headquarters hospital. On the other hand, sending medicines to people's doorstep can make family and neighbours ask all kinds of questions.”

Dr D J Barua, a physician, who works with the HIV positive community says, “Discontinuing medicines leads to a decline in the immunity of an HIV positive person. After breaking the continuity of medication, the person needs to be tested again for immunity power and s/he is prescribed the next line medication.”

(Translated from Assamese)



कोरोना संक्रमण के खतरे के बीच कैंसर, एचआईवी संक्रमित महिलाओं की मुसीबत और बढ़ गई

Corona sankraman ke khatre ke beech HIV sankramit mahilaon ki museebat aur badh gayi

Sunil Sharma

Chhattisgarh Khabar

Raipur, November 30, 2020

कोरबा निवासी 30 वर्षीय अन्नपूर्णा वस्त्रकार को मई 2019 में ओवरियन कैंसर का पता चला. उनका ऑपरेशन रायपुर में हुआ और उनका ट्रीटमेंट चल रहा था. मार्च में लॉकडाउन लगा तो वह चेकअप के लिए रायपुर नहीं जा सकी और नतीजा ये हुआ कि उनका इन्फेक्शन बढ़ गया. वह बताती हैं कि समय पर नहीं जा पाने के कारण उन्हें बाद में कीमो करवाना पड़ा. लॉकडाउन के कारण उन्हें दवा भी समय पर नहीं मिल पाई. दवा के लिए उन्हें खूब चक्कर लगाना पड़ा. एक फार्मसी की दवा खाने से उन्हें साइड इफेक्ट भी हुआ. दरअसल जो टेबलेट उन्हें लेना था वह रायपुर में ही मिल रही थी. ऐसे में एनजीओ की मदद से किसी तरह उन्हें दवा मिल पाई. लॉकडाउन ने उनकी बीमारी को और बढ़ा दिया.

वह बताती है कि रायपुर के मेकाहारा हास्पिटल में कीमो की मशीन भी कई दिनों खराब रही, इस कारण भी कई लोगों को परेशानियों का सामना करना पड़ा. खासतौर पर कैंसर पीड़ित महिलाओं को दिक्कत हुई. जो किसी तरह रायपुर चले भी गए तो वहां रहने, खाने सहित अन्य तरह की समस्याओं का भी सामना करना पड़ा. कोरबा की ही एक दूसरी कैंसर पीड़ित महिला भी समय पर नहीं जा सकी और उसके चेहरे पर सूजन आ गया. बिलासपुर निवासी योग गुरु अनिता दुआ बताती है उन्हें 2017 में ब्रेस्ट कैंसर हुआ. उसका इलाज चला. वह ठीक हुआ तो पता चला कि कालर बोन में कैंसर है. वह थोड़ी घबरा गई क्योंकि तब वाहन बंद थे. शुक्र है कि मुंबई के लिए फ्लाइट चालू थी. लेकिन वहां कोरोना का संक्रमण सबसे ज्यादा था. फिर भी वे किसी तरह वहां गई और वहां ट्रीटमेंट कराया. वह बताती है कि कई कैंसर पीड़ित महिलाओं को परेशानियों का सामना करना पड़ा.

अपोलो हॉस्पिटल की काउंसलर और खुद कैंसर पीड़ित अराधना त्रिपाठी बताती है कि वह ऐसी कई महिलाओं को जानती हैं जो कैंसर पीड़ित हैं और लॉकडाउन के दौरान उनका समय पर हॉस्पिटल में इलाज नहीं हो पाया. कुछ डॉक्टर तो कोविड 19 टेस्ट के बिना मरीज का चेकअप करने तैयार नहीं थे और ऑनलाइन चेकअप में महिलाएं न भरोसा कर पा रही थी और न ही वे संतुष्ट हो रही थी. कुछ महिलाओं को उनके घर के लोग अस्पताल नहीं जाने दे रहे थे, उन्हें संक्रमण का खतरा महसूस हो रहा था. डर व भय का माहौल का बना हुआ था. वह आज भी उस समय को याद करती हूं तो अच्छा नहीं लगता. वह बताती है कि औसत रोज एक ऐसी महिला को उन्हें फोन आता था जो कैंसर पीड़ित हैं और अपना इलाज नहीं करवा पा रही है. खूब समझाने पर किसी तरह वे इलाज के लिए जा रही थी पर यह नहीं कह सकती कि सभी ने ऐसा किया हो. वाहनों की आवाजाही पर रोक होने के कारण भी उन्हें परेशानियों का सामना करना पड़ा.

स्पंदन नामक स्वयं सेवी संगठन चलाने वाली अराधना बताती है कि वह चेकअप कराने में खुद एक दिन का भी देर नहीं करती थी लेकिन कई-कई दिनों बाद चेकअप करा पाई. दरअसल ऑपरेशन होने पर 6 माह तक लगातार ट्रीटमेंट की जरूरत पड़ती है जिसमें 6 बार कीमो, रेडियेशन आदि शामिल है. वह कहती है कि ये कैंसर पीड़ित महिलाओं के लिए बड़े तकलीफ भरे दिन थे. वह ऐसे पांच लोगों को जानती हैं जिन्हें कैंसर था और उनकी मौत भी हुई. दरअसल यह इसलिए क्योंकि उन्हें समय पर इलाज नहीं मिला. लॉकडाउन के कारण ऐसा हुआ पर महिला होना भी एक बड़ा कारण है. दरअसल महिलाएं खुद बहुत तनाव लेती हैं. अपने इलाज के लिए वह गंभीर नहीं होती. उनका आंकलन है कि 70 फीसदी महिलाओं में तनाव के कारण कैंसर हो रहा है, बाकी 30 फीसदी कुछ आनुवांशिक या कुछ और कारण हो सकते हैं.

लॉकडाउन के कारण ऐसा हुआ पर महिला होना भी एक बड़ा कारण है. दरअसल महिलाएं खुद बहुत तनाव लेती हैं. अपने इलाज के लिए वह गंभीर नहीं होती. उनका आंकलन है कि 70 फीसदी महिलाओं में तनाव के कारण कैंसर हो रहा है, बाकी 30 फीसदी कुछ आनुवांशिक या कुछ और कारण हो सकते हैं.

ये तो कुछ उदाहरण हैं, ऐसे न जाने कितनी कैंसर पीड़ित महिलाएं हैं, जिन्हें लॉकडाउन ने प्रभावित ही नहीं किया, बल्कि उन्हें पहले से कहीं अधिक बीमार बनाया और उनका आत्मविश्वास को हिलाकर रख दिया. इसी तरह गंभीर बीमारियों में एक एचआईवी के संक्रमितों को भी कोरोना ने तोड़कर रख दिया. बिलासपुर के 'अपना घर' में कवर्धा, रायपुर, बिलासपुर और जांजगीर-चांपा जिले की कुल 14 एचआईवी संक्रमित लड़कियां रह रही थी. 17 अगस्त को कलेक्टर के आदेश पर इन्हें वहां से बल प्रयोग कर निकाला गया. पुलिस पर आरोप है कि महिला अधिवक्ता प्रियंका शुक्ला के साथ मारपीट की. हालांकि एसपी प्रशांत अग्रवाल ने मीडिया को बयान दिया कि आश्रम के लोगों ने न सिर्फ सरकारी काम में बाधा पहुंचाने की कोशिश की बल्कि खुद महिला वकील ने पुलिस वालों के साथ मारपीट की कोशिश की. इसकी वजह से उनके खिलाफ एफआईआर दर्ज की गई है.

बता दें कि यह कोरोना काल में एचआईवी संक्रमितों के साथ ही हुई देश की पहली घटना है. इस घटना का नतीजा ये हुआ कि 14 लड़कियों को दस दिनों तक एचआईवी के रोकथाम के लिए दी जाने वाली दवाइयां नहीं मिल पाई. 'अपना घर' में रहने वाली 18 साल की रेखा (बदला हुआ नाम) बताती है कि संक्रमित होने के बाद से ही दवा ले रही है लेकिन लॉकडाउन हटने के बाद भी दस दिनों तक उनके साथ ही 13 अन्य लड़कियों को जो कि नाबालिग हैं, उन्हें दवा नहीं मिली. एआरटी सेंटर में दवा थी लेकिन कार्ड नहीं होने के कारण उन्हें दवा नहीं मिली. दरअसल इसी दौरान उन्हें बिलासपुर से शिफ्ट कर दिया गया और रायपुर के एआरटी सेंटर में जाकर दवा लेना पड़ा. किसी तरह दवा मिल पाई. वह बड़े दुखद दिन थे. वह अच्छा है कि किसी को कुछ नहीं हुआ पर दवा नहीं मिलने के कारण बड़ा नुकसान हो सकता था.

एचआईवी संक्रमितों को कोरोना काल में घर पहुंचाकर दवा देने का दावा प्रदेश के सभी 5 एआरटी सेंटर करते हैं लेकिन रेखा की ही तरह कई महिलाओं को दवा मिलने में देर हुई. दवा खाने में गैप हुआ. बिलासपुर में एचआईवी संक्रमितों के लिए जागरूकता अभियान चलाने वाली और उन्हें सीधे तौर पर मदद करने वाली रिंकी अरोरा बताती है कि लॉकडाउन लगा और वाहन चलने बंद हुए तो ग्रामीण इलाकों के संक्रमित व्यक्ति शहर दवा लेने नहीं आ सके. खासतौर पर महिलाओं को इसमें दिक्कत हुई. ऐसे में हमने पास बनवाकर अपनी टीम को उन तक भेजा. फिर भी उन्हें परेशानियां तो हुई. महिलाओं की नौकरी भी चली गई, उन्हें भी मदद पहुंचाई. पर राज्य में सभी संक्रमित महिलाओं को मदद मिल पाई होगी, यह कह नहीं सकती.

जिन्हें इलाज के लिए राज्य से बाहर जाना था, कई नहीं जा पाए

भारती शर्मा, स्व-प्रतिरक्षित विकार टाकायासू आर्टराइटिस (ऑटोइम्यून डिसऑर्डर) से प्रभावित हैं. उनका इलाज संजय गांधी पोस्ट ग्रेजुएट इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ मेडिकल साइंसेज (एसजीपीजीआई), लखनऊ से चल रहा है. वहां डॉ. अमिता अग्रवाल की टीम उनकी बीमारी का उपचार करती है. उन्हें लखनऊ जाना था, लेकिन कोरोना लॉकडाउन के कारण बंद ट्रेन और परिस्थिति की वजह से वे अंतिम बार जनवरी 2020 में जांच के लिए लखनऊ गई थी. ऑटोइम्यून डिसऑर्डर से प्रभावित होने के कारण इनकी प्रतिरोध क्षमता पहले ही चिकित्सकों ने दवा के माध्यम से कम कर दिया है. इसलिए कोरोना से बचने और उसके डर से वे कहीं भी सफर करने से बच रही हैं. भारती की ही तरह अन्य महिलाओं के साथ भी ये हुआ है. भारती बताती है कि पुरुष जिस तरह आसानी से कहीं आ जा सकते हैं, महिलाओं के लिए यह संभव नहीं है.

अधिकांश निजी अस्पतालों ने गर्भवती महिलाओं का प्रसव नहीं कराया

छत्तीसगढ़ की प्रसतुओं को कोरोना काल के दौरान निजी अस्पतालों ने सहयोग नहीं किया. उनका प्रसव कराने से इनकार कर दिया. हद तो ये कि जिन महिलाओं का ट्रीटमेंट प्राइवेट हॉस्पिटल में चल रहा था, उन्होंने भी ऐन वक्त में अपना हाथ खींच लिया. कोरोना संक्रमण के भय से उन्होंने प्रसव नहीं कराया. पांडातराई की प्रियंका तिवारी बताती है कि वह निजी अस्पताल में प्रसव कराना चाहती थी लेकिन कोरोना के कारण सरकारी अस्पताल में जाना पड़ा. इसी तरह बिलासपुर की पायल साहू बताती है कि जिस निजी अस्पताल में उसका पहला बच्चा हुआ, उसने दूसरे बच्चों के लिए अपने अस्पताल के दरवाजे बंद कर दिए. ऐसा कई महिलाओं के साथ हुआ. आमतौर पर महिलाएं व उनके परिजन साफ-सफाई व सुरक्षा के दृष्टिकोण से निजी अस्पतालों में प्रसव की प्लानिंग करते हैं पर यह सुविधा कोरोना ने उनके हाथ से छीन ली. वहीं सेवा का क्षेत्र कहे जाने वाले चिकित्सा व चिकित्सकों की छवि भी खराब हुई. इधर आंकड़ों पर जाए बिलासपुर के सिम्स मेडिकल कॉलेज और जिला अस्पताल में जनवरी से सितंबर तक 6439 बच्चों का जन्म हुआ. मार्च तक निजी अस्पतालों में भी प्रसव हुआ पर इसके बाद सरकारी अस्पतालों में प्रसव के आंकड़े बढ़ते गए.

प्रदेश में 92166 की जगह केवल 1151 नसबंदी, महिलाओं पर पड़ रहा विपरीत असर

परिवार नियोजन के ढेर सारे उपायों में ऑपरेशन (पुरुष/महिला नसबंदी) सबसे कारगर उपाय है. सरकारी अस्पतालों में इसे दो प्रकार से अंजाम दिया जाता है. एक विधि से ऑपरेशन में अस्थाई नसबंदी होती है, दूसरी में स्थाई तौर पर. यही जनसंख्या नियंत्रण का प्रमुख जरिया है. लेकिन कोविड काल में कोरोना ने परिवार नियोजन की योजना को ध्वस्त कर दिया. पूरे प्रदेश में 92166 की जगह 1151 नसबंदियां हुईं. बिलासपुर जिले में अप्रैल से अक्टूबर तक के सात माह में 7063 नसबंदी के ऑपरेशन तय हुए थे, लेकिन हुए एक भी नहीं. जानकारों का कहना है कि इसका सीधा महिलाओं पर पड़ रहा है. अनचाहा गर्भ के साथ ही अन्य तरह की समस्याओं का सामना महिलाओं को करना पड़ रहा है.

सामान्य बीमारियों में भी अस्पताल पहुंच पाने में भी पिछड़ी महिलाएं

कोरोना के कारण निजी के साथ ही सरकारी अस्पतालों में भी दूसरी बीमारियों के मरीज बहुत कम संख्या में पहुंचे. बिलासपुर के मेडिकल कॉलेज में मार्च तक जहां हर माह ओपीडी में 13 हजार लोग चेकअप के लिए आ रहे थे, वहीं उनकी संख्या अब घटकर तीन हजार हो गई है. उनमें भी महिलाओं की संख्या महज 25 फीसदी है. यह मेडिकल कॉलेजों से लेकर छोटे सरकारी अस्पतालों तक की स्थिति है. सिमगा के छोटे सरकारी अस्पताल में कोरोना काल के पहले की तुलना में अब महज 20 फीसदी महिलाएं ही चेकअप के लिए आ रही हैं.

महिलाओं में बढ़ रहा स्तन कैंसर

‘दि ग्लोबल बर्डन ऑफ़ डिज़ीज़ स्टडी’ (1990-2016) के अनुसार भारत में महिलाओं में सबसे ज़्यादा स्तन कैंसर के मामले सामने आए हैं. स्टडी के अनुसार महिलाओं में स्तन कैंसर के बाद सर्वाइकल कैंसर, पेट का कैंसर, कोलोन एंड रेक्टम और लिप एंड कैविटी कैंसर मामले सबसे ज़्यादा सामने आ रहे हैं. छत्तीसगढ़ में पहले स्तन कैंसर आमतौर पर 45-50 साल की उम्र की महिलाओं में होता था लेकिन अव्यवस्थित दिनचर्या के कारण 25 से 30 साल की युवतियों को भी यह हो रहा है. कहीं-कहीं 17-18 वर्ष की लड़कियों में भी यह देखा जा रहा है. एम्स में पहुंच रहे मरीजों का आंकलन पर यह पता चला कि वहां पर जाने वाली सात में से एक महिला को स्तन कैंसर होता है. दरअसल बीआरसीए वन व बीआरसीए 2 जीन स्तन व गर्भासय कैंसर के लिए उत्तरदायी है. इनके काम नहीं करने के कारण कैंसर के खतरे बढ़ जाते हैं. महिलाएं स्तन कैंसर के प्रति जागरूक नहीं रहती और उनके लक्षणों को नहीं जान पाती.

लॉकडाउन में अस्पताल से जबरिया डिस्चार्ज भी

अमरकंटक की शशि मोंगरे कैंसर का इलाज करवाने आई थीं. वे फरवरी से मेकाहारा हॉस्पिटल रायपुर में भर्ती थी. अप्रैल में उन्हें डिस्चार्ज कर दिया गया, वे बताती हैं कि वह उस वक्त अकेली थी. लॉकडाउन के कारण घर से भी कोई नहीं आ पा रहा था. उनके अलावा भी कई मरीज वार्ड में थे जो घर जाने के लिए किसी न किसी इंतजाम में लगे थे. शारदा अग्रवाल अमरकंटक में रहती हैं. वह अपनी मां का इलाज कराने मेकाहारा गई थीं. कोरोना के चलते उनकी मां का ऑपरेशन टल गया. इस बीच लॉकडाउन लग गया तब से अस्पताल में थी. डॉक्टर ने घर जाने को कह दिया. लेकिन जाने का कोई साधन नहीं मिल रहा था. दूसरे राज्य से होने के कारण किसी तरह वह घर लौट पाईं. इसी तरह गई लोगों को लॉकडाउन में अस्पताल से निकाला गया और जाने के लिए उन्हें साधन नहीं मिल पा रहा था.



लॉकडाउन में लॉक हुईं दवाएं, बढ़ी अबॉर्शन पिल्स की डिमांड

Lockdown mein lock hui davaein, badhi abortion pills ki demand

Mohini Singh

Navbharat Times

Lucknow, June 28, 2020

केस-1 लॉकडाउन के दौरान एक सरकारी अस्पताल में तैनात डॉक्टर की पत्नी प्रेगनेंट हो गई। उन्हें गाइनेकॉलजिस्ट के पास ले जाने की बजाय डॉक्टर ने मेडिकल स्टोर से अबॉर्शन पिल्स लाकर दे दी। दवा खाने के करीब एक हफ्ते बाद महिला की हालत इस कदर खराब हो गई कि उन्हें खून से लथपथ हालत में अस्पताल में भर्ती करवाना पड़ा। इस मामले में डॉक्टरों का कहना था कि अगर महिला के इलाज में आधे घंटे की भी देरी होती तो उनकी जान पर बन सकती थी। इलाज के बाद भी करीब 12 घंटे महिला बेहोश रही। गाइनेकॉलजिस्ट ने उन्हें एक महीने बेड रेस्ट की सलाह दी।

केस-2 मुगलसराय, काली महल की रहने वाली सरिता की शादी इसी साल जनवरी में हुई। शादी के तुरंत बाद वह बच्चा नहीं चाहती थीं, मार्च में वह प्रेगनेंट हो गई। इसी बीच कोरोना की वजह से लॉकडाउन हो गया। उन्हें डॉक्टर को दिखाने की बजाय पति ने मेडिकल स्टोर से अबॉर्शन पिल्स लाकर दे दी। पिल्स खाने के दो दिन बाद उनकी हालत काफी गंभीर हो गई। परिवारीजनों ने उन्हें मुगलसराय राजकीय चिकित्सालय में भर्ती करवाया, जहां काफी मशक्कत के बाद उसकी जान बचाई जा सकी।

दोनों ही मामले सिर्फ बानगी भर हैं। लॉकडाउन के दौरान अनचाहे गर्भ की समस्या होने पर प्रदेश के अलग-अलग हिस्सों से इस तरह के मामले सामने आए। कोरोना संक्रमण के डर और अस्पताल जाने से बचने की वजह ने बाजार में अबॉर्शन पिल्स और प्रेग्नेंसी किट की बिक्री में काफी उछाल देखने को मिला। कोरोना संकट के दौरान दवा बाजारों में जहां दूसरी दवाइयों की डिमांड कम हुई। वहीं, अबॉर्शन पिल्स और प्रेग्नेंसी किट की बिक्री 30 से 40 फीसदी तक बढ़ गई। हालांकि, बिना डॉक्टर की सलाह के ली गई दवाओं ने कई महिलाओं की जान पर भी बना दी। लॉकडाउन के दौरान इस तरह के बढ़ते मामलों ने इसकी बात की भी तस्दीक कर दी कि महिलाओं का खुद पर ही अधिकार नहीं है। कहीं न कहीं न चाहते हुए भी वह अनचाहे गर्भ की समस्या से जूझ रही हैं।

महिलाओं को अस्पताल में भर्ती करने से बच रहे डॉक्टर

झलकारीबाई अस्पताल की सीएमएस डॉ सुधा वर्मा कहती हैं कि लॉकडाउन में ऐसे मामले बढ़े हैं। महिलाओं ने बिना डॉक्टरी सलाह के अबॉर्शन पिल्स का सेवन किया। मुगलसराय राजकीय चिकित्सालय की स्त्री रोग विशेषज्ञ महिमा नाथ कहती हैं कि किसी भी प्रेग्नेंसी टेस्ट से सिर्फ प्रेग्नेंसी का ही पता चलता है। लेकिन, इस बारे में पता नहीं चलता है कि भ्रूण यूटरस के अंदर है या बाहर, इसलिए एमटीपी करवाने से पहले अल्ट्रासाउंड करवाने की सलाह दी जाती है। उन्होंने बताया कि लॉकडाउन के दौरान उनके यहां करीब 30 से 35 ऐसे केस आए, जिसमें महिलाओं ने अनचाहे गर्भ से छुटकारा पाने के लिए बिना डॉक्टरी सलाह लिए अबॉर्शन पिल्स का सहारा लिया। हम भी कई केस में सर्जिकल की बजाय मेडिकल अबॉर्शन की सलाह पेशेंट्स को देते हैं। इस दौरान डॉक्टर खुद भी महिलाओं को अस्पताल में भर्ती करने से बच रहे हैं।

डॉक्टर से सलाह जरूर लें

सेफ मदरहुड कमिटी फॉर्गसी की चेयरमैन डॉ प्रीति कुमार ने बताया कि लॉकडाउन के शुरुआती दिनों में उनके पास पंद्रह दिनों में अबॉर्शन के करीब चार मामले आए। इसमें तीन मामले अनचाहे गर्भ के थे तो एक केस मिस कैरेज का रहा। उन्होंने बताया कि इनमें पहले के तीन केस में मैंने खुद ही सभी महिलाओं को अबॉर्शन पिल्स लेने की सलाह दी। पिल्स लेने के 15 दिन बाद तीनों

महिलाओं का अल्ट्रासाउंड करवाया। तीनों की ही रिपोर्ट नॉर्मल आई। कोरोना के बढ़ते संक्रमण को देखते हुए महिलाएं इतना एहतियात बरत सकती हैं कि डॉक्टर से पहले फोन पर सलाह जरूर लें।

प्रेगनेंसी किट की मांग में भी हुआ इजाफा

लॉकडाउन के दौरान जहां दूसरी दवाओं की ब्रिकी घटी तो वहीं, अर्बाशन पिल्स और प्रेगनेंसी किट की मांग में इजाफा हुआ। लखनऊ ड्रगिस्ट असोसिएशन के मीडिया प्रभारी मयंक रस्तोगी ने बताया कि सामान्य दिनों में दवाओं का रोजाना औसतन 25 से 30 करोड़ का कारोबार होता था, जो लॉकडाउन के दौरान 8-10 करोड़ के बीच सिमट गया है, लेकिन इस बीच भी कुछ दवाओं की मांग बरकरार रही। इनमें अर्बाशन पिल्स, प्रेगनेंसी किट के साथ प्रिकॉशन की चीजों की डिमांड भी बढ़ गई। बाजार में पहले की अपेक्षा इनकी 40 प्रतिशत ज्यादा सप्लाई हुई। अलीगढ़ के केमिस्ट एंड ड्रगिस्ट असोसिएशन के जिला अध्यक्ष शैलेंद्र सिंह ने बताया कि जिले में भी 30 प्रतिशत तक अर्बाशन पिल्स और करीब 40 प्रतिशत तक प्रेगनेंसी किट की डिमांड बढ़ गई। प्रयागराज ड्रगिस्ट असोसिएशन के अध्यक्ष परमजीत सिंह ने बताया कि लॉकडाउन के दौरान शहर की अपेक्षा गांवों के मेडिकल स्टोर में इनकी सप्लाई ज्यादा हुई। पहले जहां महीने में सौ प्रेगनेंसी टेस्ट किट की सप्लाई होती थी। वहीं, लॉकडाउन में करीब महीने भर में 300 प्रेगनेंसी किट की सप्लाई हुई। अर्बाशन पिल्स की भी 35 फीसदी डिमांड बढ़ी।

40 फीसदी तक बढ़ गई मांग

वाराणसी में स्थित पूर्वांचल की सबसे बड़ी थोक दवा मंडी सप्तसागर से न सिर्फ पूर्वांचल बल्कि बिहार और आस-पास के राज्यों में भी दवा की सप्लाई होती है। वहां के ड्रग असोसिएशन के संजय सिंह ने बताया कि सप्तसागर दवा मंडी में थोक दवा की छोटी-बड़ी कुल मिलाकर करीब साढ़े पांच सौ दुकानें हैं। यहां से बलिया, आजमगढ़, जौनपुर, मऊ मिर्जापुर, चंदौली समेत बिहार और दूसरे राज्यों में दवा की सप्लाई होती है। लॉकडाउन के दौरान मेडसिन मार्केट में भी दवाओं की सप्लाई और डिमांड दोनों ही कम रहे। कोरोना संकट के दौरान अर्बाशन पिल्स, प्रेगनेंसी किट, कंडोम्स और गर्भनिरोधकलियों की डिमांड बरकरार रही। इनमें भी अर्बाशन पिल्स की डिमांड आम दिनों की अपेक्षा करीब 40 फीसदी ज्यादा रही। लखीमपुर, सुलतानपुर, अमेठी, रायबरेली, चंदौली जैसे जिलों के केमिस्ट ड्रगिस्ट असोसिएशन के सदस्यों के मुताबिक अर्बाशन पिल्स सहित प्रेगनेंसी किट की डिमांड लॉकडाउन के दौरान सामान्य दिनों से ज्यादा रही।

इतनी बढ़ी जिलों में अर्बाशन पिल्स व प्रेगनेंसी किट की डिमांड

लखनऊ 40 फीसदी
वाराणसी 40 फीसदी
प्रयागराज 35फीसदी
अलीगढ़ 40 फीसदी
लखीमपुर 30-35 फीसदी
सुलतानपुर 25-30 फीसदी
अमेठी 35फीसदी
रायबरेली 40फीसदी
चंदौली 25 फीसदी

बलिया में स्वास्थ्य विभाग ने बंटवाए परिवार नियोजन के संसाधन

अनचाहे गर्भ की समस्या से महिलाओं को न जूझना पड़े, इसके लिए बलिया में लॉकडाउन के दौरान स्वास्थ्य विभाग की ओर से गांव-गांव जाकर गर्भनिरोधक गोलियां और परिवार नियोजन के संसाधन बांटे गए। स्वास्थ्य महकमे का मानना था कि लॉकडाउन के बाद जनसंख्या में अचानक इजाफा हो सकता है। ऐसे में जिले में करीब 30 हजार कंडोम बांटे गए। बलिया जिला प्रशासन ने ग्रामीणों को जनसंख्या नियंत्रण का संदेश देने के लिए अभियान शुरू किया। जिले के एसीएमओ डॉक्टर वीरेंद्र प्रसाद ने बताया कि लॉकडाउन के दौरान जिले में अभियान चलाकर आशा बहुओं और स्वास्थ्य वर्कर्स ने लोगों को परिवार नियोजन के उपाय बताए गए। साथ ही गर्भ निरोधक गोलियां और अन्य संसाधन बांटे।

यूएनएफपीए ने भी माना था बढ़ सकता है अनचाही प्रेगनेंसी का ग्राफ

संयुक्त राष्ट्र जनसंख्या कोष (यूएनएफपीए) ने अप्रैल में ही एक रिपोर्ट तैयार की थी, जिसके मुताबिक कहा गया कि कोरोना वायरस लॉकडाउन के कारण प्रमुख स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं के बाधित हो जाने से अनचाहे गर्भधारण के मामलों में बढ़ोतरी हो सकती है। रिपोर्ट के अनुसार लॉकडाउन के कारण कम और मध्यम आय वाले देशों में करीब पांच करोड़ महिलाएं आधुनिक गर्भनिरोधकों के इस्तेमाल से वंचित रह सकती हैं, जिससे आने वाले महीनों में अनचाहे गर्भधारण के 70 लाख मामले सामने आ सकते हैं। यूएनएफपीए और सहयोगियों ने ये आंकड़े जारी किए।



पुरुष घर में रहे तो दोगुनी हो गई घरेलू हिंसा

Purush ghar mein rahe to doguni ho gayi gharelu hinsa

Sunil Sharma

Chhattisgarh Khabar

Raipur, October 14, 2020

कोरोना ने सबसे ज्यादा असर आधी आबादी यानी महिलाओं पर डाला. इस दौरान घरेलू हिंसा दोगुनी हो गई. किसी के पति ने हाथ तोड़ दिया तो कोई महिला अपने पति से तंग आकर दुनिया से ही चल बसी. दहेज और बच्चा नहीं होने के पुराने मामले लॉकडाउन में फिर खुल गए और पुरुष के साथ ही उनके परिवार के लोगों ने अपना खाली समय महिला को प्रताड़ित करते हुए बिताया.

अब बिलासपुर की 24 साल की रागिनी की ही कहानी ले लीजिए. उनका विवाह दो साल पहले हुआ था. उन्हें कोई बच्चा नहीं था. पति इस बात को लेकर रागिनी को प्रताड़ित करने लगा. साथ ही वह अपनी पत्नी पर शक भी करता था.

उसके पास दो गाड़ियां थी, जिसे वह किराए पर देता था. खुद भी ड्राइविंग करता था. इससे हर माह 50 हजार रुपए तक कमा लेता. पर लॉकडाउन में बुकिंग बंद हो गई. वह घर पर रहने लगा. वह शराब पीने लगा था. अक्सर बात-बात पर रागिनी की पिटाई करने लगा. अप्रैल से लेकर कुछ दिनों पहले तक रागिनी सब बर्दाश्त करती रहीं. पर एक दिन इस प्रताड़ना के सामने वह हार गई और उन्होंने फांसी लगा कर जान दे दी.

30 साल की लता के पति का काम कोविड में छूट गया. वह घर पर ही रहने लगा. वैसे तो शुरू से ही उसका लता से झगड़ा होता था पर कोरोना काल में यह और बढ़ गया. एक दिन उसने लता को इतना मारा कि उसका एक हाथ टूट गया. उसने एक सामाजिक संगठन के लोगों से किसी तरह संपर्क किया. सामाजिक संगठन के लोग उसे प्राइवेट हॉस्पिटल लेकर गए. पति ने हॉस्पिटल का खर्च उठाने से भी इनकार कर दिया. ऐसे में लता के भाई ने अपनी पत्नी के गहने गिरवी रखकर रुपए दिए. हॉस्पिटल ने कुछ छूट भी दी.

प्याज नहीं मिला तो मारपीट

दुर्ग जिले के खुर्सीपार पुलिस को एक चौंकाने वाला मामला पता चला. तब लॉकडाउन को एक माह हुए थे. 30 अप्रैल को थाने में एक युवती ने फोन कर शिकायत की कि छोटे भाई ने उनके साथ मारपीट की है. चिकन पकाने के लिए उससे प्याज की मांग की. प्याज कम होने पर उसने देने से मना कर दिया. इस बात पर छोटे भाई ने उसके साथ मारपीट की और 1 मई को उसके खिलाफ मामला दर्ज किया गया. रागिनी, लता या भाई से पीटने वाली महिला ही नहीं ऐसी कई महिलाएं हैं, जिन्हें कोविड-19 के दौरान घरेलू हिंसा का शिकार होना पड़ा.

तरह-तरह की हिंसा और प्रताड़ना में यह तथ्य बार-बार रेखांकित हो कर सामने आता है कि हम एक पितृसत्तात्मक समाज में रहते हैं. लॉकडाउन हो या फिर अनलॉक, इस दौरान ज्यादातर समय पुरुष घरों में रहे और घरेलू हिंसा में आश्रयार्जनक रूप से वृद्धि हुई. सीधे शब्दों में कहे तो घरों में रहते हुए पुरुषों ने अपनी पत्नियों पर पहले की तुलना में कहीं अधिक अत्याचार किए.

अब अकेले रायपुर की बात करें तो यहां लॉकडाउन के पहले जनवरी व फरवरी में जहां 40 शिकायतें महिलाओं की तरफ से घरेलू हिंसा की दर्ज कराई गई, वहीं लॉकडाउन में 60 से 65 मामले हर माह दर्ज किए जाने लगे. लगभग यहीं आंकड़ा बिलासपुर जिले का भी रहा.

हालांकि राज्य की महिला आयोग में शिकायतें पहले की तुलना में कम हो गईं. लेकिन इसका कारण केवल इतना भर था कि आयोग में ज्यादातर शिकायतें डाक से आती हैं और लॉकडाउन के दौरान डाक की व्यवस्था दुरुस्त नहीं थी.

छत्तीसगढ़ राज्य महिला आयोग के सहायक संचालक अभय कुमार देवांगन के मुताबिक आमतौर पर सामान्य दिनों में आयोग को रोजाना ऑनलाइन व डॉक मिलाकर 70-80 शिकायती आवेदन मिलते थे. इनमें आधे से ज्यादा दहेज व घरेलू हिंसा के होते थे. 40-50 शिकायतों पर प्रकरण दर्ज कर थानों व जिले के संरक्षण अधिकारियों को कार्रवाई के लिए कहा जाता था. पर आयोग को प्राप्त होने वाले आवेदन की संख्या करीब आधी रह गई है. हो सकता है कि लॉकडाउन के दौरान डाक से आवेदन नहीं पहुंच पा रहा हो.

हालांकि देश भर की मीडिया में आई इस दौर की रिपोर्ट और राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग के हिस्से के आंकड़े कुछ और ही कहानी कहते हैं. मीडिया रिपोर्ट की मानें तो लॉकडाउन के दौरान घरेलू हिंसा के मामले 95 फीसदी तक बढ़ गए. देशव्यापी बंद से पहले और बाद के 25 दिनों में देश के कई शहरों से मिली शिकायतों को आधार मानते हुए राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग ने यह दावा किया है कि घरेलू हिंसा के मामले दोगुने बढ़ गए हैं.

आयोग ने इस साल 27 फरवरी से 22 मार्च के बीच और लॉकडाउन के दौरान 23 मार्च से 16 अप्रैल के बीच मिली शिकायतों की तुलना के बाद के आंकड़ों के आधार पर यह दावा किया. इसके मुताबिक, बंद से पहले आयोग को घरेलू हिंसा की 123 शिकायतें मिली थीं जबकि लॉकडाउन के दौरान ऑनलाइन व अन्य माध्यम से घरेलू उत्पीड़न के 239 मामले दर्ज कराए गए.

कई मामलों में शिकायतें इसलिये भी दर्ज नहीं हो पाई क्योंकि आरोपी पुरुष पूरे समय घर पर ही थे.

छत्तीसगढ़ हाईकोर्ट में अधिवक्ता व समाजसेवी प्रियंका शुक्ला बताती हैं कि 1 मई की शाम को उनके पास फोन आया कि मोपका के अरपा विहार निवासी एक सरकारी शिक्षक अपनी पत्नी को पीट रहा है. पत्नी को खून की उल्टियां हो रही हैं. जब वे उनके घर पहुंचे तो पता चला कि दहेज और बच्चा न होने का ताना देकर पति और उसके परिवार वाले महिला को तंग करते थे, लेकिन लॉकडाउन में घर में ज्यादा समय तक रहने के कारण ये हिंसा और भी बढ़ गई. मामले की शिकायत पुलिस थाने में की गई.

छत्तीसगढ़ राज्य महिला आयोग की अध्यक्ष डॉ. किरणमयी नायक बताती हैं कि लॉकडाउन में कई बार मामले हाइपोथेटिकल भी होते हैं. इसलिए हम पूरी जांच पड़ताल के बाद ही मामला दर्ज कर रहे हैं. वह कहती हैं कि रोजाना 50 से 100 मामले अब आ रहे हैं, इनमें ज्यादातर घरेलू हिंसा के ही हैं. उन्होंने कहा कि यह भी देखना पड़ता है कि हिंसा का दायरा क्या है. हम पुलिस के सभी मामलों में दखल नहीं देते. हमारे पास सीधे शिकायत आने पर रुचि लेते हैं. इसके अलावा कुछ अन्य मामले भी संज्ञान में लेते हैं. पहले के 550 मामले भी पेंडिंग हैं. कुछ नए और कुछ पुराने केस का निराकरण कर रहे हैं.

लॉकडाउन और शराब का असर निम्न वर्ग में घरेलू हिंसा की शिकायतें ज्यादा रहती हैं, पर लॉकडाउन के दौरान शिकायतें न के बराबर रही क्योंकि दो कारणों से हिंसा होती थी, पहली शराब और दूसरा घर से बाहर काम करने वाली महिलाओं पर पति दूसरे के साथ संबंध होने का आरोप लगाकर मारपीट करता था. लॉकडाउन में न शराब मिली और न ही महिला घर से बाहर गई.

करीब 40 दिनों तक शराब दुकानें बंद रही. चोरी छिपे शराब बिकी पर वह एक या दो फीसदी की पहुंच में ही रही. पर जैसे ही दुकानें खुली, अचानक घरेलू हिंसा के मामले बढ़ गए.

राज्य महिला आयोग की पूर्व सदस्य ममता साहू का कहना है कि राज्य में निम्न वर्गीय परिवारों में घरेलू हिंसा के मामलों में कमी का कारण करीब 40 दिन तक राज्य में शराब नहीं मिल पाना रहा. जब तक शराब दुकानें बंद थी, तब तक लोग शांति से अपना जीवन बिता रहे थे. जबकि अब पहले जैसा ही हाल होने लगा है. धरमपुरा में एक महिला के पति ने शराब दुकान खुलने के बाद पीने के लिए घर बर्तन बेच दिए. इसलिए मुझे लगता है कि शिकायतों में कमी आने के पीछे डाक से भी ज्यादा बड़ा कारण शराब दुकानें बंद होना रहा.

राज्यपाल ने घरेलू हिंसा पर मुख्यमंत्री को लिखा पत्र

छत्तीसगढ़ की राज्यपाल अनुसुईया उइके कई मोर्चों पर बेहद सक्रिय हैं. उन्होंने घरेलू हिंसा सहित अन्य घटनाएं बढ़ने को लेकर पिछले दिनों मुख्यमंत्री भूपेश बघेल को पत्र लिखा जो कि काफी चर्चा में रहा. दरअसल कोरोना काल में शराब दुकानें खोले जाने

के बाद जब घरेलू हिंसा सहित अन्य दुर्घटनाएं होने लगी तब उन्होंने एक पत्र लिखा, जिसमें कहा गया कि लॉकडाउन के दौरान शराब पीने से हो रहे अपराधों पर नियंत्रण करना आवश्यक है। राज्यपालने इस संबंध में मिले कई जापनों का उल्लेख करते हुए आग्रह किया कि लॉकडाउन के दौरान शराब के कारण घरेलू हिंसा एवं दुर्घटनाओं में भी बढ़ोत्तरी हुई है, जिसे प्रभावी तरीके से रोके जाने की आवश्यकता है। इस संबंध में शासन स्तर पर उचित नीतिगत निर्णय लिया जाए, ताकि लॉकडाउन के दौरान मद्यपान से उत्पन्न आपराधिक गतिविधियों एवं दुर्घटनाओं पर नियंत्रण किया जा सके।

राज्यपाल की चिंता से समझा जा सकता है कि छत्तीसगढ़ में स्थिति कितनी भयावह है। यहां यह बताना भी जरूरी हो जाता है कि प्रदेश की कांग्रेस सरकार ने अपने घोषणा पत्र में शराबबंदी की बात कही थी। अब शराबबंदी को लेकर मीडिया या विपक्ष द्वारा सवाल पूछे जाने पर नेता कहते हैं कि अभी तो साढ़े तीन साल बाकी है। धीरे-धीरे सभी घोषणाओं को पूरा करेंगे।

पुलिस का चुप्पी तोड़ो अभियान

लॉकडाउन के 36 दिनों में रायपुर पुलिस के पास 60 से ज्यादा शिकायतें घरेलू हिंसा की आईं। कुछ शिकायतें तो ऐसी हैं जिनमें महिलाओं ने स्वीकार किया है कि वे कई बार चाहकर भी पुलिस तक नहीं पहुंच पाईं। पुलिस विभाग ने सोशल मीडिया पर 'चुप्पी तोड़ो अभियान' शुरू करने की जानकारी देते हुए महिलाओं को भरोसा दिलाया कि उन्हें डरने या घबराने की ज़रूरत नहीं।

पुलिस के अनुसार मुसीबत के समय वे सिर्फ एक मैसेज या कॉल पुलिस को करें, 10 मिनट के अंदर पुलिस उनके घर पहुंचेगी। शिकायत गंभीर मिलने पर ऑन स्पॉट केस दर्ज कर आरोपी को गिरफ्तार किया जाएगा। अभियान में डीएसपी से एसआई रैंक की महिला अफसरों को रखा गया। ताकि पीड़ित महिला अपनी बात उनके सामने खुलकर रख सके।

कहा गया कि टेलीफोन नंबर 0771-4247110 पर कॉल कर या 94791-90167 और 94791-91250 वाट्सएप पर पीड़ा बता सकती है। 2018 से लेकर 2020 मार्च तक 1500 घरेलू हिंसा की शिकायतें आई थीं। इन महिलाओं से भी संपर्क करने का प्रयास करने की बात कही गई।

पहले से ही स्थिति भयावह

2016 से 2019 के बीच तीन हजार मामले निर्भया फंड के तहत बनी महिला हेल्पलाइन (181) पर आई शिकायतों से पता चला है कि 25 जून 2016 से 17 जनवरी 2019 के बीच कुल 5197 महिलाओं ने अपनी शिकायत दर्ज कराई, जिनमें सबसे ज्यादा 2803 मामले घरेलू हिंसा के रहे।

महिला हेल्प लाइन की प्रबंधक मनीषा तिवारी बताती हैं कि संकट में फंसी महिलाओं की मदद के लिए केंद्र सरकार ने महिला हेल्पलाइन की शुरूआत निर्भया फंड से की है। यह शिकायत दर्ज करने के साथ ही महिलाओं को कानूनी सहायता भी मुहैया कराती है। घरेलू प्रताड़ना के मामलों में पुलिस का रवैया ज्यादातर निराशाजनक रहता है। ऐसे मामलों में आरोपियों के खिलाफ कार्रवाई करने की बजाय महिलाओं को ही समझाने का प्रयास किया जाता है।

उनका दावा है कि घरेलू हिंसा के मामलों में कार्रवाई के दौरान पुलिस जरूरी नियमों का पालन नहीं करती और ऐसे में ज्यादातर महिलाएं हार मान जाती हैं।



चिंताजनक- लॉकडाउन में छिना रोजगार, लड़कियों की छूट रही आनलाइन कक्षाएं, मंडराया स्कूल ड्रॉप आउट का खतरा

Chintajanak - Lockdown mein chhina rojgar, ladkiyon ki chhoot rahi online kakshayein, mandraya school dropout ka khatra

Vikas Jain
patrika.com
Jaipur, August 14, 2020

कोविड महामारी और लॉकडाउन ने राजस्थान के विभिन्न जिलों की निम्न व वंचित वर्ग की आबादी को बुरी तरह प्रभावित किया है। प्रदेश में इस समय करीब एक करोड़ परिवार खाद्य सुरक्षा योजना के तहत चिन्हित हैं, अनुमान है कि इनमें से करीब 50 लाख परिवारों की आर्थिक स्थिति बुरी तरह चरमरा गई है। ये ऐसे परिवार हैं, जो लॉकडाउन से पहले दैनिक मजदूरी, छोटे मोटे काम के जरिये अपने परिवार का पालन पोषण करते थे।

इसका सर्वाधिक बुरा असर निम्न वर्ग की महिलाओं और किशोरियों पर भी पड़ रहा है। पड़ताल में सामने आया कि लॉकडाउन के पहले से स्कूल जा रही लड़कियों को अब स्कूल खुलने के बाद उनके स्कूल ड्रॉप आउट का खतरा सताने लगा है। अभी चल रही आनलाइन कक्षाओं में भी किसी परिवार में लड़का और लड़की दोनों होने पर संसाधनों की कमी के चलते लड़कों को ही कक्षा अटैंड करने पर अधिक तरजीह दी जा रही है। लड़कियों को जल्द शादी करने और घर के काम में ही झोंक देने की चिंता भी सता रही है। शुरूआती तौर पर इस तरह की समस्याएं सामने आने पर कुछ संस्थाओं ने इस पर रिसर्च भी शुरू कर दी है, जिनके विस्तृत परिणाम भी जल्द सामने आने की संभावना है।

परिवारों ने इस तरह बताई अपनी व्यथा

राजस्थान के टोंक जिले के निवाई उपखंड का एक परिवार कोविड प्रकोप से बुरी तरह प्रभावित होने और रोजगार खोने के बाद वापस अपने गांव लौट आया है। पति पत्नी और परिवार में दो ही बच्चे हैं। पहले यह परिवार जयपुर में ही रहकर अपना गुजर बसर करते था। वहां एक छोटे निजी स्कूल में दोनों बच्चे पढ़ते थे। अब समस्या स्कूल से निकलवाने की आ गई है, स्कूल ने आनलाइन कक्षा शुरू करवा दी है, अभी तक लड़के को तो पढ़वा रहे हैं, लड़की की आनलाइन कक्षा भी छूट गई है।

लड़कियों से पत्रिका संवाददाता ने किया संवाद, बताई अपनी पीड़ा

राजस्थान पत्रिका ने प्रदेश के कुछ जिलों की लड़कियों से संवाद किया तो उन्होंने अपनी पीड़ा को साझा किया...

या तो छूटेगी पढ़ाई, या जाना होगा सरकारी में।

जयपुर जिले के बस्सी क्षेत्र में कानोता इलाके की किशोरी को डर है कि आने वाले समय में जब भी उनके स्कूल खुलेंगे तो हो सकता है कि उन्हें स्कूल भेजा ही नहीं जाए, कारण पूछने पर वे साफ कहती हैं कि उनके परिवार में लड़के भी हैं और लड़कियां भी, परिवार की आर्थिक स्थिति खराब हो चुकी है।

आनलाइन पढ़ाई से ही मिलने लगे संकेत

डूंगरपुर जिले की एक किशोरी ने एक आनलाइन संवाद में बताया कि अभी आनलाइन पढ़ाई चल रही है, लेकिन उनकी कक्षाएं

अभी से ड्राप होना शुरू हो गई है, कारण..परिवार के पास संसाधनों का नहीं होना..हालांकि परिवार वाले कोशिश कर रहे हैं लड़कों की पढ़ाई आनलाइन भी ड्राप नहीं हो।

नजदीकी स्कूलों से भी अपने स्तर पर कर रही पूछताछ

राजस्थान में काम करने वाली विभिन्न स्वयंसेवी संस्थाओं ने भी इसे लेकर चिंता जताई है, इनका मानना है कि स्कूल खुलने के बाद बड़ी संख्या में लड़कियों का स्कूल ड्राप आउट का खतरा बना हुआ है।

फैक्ट फाइल: खतरा इसलिए भी बढ़ा, प्रदेश में लैंगिक असमानता अधिक

- लड़के और लड़कियों का अनुपात 1000:943
- राजस्थान में 15 से 16 आयु वर्ग की किशोरियों में हर 5 में से 1 स्कूल छोड़ देती है। यह देश के सर्वाधिक खराब वाले राज्यों की स्थिति है। राजस्थान में स्कूली छात्राओं के स्कूल ड्रॉप आउट को लेकर भी खतरा पहले से ही अधिक है।
- एक करोड़ स्कूली बच्चों के दुनिया में स्कूल ड्रॉप आउट की आशंका, राजस्थान में भी यह संख्या जा सकती है करीब 50 हजार

विशेषज्ञों ने भी जताई चिंता...

यह खतरा बढ़ा.....

वैसे, संकट अकेली लड़कियों की शिक्षा ही नहीं, बल्कि लड़कों की शिक्षा को लेकर भी है, जिस पर सरकार को तत्काल ध्यान देने की आवश्यकता है। लड़कियां स्कूल के लिए पहले घर से बाहर निकलती थी, कुछ सीखती थी, अब उन्हें वापस से घर के काम में ही लगाया जा सकता है। लॉकडाउन के समय में विशेष तौर पर वंचित वर्ग के लिए शिक्षा बड़ी समस्या बन रही है, आने वाले दिनों यह और बढ़ सकती है। जिस घर में एक से अधिक बच्चे हैं, और आनलाइन के संसाधन एक ही हैं तो वहां लड़कों को ही पहली प्राथमिकता दिया जा रहा है। आने वाले समय में यह समस्या और बढ़ेगी।

शारदा जैन, शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में शोधकर्ता



कोरोना लॉकडाउन पड़ा वंचित वर्ग की कई महिलाओं पर भारी, झेलना पड़ा गर्भपात का दंश

Corona lockdown pada vanchit varg ki kai mahilaon par bhari, jhelna pada garbhapat ka dansh

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patrika.com

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प्रदेश में कोरोना काल वंचित वर्ग व सुदूर जिलों सहित गांव ढाणियों की महिलाओं के लिए परिवार नियोजन साधनों की उपलब्धता के लिहाज से संकट वाला रहा। गांव ढाणियों में वंचित व गरीब वर्ग को समय पर परिवार नियोजन के साधन उपलब्ध ही नहीं हो पाए, जिसके कारण उन्हें गर्भपात की स्थिति से भी गुजरना पड़ा।

राजस्थान पत्रिका संवाददाता ने परिवार नियोजन साधनों की पहुंच लॉकडाउन के दौरान सहज नहीं होने या कम होने की जमीनी पड़ताल की तो यह स्थिति सामने आई। बातचीत में महिलाओं ने बताया कि लॉकडाउन के दौरान सब कुछ बंद था और वे लोग बाहर भी नहीं निकल पाए। जिसके कारण ऐसी स्थितियों का सामना करना पड़ा। हालांकि राज्य सरकार ने जिलों के प्रशासन के जरिये व स्वयंसेवी संस्थाओं ने भी इनकी पहुंच के प्रयास लॉकडाउन के दौरान किए, लेकिन वे भी पर्याप्त साबित नहीं हो पाए।

इस तरह बयां किया महिलाओं ने अपना दर्द...पत्रिका से लिखित में भी दर्द साझा किया लॉकडाउन के कारण मैं अपना टेस्ट नहीं कर पाई और मैं प्रेगनेंसी हो गई। जबकि मेरी छोटी लड़की अभी 11 महीने की ही है। मुझे बाद में गर्भपात करवाना पड़ा। शारीरिक तौर पर कमजोर हुई, आर्थिक नुकसान भी हुआ। अनलॉक होने पर पति के साथ टोंक गई तो पता चला कि वह गर्भवती है, उसके बाद उसने गर्भपात करवा लिया। इस दौरान समय पर वह अपना दर्द भी किसी से बयां नहीं कर सकी। मैं टोंक जाकर गर्भपात करवाकर आई, लेकिन किसी भी सरकारी संस्था या स्वयंसेवी संस्था ने मुझसे आकर पूछताछ नहीं की आखिर मुझे यह कदम क्यों उठाना पड़ा।

- निर्मला, निवासी, जिला टोंक

अनलॉक में भी नहीं मिल रहे आंगनबाड़ी केन्द्रों से

कोरोना के कारण उन्हें कई सारी परेशानियां का सामना करना पड़ा। परिवार नियोजन के साधन उपलब्ध नहीं पहा पाए। इस समय भी ये नहीं मिल पा रहे हैं और पैसे देकर ही मेडिकल स्टोर से लाने पड़ रहे हैं हमारी आर्थिक स्थिति ऐसी नहीं है कि यह सब लगातार खर्च कर सकें। कोरोना काल से पहले हमें यह साधन आंगनबाड़ी केन्द्रों से मिल रहे थे, लेकिन अनलॉक के बाद भी यह साधन नहीं मिल रहे। हमें मेडिकल से ही लाना पड़ रहा है।

- पूजा, निवासी, जिला टोंक

लॉकडाउन के दौरान हमें गोलियां एएनएम से मिलती थी, लेकिन एएनएम दूसरे कामों में ज्यादा व्यस्त रहती थी। ऐसे में कभी कभी देरी से मिलती थी।

- निर्मला, सुरपुर, डूंगरपुर

कोरोना काल के शुरूआती दौर में हमें परिवार नियोजन के साधन नहीं मिले। उस समय निजी मेडिकल विक्रेताओं को ज्यादा पैसे देकर साधन मंगवाए।

- रेणुका, डूंगरपुर

हमें लॉकडाउन के दौरान परिवार नियोजन के साधन हासिल करने में काफी परेशानी आई। जिसके कारण बड़ी परेशानियां हमें हुईं।

- अनीता, निवासी बूंदी जिला

गांवों की महिलाओं के लिए सुरक्षित गर्भपात भी बड़ी चुनौती |

अनचाहे गर्भ के समय महिलाओं को गांवों में सुरक्षित गर्भपात की सुविधा भी नहीं मिल पाती। राजस्थान में जिला स्तर पर ही यह सुविधा बमुश्किल मिल पाती है। ऐसी महिलाओं को बड़े सेंटर पर जाना पड़ता है। गांव ढाणियों की महिलाओं के लिए यह कापफी मुश्किल भरा होता है। संयुक्त परिवार में रहने वाली महिलाओं के लिए तो दूसरे शहर में जाने की अनुमति भी पहले परिवार में लेनी होती है। अधिकांश मामलों में महिलाएं यह कदम उठा ही नहीं पाती। इस समय प्रदेश में बड़े शहरों के अस्पतालों के अलावा निजी अस्पतालों में भी सुरक्षित गर्भपात नियमानुसार हो सकता है, लेकिन यहां इसके लिए हजारों रूपए लिए जाते हैं। गर्भपात के समय महिलाओं को सरकारी नियमों का भी खयाल रखना चाहिए। 20 सप्ताह के बाद गर्भपात नहीं करवाया जा सकता।

राजस्थान में 1.60 लाख जोड़ों पर असर पड़ने का अनुमान

एक अध्ययन में अनुमान लगाया जा चुका है कि राजस्थान में 1.60 लाख जोड़े गर्भ निरोधन प्राप्त करने में असफल होंगे। जिससे 1 लाख 66 हजार 217 अनचाहे गर्भधारण, 47 हजार 539 जीवित बच्चों का जन्म, 1 लाख 1 हजार 62 गर्भपात, 58 हजार 319 असुरक्षित गर्भपात और 122 मातृ मृत्यु होंगी। वर्ष 2020 में, 57,757 ट्यूबल लीगेशन, 92,040 आईयूसीडी, 56,382 इंजेक्शन से गर्भनिरोधक, 1.21 लाख ओसीपी, 54,007 ईसीपी सेवाएं रद्द होंगी और 25.49 लाख कंडोम का प्रयोग नहीं होगा।

लॉकडाउन ने बिगाड़ा परिवार नियोजन कार्यक्रम

दरअसल, देश में 25 मार्च से लॉकडाउन के बाद लाखों महिलाएं चाहते हुए भी अपने पसंदीदा गर्भनिरोधक हासिल करने में असफल रहीं हैं। आने जाने पर रोक लगने के कारण बिना डॉक्टर के पर्ची पर मिलने वाली गर्भ निरोधक दवाई, कंडोम, ओसीपी और ईसीपी हासिल करने में लोगों को काफ़ी मुश्किलों का सामना इस दौरान करना पड़ा।

परिवार नियोजन कार्यक्रमों का संचालन करने वाले जयपुर के मुख्य चिकित्सा एवं स्वास्थ्य अधिकारी डॉ. नरोत्तम शर्मा का कहना है कि प्रशासन के सहयोग से लॉकडाउन के दौरान भी परिवार नियोजन के साधन पहुंचाए गए। उन्होंने कहा कि महिलाओं को इसमें आई परेशानियों की जानकारी करवाकर उचित कदम उठाएंगे।



खौफ के दौर से गुजरी राजस्थान की 8.5 लाख प्रसूताएं, लॉकडाउन में कई निजी अस्पतालों ने प्रसव से ही कर दिया इनकार

Khauf ke daur se gujari rajasthan ki 8.5 lakh prasutaein, lockdown mein kai niji aspatalon ne prasav se hi kar diya inkar

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जयपुर। कोरोना काल के दौरान प्रदेश में करीब 2 लाख से अधिक प्रसूताओं को प्रसव से पहले अस्पताल में जगह हासिल करने और खौफ के माहौल में यहां से वहां चक्कर लगाने पर मजबूर होना पड़ा है। लॉकडाउन के दौरान प्रदेश में कई निजी अस्पतालों ने सामान्य प्रसूताओं को भी आसानी से जगह नहीं दी और प्रसव कराने से इनकार ही कर दिया। ऐसी प्रसूताओं में वे भी शामिल हैं, जो पहले से किसी अस्पताल में स्त्री एवं प्रसूति रोग विशेषज्ञ की देखरेख में चल रही थी।

राजस्थान पत्रिका संवाददाता ने प्रसूताओं के दर्द की पड़ताल की तो सामने आया कि उन्हें लॉकडाउन और अनलॉक दोनों में ही भारी परेशानी रही। इस पूरे काल में भय का माहौल शहरी और ग्रामीण दोनों ही क्षेत्रों की महिलाओं में बना हुआ है।

करीब 8.5 लाख प्रसव प्रदेश और सवा करोड़ भारत में

प्रदेश में मार्च से अब तक छह माह के दौरान करीब 8.5 लाख प्रसव और करीब इतने ही शिशुओं के जन्म लेने का अनुमान है। प्रदेश में सालाना करीब 17 लाख जीवित शिशु जन्म लेते हैं। अनुमानित आंकड़ों के मुताबिक इस अवधि के दौरान भारत में करीब सवा करोड़ प्रसव हुए हैं।

मातृ मृत्यु दर पर विपरीत असर की आशंका

सैपल रजिस्ट्रेशन सर्वे के मुताबिक प्रदेश की मातृ मृत्यु दर प्रति एक लाख जीवित जन्म पर इस समय करीब 180 के करीब है। जो कि पहले से ही देश में बेहतर स्थिति में नहीं है और निचले पायदान वाले राज्यों में ही शामिल है। शिशु मृत्यु दर के लिहाज से भी प्रदेश में स्थितियां अच्छी नहीं हैं, प्रदेश में एक साल तक के बच्चों की मौत का प्रति वर्ष आंकड़ा करीब 70 हजार है। आशंका है कि इस साल कोविड काल में स्थितियां और बिगड़ सकती है।

डॉक्टर को खुद सताया संक्रमण का डर, नहीं करवाया प्रसव

अजमेर जिले की प्रसूता का प्रसव लॉकडाउन के दौरान ही होना था। उनके पहला प्रसव था और एक बड़े निजी अस्पताल में स्त्री एवं प्रसूति रोग विशेषज्ञ की देखरेख में चल रही थी। लेकिन लॉकडाउन के दौरान कोरोना का भय स्त्री एवं प्रसूति रोग विशेषज्ञ को खुद को सताने लगा और महिला को प्रसव के लिए दूसरी जगह जाने की सलाह दे दी। इसके बाद भय के माहौल में महिला को सरकारी अस्पताल में ही प्रसव कराना पड़ा।

मजबूरन जाना पड़ा कोविड अस्पताल में

जयपुर शहर के चारदीवारी क्षेत्र की प्रसूता को कोरोना था ही नहीं, लेकिन इस पूरे क्षेत्र को कंटेनमेंट जोन घोषित किया गया था। उस समय प्रशासन ने व्यवस्था ऐसी कर दी कि इस कंटेनमेंट जोन की प्रसूता का प्रसव कोविड डेडिकेटेड महिला चिकित्सालय सांगानेरी गेट में ही होगा। जबकि यहां पहले से ही कोरोना संक्रमित प्रसूताएं थी। मजबूरन प्रसूता और परिवारजन डरते डरते वहां गए और प्रसव करवाया। बाद में वह नेगेटिव ही मिली।

अस्पताल में भर्ती होने के बाद संक्रमित हो गई

जयपुर शहर के एक निजी अस्पताल में हाल ही में अनलॉक के दौरान प्रसूता ने शिशु को जन्म दिया। वह भर्ती हुई तब नेगेटिव थी, लेकिन अस्पताल में रहने के दौरान पॉजिटिव पाई गई। प्रसूता को बाद में कोविड डेडिकेटेड अस्पताल महिला चिकित्सालय जाना पड़ा।

संदिग्धों के लिए तो कई ने व्यवस्था ही नहीं की

सामान्य प्रसव कराने वाले कई निजी अस्पतालों ने तो इमरजेंसी प्रसव की व्यवस्था ही नहीं की और प्रसूता को पहले ही सलाह दे दी गई कि वे नेगेटिव रिपोर्ट लेकर ही आएँ। यहां संदिग्ध यानि सैंपल लेने की तो व्यवस्था थी ही नहीं।

प्रदेश में गांवों तक नहीं होते प्रसव

इस समय प्रदेश की स्थिति ऐसी है कि गांवों ढाणियों और यहा तक की 20 हजार से अधिक आबादी वाले कई कस्बों में भी स्तरीय प्रसव की सुविधाएं नहीं है। कई जगह निजी अस्पताल हैं ही नहीं हैं, सरकारी अस्पताल हैं तो स्त्री एवं प्रसूति रोग विशेषज्ञ नहीं है। ऐसे में इनके लिए कोरोना काल दोगुनी चुनौती के रूप में सामने आया।

डरें नहीं, सुरक्षात्मक उपाय अपनाकर प्रसव सुविधाओं का उपयोग लें

प्रसूताओं को अलग सुरक्षित व संक्रमण रहित माहौल में रखा जाए

समय समय पर जरूरी चेकअप करवाते रहें, मास्क लगाएं

अपने नियमित विशेषज्ञ से समय समय पर टेली कंसल्टेंसिंग या अन्य माध्यम से परामर्श लेते रहें

आहार का विशेष ध्यान रखें

घर में भी अन्य सदस्यों के कम से कम संपर्क में आएँ

प्रसव तारीख से पहले ही अपनी कोविड व अन्य आवश्यक जांचें जरूर करवा लें

इस समय कोविड डेडिकेटेड अस्पतालों में सरकारी स्तर पर और निजी अस्पतालों में भी सुरक्षित प्रसव की सुविधा है

- डॉ. विमला जैन, पूर्व अधीक्षक, महिला चिकित्सालय, सांगानेरी गेट जयपुर के अनुसार

प्रसव के समय प्रसूताओं को भारी परेशानियां हुईं। कई निजी अस्पतालों ने तो भर्ती करने से ही इनकार कर दिया, इस तरह के मामले होने के बाद भी राज्य सरकार ने उन पर कोई ठोस कार्यवाही की नहीं, जो कि दुखद है। अब अनलॉक के समय प्रसूताओं को किसी तरह की समस्या नहीं आए, वे बेखौफ होकर स्वस्थ शिशु को जन्म दे सके, इस तरह के माकूल इंतजाम राज्य सरकार को करने चाहिए।

- सुमन शर्मा, पूर्व अध्यक्ष, राजस्थान महिला आयोग



F. Success stories

Since the lockdown brought all activities to a halt, there have been several horror stories, of people struggling to find even a morsel of food and migrant workers left stranded, among others. Then there is the daily rise of Covid-19 cases and deaths and the discrimination being faced by people suspected to have caught the virus. Yet, as we physically distance ourselves from one another, people have come together in the most extraordinary ways to go the extra mile and lend a hand. Across India, instances abound of people trying to do what they can to help each other. Despite the scary scenario thrown up by the Corona pandemic, hope stayed afloat as people found compassion for each other and women reached out to the sororities and collectives for comfort.

From Anuradha Mascarenhas documenting how a vision-impaired Zainab Kamwala had used the lockdown to help other vision-impaired dyslexic women pick up reading to Mohini Singh documenting how the women in UP's 11 prisons have taken up mask making the stories highlight the positive and proactive response of the women to the pandemic. Tariq Mir's report on the way Kashmiri women are showing solidarity with each other in the troubled state where Corona has multiplied their problems, presents an incredibly powerful positive story of the indomitable human spirit.



Guiding online classes, social volunteering: How these visually-impaired women in Pune are taking the lockdown in their stride

Anuradha Mascarenhas

Indian Express

Pune, July 01, 2020

From teaching French to being in charge of bookshare.org, a project of Benetech firm, 50-year-old Zainab Kamwalla, who is visually impaired, has utilised the three-month lockdown period to help many print disabled people (those who struggle to read print due to a disability) with dyslexia and cerebral palsy 'read' the books the way they want to. She, along with her firm, also helped ensure that students with reading barriers at government and private schools were not affected academically by the lockdown, and could attend online classes along with sighted students.

Motivating herself to be positive, Rina Patil (36), an official with Bank of Baroda, takes part in several social initiatives. During the lockdown, she helped volunteers with a charitable foundation serve tea at petrol pumps and police chowkis. "What was particularly satisfying was along with volunteers, we were able to reunite a 65-year-old man, who was suffering from amnesia and had been walking for seven days on the road, with his family. I can't see but I could sense the... relief of the family when they found their father," says Rina.

When she was 13, visually-challenged Suvidha Waghmare told her father she wanted to study in Pune and earn enough money to support her family. She left Nanded to pursue her studies and is today a software tester at HSBC global software development in Pune. Suvidha, who stays with flatmates in the city, not only carved out a new life for herself but at 23, has utilised the time during the lockdown to work from home, learn new skills online and pay college fees for her sister, who is doing her Masters in Botany.

There are at least 1.5 crore visually-impaired persons in India and out of 10, four are learning disabled. The lockdown is particularly hard for them as the sense of touch is important to feel their way around. Physical and social distancing due to the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have become a challenge as people are scared to even help the visually challenged crossroads due to the fear of virus transmission.

Some visually-challenged women like Rina and Zainab have, however, taken the crisis in their stride.

"Initially, I was flustered as I travel a lot, but these three months of lockdown have kept me super active," says Zainab, who is in charge bookshare.org, an online library for people with a print disability that operates out of 94 countries and has 8.91 lakh books in various categories.

"The e-library is close to my heart... I still remember how, during my younger days, I had to strain to see the fine print and bring the book so close to my eyes, but in vain," she says. An avid technology user, the use of software made it simpler to open up a wide variety of textbooks, bestsellers, children's books, career

resources, and more for people with reading barriers, Zainab says, adding that during the lockdown, they especially ensured that visually-challenged students should be able to access information provided during school's online classes. "We used special software so that these students could follow the teacher's instructions online," she said.

Rina, who hails from a farmer's family in Sangli district, decided to make Pune her base and stays alone in the city. While she worked from home during the lockdown, she also decided to help volunteers with the foundation and travelled with them to areas like Swargate and Hadapsar.

"My family back home was scared and told me not to venture out but like others, I have a sanitiser, a mask and this is my way of telling the visually-challenged not to be afraid. I have a cane that guides me and during this crisis, several persons have also helped with groceries and vegetables," she said.

Says Suvidha, "During the lockdown, I went back to Nanded. As my office has allowed me to work from home for another three months, I am also utilising the time to learn new skills," adding that there was no time to feel depressed or anxious. "The pandemic is not going to last forever and there is no need to get so scared," she says.

Yasmin Beig, 34, said dealing with her blindness has not been a major issue. Hailing from Solapur, she studied at Fergusson College and works as an independent cosmetic jewellery salesperson. Her husband, who is also visually challenged, has yet to be called back to work at his company, where he is engaged in packing material.

With two partially-sighted children, Yasmin admits that at times she feels dejected but then feels hopeful again, and is confident of finding a silver lining during these tough times.



यूपी की 11 जेलों में बंद 70 महिला कैदी मिलकर बना रही मास्क

UP ki 11 jelon mein band 70 mahila kaidi milkar banaa rahi mask

Mohini Singh
Navbharat Times
Lucknow, April 21, 2020

समाज भले ही महिलाओं को जिम्मेदारियां देने से हिचकिचाता रहा है, लेकिन वह खुद ही आगे आती रही हैं। कोरोना से जंग में बराबर की हिस्सेदारी निभा कर आधा आबादी ने इसे प्रमाण के साथ पेश भी कर दिया है। देश में चाहे पहली कोरोना टेस्ट किट बनानी हो या फिर कोरोना ग्रसित देश से भारतीयों को वापस लाना हो। चाहे कोरोना की स्क्रीनिंग के लिए जाकर लोगों के गुस्से का शिकार होना पड़ा हो या फिर अपनी जिम्मेदारी को निभाते हुए लोगों से लॉकडाउन और सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग का पालन करवाना हो। महिलाएं अपने-अपने क्षेत्र में काम कर रही हैं।

इन सबके बीच उन महिलाओं का जिक्र भी लाजिमी है जो खुद तो चारदीवारी में कैद हैं, लेकिन लोगों की सुरक्षा के बारे में सोचकर उनके लिए काम कर रही हैं। जेल में सजायाफ्ता महिला कैदी कैसे कोरोना के खिलाफ छिड़ी जंग में शामिल हुईं, पढ़ें पूरी रिपोर्ट:

कानपुर की किरण पति की हत्या के आरोप में आजीवन कारावास की सजा काट रही हैं। पेशे से सरकारी शिक्षिका किरण बच्चों को विज्ञान पढ़ाती थीं, लेकिन ज़िंदगी में बिगड़े समीकरणों ने किरण को जेल की सलाखों के पीछे पहुंचा दिया। लखनऊ स्थित नारी बंदी निकेतन में जान लेने के अपराधबोध के साथ सजा पूरे होने के दिन गिन रही किरण को कोरोना त्रासदी ने एक मौका दिया दूसरों की मदद करने का। कोरोना संक्रमण से लोगों को बचाने के लिए किरण जेल में सजा काट रही दूसरी महिला कैदियों के साथ मास्क तैयार कर रही हैं। किरण अकेली नहीं हैं। यूपी की 11 जेलों में उनके जैसी 70 और महिलाएं हैं, जो लोगों को कोरोना संक्रमण से बचाने के लिए मास्क तैयार कर रही हैं।

जेल अधीक्षिका दे रही मास्क बनाने का प्रशिक्षण

नारी बंदी निकेतन की अधीक्षिका नयनतारा बनर्जी खुद ही बंदियों को मास्क बनाने का प्रशिक्षण दे रही हैं। उन्होंने बताया कि उन्होंने मास्क बनाने के लिए उन कैदियों को चुना जिन्होंने खुद से इसे बनाने की इच्छा जताई। हर महिला कैदी को उसकी पसंद के काम में लगा रखा है। वर्तमान में नारी बंदी निकेतन में आठ महिला कैदी हैं जो मास्क बनाने के काम में लगी हैं। दिनभर में ये जितने मास्क बना पाती हैं, बनाती हैं। करीब 300 मास्क रोजाना बन ही जाते हैं। मात्र पांच रुपये की कीमत में ये मास्क तैयार हो रहे हैं।

यहां बंद 215 महिला बंदियों, जेल स्टाफ और उनके परिवार के लोग इन्हीं मास्क को इस्तेमाल कर रहे हैं। कुछ अस्पतालों ने मास्क सप्लाई के लिए संपर्क किया है। नयनतारा बनर्जी ने बताया कि बंदी किरण मास्क बनाने वाली महिलाओं को सुपरवाइज कर रही है। आजीवन कारावास की सजा काट रही आगरा की मित्रा, मुरादाबाद की प्रियंका राना, कानपुर की गुड़िया, सहारनपुर की नाजो, बिहार की पूनम और इलाहाबाद निवासी पूनम किरण का साथ दे रही हैं। मित्रा कहती हैं कि हमने सुना है कि बाजार में मास्क न होने की वजह से लोग परेशान हो रहे हैं। जिन दुकानों में मिल भी रहे हैं। वहां इन्हें ज्यादा कीमत पर बेचा जा रहा है। असमर्थ लोग उसे खरीद नहीं पा रहे हैं। हमारे बनाए मास्क तो कम कीमत में ही लोगों तक पहुंचाए जा रहे हैं। इसलिए हमारी कोशिश है कि हम ज्यादा से ज्यादा मास्क तैयार करें।

सैनिटरी नैपकिन भी कर रहीं तैयार

नारी बंदी निकेतन एकमात्र ऐसी जेल है जहां सैनिटरी नैपकिन भी तैयार किए जा रहे हैं। एनटी बनर्जी ने बताया कि मास्क के साथ जेल में सैनिटरी नैपकिन भी तैयार किए जा रहे हैं। कानपुर की स्वयंसेवी संस्था ने अक्टूबर 2018 में सैनिटरी नैपकिन की मशीन लगवाई गई थी। संस्था की संचालिका मनीषा बाजपेई ने यहां सजा काट रही करीब 25 महिलाओं को नैपकिन बनाने का प्रशिक्षण दिलवाया। कैदी मित्रा इन महिलाओं का सुपरविजन करती है।

मनीषा बाजपेई ने बताया कि बंदियों को नैपकिन निर्माण से जोड़ने के लिए काफी मशक्कत करनी पड़ी। उन्हें मोटिवेट करना पड़ा। उनके लिए सेमिनार करवाए। यह भी बताया कि यह उनके लिए एक मौका लोगों की मदद करने का। इस काम का फायदा सबसे ज्यादा लॉकडाउन में दिख रहा है। इन महिला कैदियों के बनाए सैनिटरी नैपकिन हम मलिन बस्तियों की महिलाओं तक पहुंचा रहे हैं। हाल ही में संस्था ने 51 हजार सैनिटरी नैपकिन प्रशासन की मदद से मलिन बस्तियों की महिलाओं को मुहैया करवाए हैं। इसके साथ ही जेल में बंद महिला बंदियों को भी इन्हीं नैपकिन की सप्लाई की जा रही है। जेल में बने नैपकिन को ज्यादा से ज्यादा लोगों तक पहुंचाने की कवायद भी चल रही है। ताकि जेल में सजा काट रही महिला बंदी स्वावलंबी बने।

यूपी की जेलों में हर दिन बन रहे 20 हजार मास्क

यूपी की जेलों में हर दिन करीब 20 हजार मास्क तैयार किए जा रहे हैं। सोमवार शाम तक जेलों में 7 लाख 98 हजार 33 मास्क तैयार हो चुके थे। इस संख्या तक पहुंचने में 11 जेलों में बंद 70 महिला बंदियों की भी अहम भूमिका है। डीजी जेल आनन्द कुमार कहते हैं कि कोरोना ने जब देश में पांव पसारने शुरू ही किए थे तभी जेल विभाग ने इसकी भयानकता को भांप लिया था।

बाजार में मास्क, सैनिटाइजर, पीपीई किट की कमी की आशंका को भांपते हुए बंदियों को प्रशिक्षण दिलवाकर इनका निर्माण शुरू कर दिया गया था। अपराधबोध से ग्रसित बंदियों ने बीते कुछ दिनों में दूसरों की जान बचाने के लिए जिस युद्ध स्तर से मास्क, सैनिटाइजर और पीपीई किट तैयार की है वह सराहनीय है।



रेड जोन में उम्मीदों का ग्रीन सिग्नल फीमेल फाइटर्स

Red zone mein ummeedon ka green signal female fighters

Mohini Singh
Navbharat Times
Lucknow, May 30, 2020

शहर का तब्दील होना शाद रहना और उदास रौनकें जितनी यहां हैं औरतों के दम से हैं। ये चंद लाइनें महिलाओं की शख्सियत को बखूबी बयां करती हैं। कोरोना संकट में जिस तरह महिलाएं आगे आकर काम कर रही हैं, उसे अनदेखा नहीं किया जा सकता है। एक तरफ जहां कोरोना से हर कोई खौफजदा है, वहीं शहर में तमाम लड़कियां और महिलाएं ऐसी हैं, जो लोगों और जानवरों के लिए रेड जोन में उम्मीदों का ग्रीन सिग्नल हैं। खुद को रिस्क पर रखकर ये लोगों की मदद कर रही हैं। चाहे जरूरतमंदों तक खाने का सामान पहुंचाना हो या फिर ग्रामीण और स्लम एरिया में महिलाओं को सैनेटरी पैड उपलब्ध करवाना हो। कहीं फ्रंट लाइन वर्कर तो कहीं मददगार बनकर ये इस संकट की घड़ी में लोगों के काम आ रही हैं।

फोन से लोगों तक पहुंचा रही मदद

चौक के सरकट नाला के पास मीर अनीस का मकबरा लखनऊ के रेड जोन में आता है। यहां रहने वाली समरीन फातिमा और मंताशा बानो सगी बहनें हैं। दोनों ही बहनें यूपी 112 में कॉलटेकर का काम करती हैं। इनका एरिया हॉट स्पॉट की सूची में आया तो इनके लिए मुख्यालय जाना मुश्किल हो गया। चाहती तो दोनों बहनें घर पर बैठ सकती थीं लेकिन उन्होंने वर्क फ्रॉम होम का फैसला लिया। एडीजी यूपी 112 असीम अरुण ने दोनों बहनों के घर से काम करने के लिए सिस्टम उपलब्ध कराए। दोनों बहनें अलग-अलग शिफ्ट में ड्यूटी कर लोगों तक मदद पहुंचा रही हैं। फिर चाहे वो नोएडा में लॉकडाउन में फंसा भूख से बिलखता परिवार हो या घर पहुंचने के लिए पुलिस की मदद चाह रहा कोई प्रवासी। लॉकडाउन और कोरोना के चलते यूपी 112 पर आने वाली कॉल्स का बोझ 75 से 90 प्रतिशत तक बढ़ गया। समरीन और मंताशा के मुताबिक, उन्हें दिन में 400-400 से ज्यादा कॉल्स अटैंड करनी पड़ रही हैं। पहले इन कॉल्स का औसत 150 से 200 तक रहता था, लेकिन दोनों ही बहनें पूरे संयम के साथ लोगों की मदद कर रही हैं।

यूपी 112 में ही तैनात शगुन तिवारी ने घरेलू हिंसा का शिकार होकर खुदकुशी करने जा रही महिला की जान भी बचाई। सूझबूझ से पहले महिला को बातों में उलझाया। इसके साथ ही पीआरवी को भी उसकी मदद के लिए भेजा।

112में तैनात कम्युनिकेशन ऑफिसर-642

वर्क फ्रॉम होम पर कम्युनिकेशन ऑफिसर-142

मार्च से अब तक मदद के लिए आई कॉल्स- 16 लाख 22 हजार 704

कोरोना से रिलेटेड मदद के आई कॉल्स- 5 लाख 82 हजार 316

सिर पर राशन लादकर घरों तक पहुंचाया

घर-घर राशन पहुंचाना हो या फिर क्वारंटीन सेंटर में रहकर लोगों की देखभाल करनी हो। फ्रंट लाइन वर्कर्स में शामिल आंगनबाड़ी वर्कर्स अपनी जिम्मेदारी बखूबी निभा रही हैं। आंगनबाड़ी कर्मचारी यूनियन की प्रदेश अध्यक्ष वीना गुप्ता ने बताया कि पूरे प्रदेश में करीब चार लाख आंगनबाड़ी वर्कर काम कर रही हैं। लॉकडाउन के दौरान इन्हें 48 घंटे में 84 घरों में राशन पहुंचाने का टॉस्क दिया गया। यातायात के साधन उपलब्ध नहीं होने के बाद भी मुश्किल की इस घड़ी में इन लोगों ने पैदल जा-जाकर घरों तक राशन पहुंचाया। गोंडा के क्वारंटीन सेंटर में तैनात शोभा देवी ने बताया कि उन्हें बिना किसी ट्रेनिंग और सुरक्षा का सामान दिए क्वारंटीन सेंटर में लोगों की देखरेख के लिए लगाया गया है। हालांकि की अपनी सुरक्षा को लेकर वह खुद सजग हैं और मास्क, ग्लव्स और सैनिटाइजर का इस्तेमाल कर करती हैं। शोभा बताती हैं कि क्वारंटीन सेंटर में लोगों की मदद कर अच्छा तो लगता है, लेकिन डर भी लगा रहता है। घर में छोटा बच्चा है बुजुर्ग हैं, जिनकी फ्रिक हमेशा रहती है, इसलिए घर के अंदर नहीं जाती। घर के आंगन में ही बने कमरे में रहती हूं। शोभा की तरह ही सलमा भी लोगों की मदद में जुटी हैं। सलमा कहती हैं कि उन्हें नौ घंटे का काम दिया गया है। कुछ समय पहले तक वह क्वारंटीन सेंटर में तैनात थीं। अब आंगनबाड़ी सेंटर पर

गर्भवतियों और बच्चों का टीकाकरण करवा रही हैं। साथ ही खद्यान्न वितरण का काम कर रही हैं। सलमा कहती हैं कि लॉकडाउन के दौरान हमने सिर पर दस-दस किलो की बोरी रखकर घरों तक पैदल पहुंचाई हैं। इस संकट की घड़ी में हम किसी के काम आएंगे इससे अच्छा और हमारे लिए क्या हो सकता है।

कैप लगाकर बांट रहीं सैनिटरी पैड

लॉकडाउन में जहां महिलाओं के बड़े तबके को घर और खाने के लिए संघर्ष करना पड़ रहा है वहीं इन्हें पीरियड्स के दौरान सैनिटरी पैड न होने से भी कई परेशानियां झेलनी पड़ रही हैं। खास तौर से स्लम एरिया और ग्रामीण इलाकों में रहने वाली लड़कियों व महिलाओं को। मेडिकल स्टोर्स खुले हैं लेकिन लॉकडाउन के दौरान इनके लिए वहां तक पहुंचना ही मुमकिन नहीं। इस समस्या को दूर करने के लिए नगर निगम की ओर से अपर आयुक्त अर्चना द्विवेदी ने भी शहरभर में करीब 35 हजार सैनिटरी पैड बांटवाए। अर्चना बताती हैं कि इसके लिए नगर निगम की ओर से छह सखी वैन चलाई गईं, जिसमें 18 लड़कियों ने शहर के हर स्लम एरिया में महिलाओं, लड़कियों को सैनिटरी पैड उपलब्ध करवाए। अर्चना ने बताया कि हमने एक हेल्पलाइन नंबर 7905323611 भी जारी किया है, जिस पर करीब 300 महिलाओं ने कॉल करके सैनिटरी पैड की मांग की। ऐसे ही एलडा फाउंडेशन की डॉ पूजा अहमद शहर के उन तमाम इलाकों में सैनिटरी पैड बांट रही है जहां इनकी बहुत जरूरत है। फाउंडेशन की संचालिका पूजा लड़कियों के लिए ऑनलाइन वर्कशॉप भी कर रही हैं। उन्होंने बताया कि जो लड़कियां शहर के मदरसों में रह गई हैं और घर नहीं जा पाई हैं, उन्हें भी सैनिटरी पैड उपलब्ध करवाए गए हैं। वहीं, दूसरे शहरों से अपने शहरों को जा रहीं प्रवासी महिला मजदूरों को भी कैप लगाकर हम सैनिटरी पैड दे रहे हैं।

हर रोज 250 से 300 स्ट्रीट डॉग्स को खिला रहीं खाना

कोरोना और लॉकडाउन जितनी परेशानी इंसानों के लिए लाया है, उससे उतनी ही तकलीफ पशुओं को भी हो रही है। लॉकडाउन के चलते रेस्त्रां, होटल, ढाबे, धार्मिक स्थलों के बंद होने और लोगों के बाहर न निकलने से सड़कों पर घूमने वाले पशुओं को खाना नहीं मिल पा रहा है। ऐसे में सेंट फ्रांसिस स्कूल में पढ़ाने वाली शिक्षिका कॉर्लेन बॉर्गस स्ट्रीट डॉग्स के लिए बड़ा सहारा हैं। वह शहर के अलग-अलग इलाकों में जाकर हर रोज 250 से 300 स्ट्रीट डॉग्स को खाना खिला रही हैं। कॉर्लेन कहती हैं कि वह रोज सप्रू मार्ग, नवल किशोर मार्ग, शाहनजफ रोड, जनपथ मार्केट सहित शहर के दूसरे इलाकों में स्ट्रीट डॉग्स को खाना खिलाने जाती हैं। बीमार डॉग्स को खाने के साथ दवा और मल्टी विटमिन, कैल्शियम की टैबलेट भी देती हूँ। कॉर्लेन बताती हैं कई रोड ऐक्सिडेंट का शिकार हुए स्ट्रीट डॉग्स का भी उन्होंने इलाज डॉक्टर से करवाया। शहर की अलंकृता भी स्ट्रीट डॉग्स के लिए काम कर रही हैं। रोजाना करीब एक हजार रुपये का खाना तैयार कर वे शहर के अलग-अलग हिस्सों में जाकर डॉगीज को खिलाती हैं। अलंकृता कहती हैं कि डॉगीज को खाना नहीं मिलता जिससे वे रोते हैं।



Adversity brings emotional closeness

Tariq Ali Mir

Kashmir Uzma

Srinagar, August 27, 2020

Nations or the people who are caught up in prolonged violence and bloodshed, generally lose connection with their social and human values, as the enduring hostilities and violence naturally draw its negative impact on the social structures of these conflict-ridden regions or countries.

However, in the case of Kashmir, adversities have brought people of this region emotionally closer to each other. Whenever an individual or a family falls prey to some untoward situation, people around immediately come along with a helping hand. Kashmiris have succeeded to uphold their centuries-old solidarity traditions, even in the worst times.

When the Corona pandemic knocked at their doors in March, this year, people including womenfolk started coming up to help each other to tackle the public-health crisis with unity. In this regard, there are numerous examples to share.

Take this woman from central Kashmir's Budgam District: Nadia Mushtaq, a 31-year-old professional calligrapher. Nadia has graduated in Humanities and then had a master's degree in economics from Kashmir University. However, she decided to pursue her passion for calligraphy as her profession. She has been learning calligraphy, art, designing, sketching, and drawing since her childhood.

Before Covid hit Kashmir, Nadia had started earning name and fame in the field of art. She had worked for many clients from abroad. She had got several online orders from the UAE. She had also designed logos for some foreign companies. However, with the economic meltdown across the world due to the pandemic, Nadia suddenly lost scope for building her career as an art designer and a calligrapher.

She says, "As soon as the Covid lockdown started in late March, I decided to forget about my career and started work to help the society in these tough times. I decided to encourage my people in these depressing times through my art."

She drew some verses from the Holy Quran, on patience, human bonds, and humanity and then shared these verses through social media. "When I shared these encouraging verses from the holy book, I got tremendous feedback from the people. I continued calligraphy and sharing such verses. I am doing it daily. It gives me strength and many people have told me that my work helped them to be strong in these tough times," Nadia told this reporter. She added, "In an abnormal situation, our priorities get changed. Before corona hit our society, I was trying hard to make my career through my artistic skills. However, now I am always trying to help my family and the whole society in these testing times."

During this pandemic, Nadia also attended several 'virtual museum exhibitions' and displayed her work there. She sent out messages of patience and faith in God through her calligraphic words. She says, "Calligraphy and designing is my profession. My career is related to it. I earn out of this profession but I do not work to earn money these days. My only goal is to help people through my art. I believe that in times of pandemic, we need to be united and fight the circumstances with unity."

Nadia is not the only Kashmiri woman who is using her skills to help the people during this pandemic. There are many more belonging to different fields.

Rubeena, a poetess from Rajouri, penned down many Urdu poems giving messages like how to tackle the adversities of Covid. She believes that God is angry with people, because of their 'bad deeds'.

She says pandemics, natural-disaster, and catastrophe causing panic, fear, anger, sadness, confusion, and despair are signs of God's anger with people. She says, "Through my poetry, I try to make people understand that we need to change for good deeds. This is the only topic I write on, these days."

Many other poets have also written verses on the pandemic. Parveen Azad, a famous Kashmiri singer, has sung many of them.

Parveen says, "The pandemic has impacted every aspect of our lives. I deliberately have sung poems and songs on Covid. Some of them got popular on social media networks. Most of these songs were inspiring. People forwarded these songs to each other."

During the Covid lockdown, a group of female theatre artists also got active to entertain people in these depressing times. 'Actors creative theatre' headed by a noted artist and filmmaker Mushtaq Ali Ahmad Khan, took an initiative to organize online plays during the lockdown. Many Kashmiri girls voluntarily contributed to executing this creative way of entertaining the masses. Tamweel Khan, Shaheena Mahajan, Ulfat Lone, Rabia Chaudry are some of these girls.

Rabia says, "In the early days of the lockdown, we started getting depressed. Everyone around seems to be in sadness. Then, and there we decided to start organizing online to remain busy to entertain people through our art."

Kashmiri womenfolk belonging to different fields played an exemplary role to help society remain lively during this pandemic. Particularly, women belonging to the health and education sectors, left no stone unturned to help the people in these miserable days.

It is pertinent to mention that Kashmir was already under a government-imposed lockdown for six months when covid started spreading here. Curfew, telecommunication blockade, and internet ban was imposed here on August 5, last year, when the central government abrogated the special status and the statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

(Translated from Urdu)



G. Programme Implementation

When the first nationwide lockdown was announced by the Government of India due to the rising coronavirus cases, the country witnessed a dearth of masks and sanitisers caused due to panic buying and confusion. On the other hand, millions of Indians had started migrating back home after losing their livelihoods in big cities. Amidst all this, hundreds of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) across India rose to the occasion to help the country fight the pandemic, and also employ people who lost their jobs.

Just like most other disasters in the world, the Coronavirus pandemic too has had a differential impact on men and women. The 2014 Ebola virus and the 2015 Zika virus outbreaks have also proved that women are more vulnerable than men in various ways, which reinforced the persisting gender inequity concerns, especially for the developing world.

At a time when supply chain disruptions in medical products have largely hindered women's menstrual and reproductive health in India, they have been the majority amongst the Covid-19 warriors across the world. 70% of the world's healthcare and social workers are women. In India, estimates show that qualified female healthcare workers account for almost half of the country's health force and are among the more vulnerable groups - women account for a staggering 88.8% of trained nurses and midwives.

Women's bigger role in the healthcare sector in India makes them the frontline staff in the ongoing war against Covid-19 and exposes them to this deadly disease in a multitude of ways. As the collateral damage seems to be lopsided, women across India play a seminal role in plugging the medical supply disruptions as well. Indian self-help groups (SHGs) dominated by women have contributed towards the production of masks, sanitisers, and protective gear to meet the burgeoning demands of the health sector.

Ninglun Hanghal looked at how Manipuri women were helping plug food supply gaps in the state. During the lockdown, the role and contribution of women became even more prominent and visible. It was in this time of crisis that women, as individuals and collectives, came to the forefront ensuring food availability in their homes and to the general public. Hanghal's report on how women learnt to cope with and work around the closure of women's markets like Nupi Keithel - the historic women market in the heart of state capital Imphal - talks of the women's grit to keep it going despite challenges and hardships. Most of these markets sell handicrafts and weaves created by women and hence their closure has hit the women artisans too. But they do not want to lose hope.

They are just like the Kashmiri women entrepreneurs whose young ventures have run into choppy waters due to the pandemic and the lockdown. But Tariq Ali Mir writes of how they are struggling to keep them afloat and keep hopes of their ecosystem going.

Women plug food supply gaps during pandemic lockdown

Ninglun Hanghal
The Sangai Express
Imphal, August 07, 2020

When nutrition specialist-turned-entrepreneur Vedmani Kshetrimayum wears a mask and heads to her farm early morning and collects vegetables, little does she know how significantly her efforts are plugging the food supply gaps in Manipur.

The struggle to contain the Coronavirus pandemic has led to a shortage of food and essential commodities. In Manipur, which is heavily dependent on supplies from the subcontinent, it is a hard time.

During the national lockdown, both internal and external supply chains were severely impaired as inter-and intra-state transport services stopped. Even as the lockdown eases, food supply chains continue to be affected.

For people in Manipur, it is a common sight to see women selling vegetables and other food products across the state, be it in the tribal hills or, non-tribal areas of the Imphal valley. During the lockdown, the role and contribution of women became even more prominent and visible. It is in this time of crisis that women, as individuals and collectives, are at the forefront of ensuring food availability in their homes and to the general public at large.

Finding Means to Get Farm Products

Kshetrimayum is now a vegetable supplier in Imphal west. Every morning, Kshetrimayum sets out to the farmstead in rural Imphal to collect fresh vegetables and bring them to the city in her car. She also picks up products from farmers and middlemen who are unable to transport the produce to the city, either due to lockdown or the nonavailability of vehicles. These vegetables were further provided to women vendors and also sold out in the localities by Kshetrimayum herself.

“As a food entrepreneur, I am privileged to get a curfew pass so I can move around,” said Vedmani. She utilized her advantage to the maximum benefit of the general public. Kshetrimayum founded Vedam Agro Enterprise, an all-women venture initiated in 2014 dealing in food processing and marketing, mainly fruit products and spices.

Presently Kshetrimayum’s enterprise has temporarily stopped work. She said, “At the moment we discontinued collection and processing as we are not sure of the market.” Since raw material, mainly fruits, are perishable it is not advisable to stock up, while dry fruit products or pickles were not in much demand, observed Kshetrimayum.

Disruption in Demand-Supply Chain

The food business is not simply about collecting vegetables, crops, fruit from farmers and suppliers, selling it, or processing it. It involves a whole network, supply chain, transport, and most of all in a state like Manipur, it largely depends on the vagaries of nature.

About 45km away from Imphal, a group of women at Wangjing under Thoubal district also had to shut down operations during the peak fruit season. They shut down because of labour constraints and the absence of transport due to the lockdown.

They work under the brand “Heijing -Eikhoigee Mahao” in food processing and production. Nonibala Narengbam who created the brand said they were unable to stock up raw material. “Right now (May through August) is pineapple and mango season, but it is almost over now so that means we will not have any resources for processing for the next phase”. Narengbam is worried that her team will have no products for sale for a long time.

Another major hindrance in the food chain network is the unavailability of public transport and inter-district communication being cut off. “For instance, our mango comes from the interiors of Chandel district. Either our suppliers cannot reach us or we cannot go there,” said Narengbam.

Narengbam and her team somehow manage to sell their previous stock during the few hours of lockdown relaxation. Heijing’s annual income in a normal year is about Rs6 to 8 lakh but 2020 is going to be bad.

Finding an Alternative

As supplies of food and essential items are hard hit, a variety of locally processed food products are in huge demand, particularly in urban areas. Several small scale food enterprises, mostly women groups, are working hard to ensure food reaches their customers.

At Elangbam Leikai in Imphal, a group of about 20 women continue their work even during the lockdown. A unit of Meira Foods— one of the popular food processing and marketing enterprises in Manipur, run and managed by women, the staff was even tighter than before, as demand rose. The coordinator and manager of the unit Sunanda said that three or four staff who hail from far distance stay put at the processing centre as the movement of people is restricted. “Even during lockdown we work as usual - from 10 am to 5 pm,” she said.

In the first phase of lockdown relaxation, all stock at Meira Foods was sold out. “There is a lot of demand for dry fruit, pickles, bamboo shoots,” explained Sunanda. “But the concern is about wholesale, which is yet to pick up,” said Sunanda asserting that they ensure there is no unreasonable price rise of their products. However, Sunanda reasoned that since prices of ingredients such as sugar or spices which are imported have gone up, there was a need to raise prices for their products too.

Meira Foods have tied up with several home delivery services in the city, who deliver products to the customers’ doorstep. Moreover, since some of their production units are in the vicinity of the city it offered an advantage. People around the neighbourhood and home-based grocery shops and retailers collect their products for sale.

“The first two weeks of the lockdown was a difficult time,” said Subhra Devi, founder and proprietor of Meira Foods. Eventually, as the lockdown eased, farmers from nearby villages came on their bicycles or carried products in cycle-rickshaws. But not all farmers could reach the towns and cities due to the unavailability of transport and restriction on inter-district movements. “Since my farm supplies are from remote hills, there was no way they could bring it down to Imphal. For example, we missed the collection of pineapples, which come from interior Churachandpur district, nearly 100 km from Imphal,” said Subhra. “It will be a loss of about two tons of pineapples or maybe even more in this single season,” estimated Subhra.

This gave rise to seeking out more alternatives. Even as some of the product sales are redundant, such as candy or chips, essential food products became a huge hit. Subhra said that they came up with an idea focussing on essential food items, like gram flour or besan and besan products. The new product line includes bori (or baree) which has a longer shelf life. “This is dry and lasts longer making it a good idea for the lockdown,” said Subhra, mentioning its nutritional value as well.

Women: The Backbone of Food Security

In rural and semi-urban areas of Manipur, families own a backyard garden or farmsteads that sustain them. These gardens or farms are the woman’s domain. In tribal hill areas, women work side by side with the men in terrace or Jhum cultivation. They collect forest produce, such as bamboo shoots or varieties of edible leaves for family consumption and to be sold in local markets.

Women in Manipur engage in some form of economic activity or other. Agriculture and food business is an important engagement. Women are involved in the entire gamut of activities from the preparation of fields for cultivation, sowing, weeding, harvesting, preserving seeds, collecting the produce, selling and preparing food for consumption. In the current context, they are part of food processing and marketing as well. Except for ploughing in permanent and terrace fields or clearing areas for jhum cultivation, the whole process is largely dependent on women. According to Manipur’s Economic Survey 2019-2020 the agriculture sector contributes a major share to the total State Domestic Product (SDP).

In the agriculture sector, more than 80% of women are involved directly or indirectly, said Devdutta Sharma, project director of Manipur Organic Mission Agency. Acknowledging the contribution and the role of women in food production, Sharma said, “Without women, the agriculture and horticulture sectors will be a total failure.” The significant role is evident in the success stories created by women and women self-help groups.

Statistics

There is enough evidence that women form the backbone of Manipur’s economic life. According to the Manipur Economic Survey 2019-2020, the percentage of the female workforce is at 43.3%. It records a total of 3.59 lakh women as main workers, of which 1,85,617 (51.70%) are cultivators, 21,075 (5.87 %) agricultural labourers whereas the remaining 1,52,347 (42.43%) are engaged in manufacturing, processing, servicing and household industries. A total of 8,52,006 of them are classified as “non-workers”.

Women’s work is mostly categorised in the informal sector. They form a large base of the workforce that engages in traditional modes of production and means of economy, such as agriculture and allied sectors. Food production and food business, which engages the largest number of women, still forms the non-formal economy.



Manipur women weave success in the pandemic warp

Ninglun Hanghal

The Sangai express

Imphal, September 04, 2020

At her modest home in Thangmeiband in the Imphal West district, a sling handbag hanging on her shoulder 74-year-old Ima Radhesana anxiously moves about in her courtyard, answering distress calls.

Ima, the word for “mother” in Meiteilon, is a go-to person for scores of women as she is coordinating the submission of names for vendors’ loans announced by Manipur Chief Minister, N Biren Singh. She is constantly answering distressed calls from the women vendors of Nupi Keithel, inquiring about the status of the Covid-19 lockdown.

She is the president of the Khwairamband Nupi Keithel Sempat Sagatpa Lup, popularly known as Nupi Keithel– the historic women market in the heart of state capital Imphal.

Spread across two square kilometres or more the Nupi Keithel stands quiet and desolate, devoid of any activity due to the lockdown. The women market is the biggest and largest commercial hub in Manipur. Thousands of women carry out trade and marketing of locally made products there.

With the threat of the Coronavirus, Nupi Keithel and adjoining areas have been heavily cordoned and strictly monitored. Yellow iron barricades and policemen are seen around the market most of the day. Along the same lines of Nupi Keithel are the women markets in all the district headquarters of Manipur, such as Nute Bazaar in Churachandpur, Ava market in Ukhrul, Rani Gaidinliu market in Tamenglong, Apfii Saliki market in Senapati.

All these women’s markets, in a way the defining feature of small trade dominated by women across the hills and vale of Manipur, are shut due to the pandemic.

Over the months the women’s markets continue to be excluded from the periodic announcements on relaxation in the lockdown. It is probably going to be the last of the markets to be opened to the public.

“We are very vulnerable,” said Radhesana, explaining that at Nupi Keithel Covid-19 preventive guidelines would be impossible to follow. “Ours is a close-knit market, we sit together and it is crowded,” said the Keithel president.

Shutting down the women’s market has put the women vendors out of gear. Ima said that most of the women are the main breadwinners of the family and are facing a huge challenge. “One-day closure of the market is a huge blow for us,” she said.

There are about 7000 registered vendors in the Nupi Keithel. In normal circumstances, a vendor on average makes between 500 – 1000 rupees per day. That is an estimated loss of Rs 70 lakh every day and a loss in the economic activity of a whopping Rs 105 crore at the end of five months of lockdown.

Along with the registered vendors, there is an equal number of women engaging in small trade in the vicinity daily, alongside the road. It is difficult to estimate the quantum of their trade losses but does not require much to imagine their pain.

Nupi Keithel is a place where a large number of traditional handlooms and handicrafts are marketed. Sarongs, shawls, mufflers, jewellery, crafts, organic food products, and various other local products of different hues and colours are all available under one roof.

Ima Radhesana deals in handlooms. Her weavers are from remote villages and she is facing a hard time. She said that weavers could not procure the all-essential yarn as the shops remained closed so there was no way they could bring their final products to her. "They are all from rural areas, so it is even more difficult to come since there is no transport," she said. "Even if they managed to bring to me I have nowhere to sell either."

Even as the lockdown continues, a patient Ima stays positive. "I hope and pray, this will pass someday," said Ima. "It is an age of science and it will not go on forever," she hopes.

On the other side of Covid-19, there is a new trend evolving. Weaving and looms are still very much part of the way of life of Manipur women. Even today almost every household in Manipur owns a loom, either loin or fly-shuttle. Many women who had quit weaving due to other vocations have gone back to weaving during the lockdown as they have time to engage in the activity. Reports from across different towns suggest that the limited yarn stocks have been exhausted.

New stocks of yarns are hard to come by as the supply chain has been severely impaired. It leaves a huge shortfall because Manipur consumes an estimated 8.64 million meters of handloom fabrics and one million kilograms of yarn per month, as per government figures.

The collection of traditional wear is one way of an investment or an asset for women in Manipur. Most importantly women's wear is passed on from mother to daughter. As a result, it is never out of fashion.

Women have adapted to shortages by walking the extra mile. "I do home delivery," said Mimi Mangsatabam, in her mid-50s, who has been weaving since her teens and has been in the handloom business for over 10 years. She said many women utilized the lockdown to focus on doing things that they could not do during other normal days. "They began to redecorate their homes, change curtains, get new cushion covers," observed Mangsatabam. That is how she managed to sell a lot of her collection.

Mangsatabam personally went door to door to the weavers. "They cannot come so I go to them to deliver the yarn and take their products. Then further deliver it to customers," she said. How did she move about? "I have a two-wheeler," she said. Since the weavers reside in suburban or rural areas, there is no hassle of social distancing norms as she moves alone during lockdown relaxation.

Talking about her weavers, Mangsatabam said that many of them are in a difficult time. She brought rations of rice, dal, potato, oil for her weavers and in turn, would come back with loom products.

"Fortunately, being in this sector for a long time, I have personal networks and contacts with outlets selling yarn. I also have my yarn stock and that's how I keep going in the lockdown," said Mangsatabam. She has around 35 active weavers and a network of about a hundred weavers who work on traditional loin looms and the more modern fly shuttle looms.

Many part-time weavers are said to be willing to offer their service for a lower wage. Meanwhile, a large number of handloom dealers have begun going online to start discount sales, attracting many customers.

The lockdown also paves the way for an innovative way of marketing to many women.

Under the brand My Loom Collection, Shanti Gurumayum and her daughter started online marketing on social media platforms and sold well.

“Quite a good response,” said Gurumayum “We offer a discount, that’s the USP.” Their products include sarees, phaneks, cushions, pillow covers. Once the items are selected and ordered by customers they deliver them to the doorstep. “Sometimes customers come home to get it on their own, especially when they think it might be sold out,” said Gurumayum.

Gurumayum has around 60 to 70 weavers working with her. At her home in Imphal East, she also conducts weaver training for young women. Recalling her younger days, Gurumayum said, from the moment she opened her eyes, she had seen her mother weaving. “I grew up with it,” she said.

Handloom and textiles are primary and secondary occupations for a large section of households. It is the largest cottage industry here and the second-highest employer in the state, next to agriculture.

Manipur is the second-largest handloom producer in India, Assam being the first. According to the All India Handloom Census 2019-2020, Ministry of Textile, Government of India, Manipur ranks third with 2.1 lakh weaver households— a third of who are in the cooperative fold - among the four states that account for 18 lakh weaver households in India. The other states are Assam with 10.9 lakh, West Bengal with 3.4 lakh, and Tamil Nadu with 1.7 lakh households.

94% of weavers in Manipur are women. The pandemic may have brought suffering but these women strive to weave their small success stories.



New women's business units under the pandemic

The virus destroyed the foundations of the initial projects

Tariq Ali Mir

belaag.com

Srinagar, August 09, 2020

When coronavirus first made its debut in Srinagar in mid-March, few people expected that this unknown and unseen enemy, like the rest of the world, would not only disrupt normal life in the entire valley but also give another blow to an already devastated economy.

Within the first few weeks, the medium-sized and gigantic commercial and industrial enterprises began to weaken and the foundations of the fledgling commercial units began to crumble. These new entities included the business units of hundreds of educated Kashmiri girls who had just begun to dream of a better future, by challenging the worn-out traditions of a conservative society. But the effects of the virus have not only shaken the foundations of these business units but also shaken the spirits of the enthusiastic girls seeking to establish them.

The victims include Farhat Amin, from a suburb of Srinagar. After earning a postgraduate degree in economics from the University of Kashmir, Farhat decided to set up her own business instead of looking for a job in a government or private company. After overcoming all sorts of difficulties in this regard, she opened a women's clothing store. In the last days of the year, Farhat hired several non-state artisans to produce the latest fashions and designs, as well as promoting her business on social networking sites.

Soon her shop started running. Many women not only started buying and getting clothes stitched from her for their daily use but also the demand for their specially designed clothes for wedding ceremonies and brides was gradually increasing.

Before this commercial unit of Farhat could move towards success, Corona lockdown shook it. Today, many months later, she still sees no way to get her business back on track. "In societies like ours, it is difficult for girls to do any unconventional business," she said. "But I did it, and got the approval and good wishes of not only my parents but also other relatives."

Not only that, Farhat had launched her dream project at the Women's Development Corporation after completing all the official formalities and a loan was released from a bank under a government scheme. She says the most disturbing thing is that now she doesn't even know when she will die from this invisible virus called the corona. She added, "Because of this situation, I feel helpless to make any decision about the future."

Stories similar to Farhat's are currently scattered across the valley. Twelve years ago, for the first time, the government introduced several schemes to make women self-sufficient in employment, and a special body,

the Center for Women Entrepreneurs, was set up to successfully implement them. However, due to the slow pace of information campaign, unfavourable conditions in the valley and many other reasons, in the early years, more women-related businesses could not be established here.

But in 2013, the government announced a “J&K Startup Policy” to support at least 500 new startups and to nurture their business. Several central schemes were also introduced and implemented.

Thanks to these schemes, educated young boys and girls had a rare opportunity to set up units in handicrafts, agriculture and various industries. The new start-ups were provided with comprehensive knowledge and training in related business sectors as well as facilities such as government investments and easy disbursement of loans. At the same time, the trend of educated Kashmiri girls taking advantage of government schemes to get their jobs has intensified.

Hundreds of educated Kashmiri girls in urban and rural areas have become self-sufficient in business activities such as Publishing, Printing, Garments, Healthcare, Paper Industry, Travel Agencies, Tourism, Restaurants, Food Supplies, Art, Sewing, Embroidery, Knitting etc. In this regard, institutions like the Jammu and Kashmir Entrepreneur Development Institute (EDI) and the Center for Women Entrepreneurs have done extraordinary and positive work with the participation of national banks. But most of the girls' commercial and industrial units were still in their infancy. As soon as they put top gears to their business, their activities were stalled and their hopes collapsed due to the pandemic

Artif Lone, EDI's public relations officer, says, “The pandemic has not only affected ongoing projects but has also seen hundreds of other girls make no progress in launching their small business units. In the last five months, a lot of new business projects for girls would have started, if there was no pandemic”

The girls' business units affected by the epidemic include 22-year-old Alia Wani (name changed) from Shopian. Alia had learned the art of embroidering Kashmiri women's traditional dress, Pheran and shirt Shalwar, at an early age. After graduation, she decided to do the same job with a machine and make it a source of employment for herself.

With the full support of her father, she set up a small factory in a part of her own house and installed several machines there. In this factory, Alia started embroidering women's garments in unique and attractive designs and also succeeded in getting work from different parts of her district by advertising her business through the internet.

But her project has also been affected by the pandemic. She says the number of visitors has been steadily declining since the outbreak. Talking to this correspondent, Alia said she was so enthusiastic about her business and wanted to expand her business. “We have now started a small trade in Georgette, Banarasi, Silk, Cotton and Chiffon garments for women,” she said. “In fact, I wanted to set up a unit where brides would be provided with all kinds of clothes as well as cosmetics, slippers and metal jewellery.”

“I wanted to create clothes with a specific design that highlights the colours of our rich culture. The whole outline of this business was clear in my mind and I was constantly thinking about it.” But nature had its own plans. At present, Alia's capital of lakhs of rupees and her months of hard work is at stake. She added, “I have not stopped the work but the problem is that the embroidery of wool and silk threads in the garments cannot be done in advance because usually, women buy clothes of the colour of their choice, that means my business can only flourish when the fear of the virus is completely eliminated, lockdown is over and people are out moving around freely and fearlessly.”

Surprisingly, even the successful commercial ventures of Kashmiri women from various professions could not remain unaffected. In this regard, the example of female journalist Chasfida Shah can be the best. Years ago, as soon as she set foot in the field of journalism, instead of working for a newspaper for a salary, she launched a magazine of her own. The English-language monthly 'Kashmir Scan' is popular in social and political circles. But how the virus affected her business!! She says: "After launching the magazine, for the first few years, the deal proved to be a consistent loss. But I made sure that it was published regularly. For the last few years, this magazine was proving to be a lucrative proposition as various commercial establishments started sending their advertisements for printing. But the lockdown imposed by the administration after August 5 last year badly affected the commercial aspect of the magazine. I don't know how long I will be able to bear the financial loss of my magazine."

In short, there are hundreds of such examples in the Valley, which show that in addition to the general trade and industrial deficit, the pandemic has hit women's small business units too.

Sheikh Ashiq, president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industries, says it will take years to make up for the loss. He says a year-long lockdown has hurt Kashmir's economy to the tune of Rs 40,000 crore.

In these general conditions of despair and frustration, there are happy stories too.

A few people have managed to change the course of difficulties even in these unfavourable conditions. In this regard, the example of 28-year-old Sadia Mufti is noteworthy. Sadia has been running a boutique in Jahangir Chowk, Srinagar for many years. Through her courage and hard work, she gradually started a successful business and gained fame. With the outbreak of the coronavirus in March, workers at her factory were shocked to see the situation and started thinking about returning to their homes. Suddenly, Sadia thought that instead of sending her artisans to their homes, she would put them to work that would keep her business afloat and create jobs for the artisans. "I thought why not make masks and protective gear and sell it in the market," she said and added, "from the initial survey, I realized that this work would not only help people but also keep my factory going." Fortunately, Sadia got orders from several hospitals, voluntary associations and pharmaceutical companies for masks and PPE kits after examining her samples. Today the situation is that in Sadia's factory where she used to make colourful dresses for brides, the work of sewing three layers of masks and PPE kits is in full swing. Sadia says, "Over the past five months, we have manufactured and supplied thousands of masks and thousands of PPE kits to the market. We are selling these goods at a very low profit because we know that the financial condition of the people has been badly affected. Because of the low price, people are asking us to supply these goods instead of importing them."

Sadia's example, however, is exceptional. The general situation is that thousands of girls are currently anxious and insecure, both whose new commercial and industrial activities have died or are in the final stages of shutting down. It remains to be seen how many of these girls will be able to rehabilitate or restart their commercial units in the post-pandemic world.

(Translated from Urdu)



H. Problems of migrant workers

The Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated India's hunger and malnutrition woes, more so for the millions of workers in the unorganised sector, on their way back home or struggling to meet two ends in their urban and rural homes. Their embedded informality over labour, land and housing tenure has uprooted led to the loss of income, occupation and habitat, multiplying their already entrenched nutrition vulnerability.

Given the already acknowledged multidimensionality of the nutritional problem and its significant connection to immunity, further oversight or negligence, implicates a heavy toll on these de-facto nation builders, either through Covid-19 infection, poised now for community spread or due to the lockdown which is bound to deny them access to basic nutrition and micronutrients leading to death and disease.

India ranks low at 102 in the 2019 Global Hunger Index, below its neighbours, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, with documented poorer malnutrition levels among the rural poor, agriculture labourers and migrant workers, pregnant and lactating mothers and children.

Without urgent, timely and integrated nourishment through supplemental nutrition, special care and institutional rehabilitation, their malnutrition is likely to impact the future GDP significantly. With the relevant loss to GDP, estimated between 4% to 8%, it may undo the impetus intended via post-Covid revival and reform packages. Nikitha Nellutla writes about the desperation of women migrant labourers – even new mothers walking with their just born infants in arms, caught in the challenges thrown up by the pandemic and the desperation of women who work as domestic help. These women have to contend with both prejudices and exploitation using the Corona pandemic as a ruse.

Ninglun Hanghal writes of the uncertainty of both travel modes, and the time taken when women workers wanted to head back home after the lockdown. Apart from raising questions about why logistics and basics are still so poor in a country that touts a Mars mission on its currency notes, she points out how this travel also brought back the gender and space debate. Her story also raises questions about why North Easterners have to migrate to Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai or Kolkata and make peace with working there despite harassment and discrimination. Though the pandemic impacted the earning, it has also reinforced restrictions, curbed mobility and disempowered young women who otherwise enjoyed independence and agency as they earned an income away from their homes and villages.

Raksha Kumar looks at how the very laws created to protect, enable and empower women are used to work against them or in other cases like India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh has suspended 35 of its 38 labour laws for three years. Worryingly, hard-fought-for gender-equal laws like the Minimum Wages Act, Maternity Benefit Act, Equal Remuneration Act (ERA) are gone.

When Revati Laul says “Give me the bright beady-eyed knowing face with its wrinkles of age over a plump know-it-all any day. Because right now, youth and the myth of invincibility masks the self-righteous, self-assured, self-contained bigot,” she could mean it centripetally or centrifugally. In this delightful piece, she joins the dots between the intensely personal and the polemically political and familiarises the reader with the idea that these are not mutually exclusive worlds.

Yogesh Pawar then brings us back to the household which increasingly becomes the patriarchal stranglehold in times of Covid-19. But had patriarchy retreated or did it get itself an all-new politically correct camouflage? His feature looks at how between all its attendant inconveniences, the lockdown has also brought gender inequality and gender injustice within the confines of the home into sharp focus.



Tearful saga in the time of Corona

Nikitha Nellutla

Sarathi Media

Hyderabad, September 03, 2020

While the whole world marches towards modernity, stories of migrant workers are changing perspectives. Often they are still struggling for a square meal a day. Corona has left a lasting impact on them, especially the hapless women whose suffering can melt even the most hardened heart. Here are a few examples:

They have never dreamt of earning crores. All they want is two meals a day and a little something for their old parents. With no work in their home states, these labourers move to neighbouring states, hoping to find work. When the Centre and State announced a lockdown at such short notice, they lost their livelihoods. Forget about money to pay rent, many didn't have enough to buy food. Since there was no means of transport available, they risked their lives walking hundreds and thousands of kilometres back home to their villages. While some hopped onto trucks, others boarded private buses hired by private donors. But often that journey did not go smoothly, especially for women. Migrant workers from Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai had to cross the Medchal ORR (NH44) to reach their home states of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Odisha and Bihar. Every woman who came to the relief camps had her own horror story to recount.

To meet her children

Radha Devi was going from Hyderabad to Jharkhand. Her two children in her native village will only have food if she sends money home from what she earns as a labourer. When things got out of hand due to the lockdown, and there was no option, she began walking to reach her two children, living with her older sister. She ate only when she found food, walked as far as she could, slept in the shade of trees during the day, and walked again in the dark to reach Medchal Camp. From there she went to her village on a private bus.

Sagan, another mother like Radha Devi set out to also meet her children, living with her mother-in-law. Fearful of dying of Corona without seeing her children, she starved for three days, walking in the scorching sun to reach Medchal Camp to board a bus for her village.

Child marriage for girls

A large family migrated for work from Jhansi in Madhya Pradesh to a poultry farm near Keesara. This included two teenage girls and three boys. They had come so far only to earn enough money to marry off an underage daughter and give the bridegroom a motorcycle and dowry. The 'bride' too came to work with her extended family and siblings. For two months the owner of the poultry farm neither fed them nor paid them any salary and the family was headed back empty-handed, their dreams dashed.

When roads become maternity wards

Prameela (name changed), had to reach her village in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. She was already nine months pregnant. Hoping to reach her village, she and her husband boarded a bus organised by the Telangana government which dropped off all those aboard at Adilabad off the Maharashtra border. But her state did not want them. It did not provide any transportation from there on and blocked people coming on foot instead. The next day Prameela was in pain and had to deliver by the roadside with the help of fellow women travellers. After resting for a mere six hours, she gathered her newborn in her arms and began walking again with her husband to reach her village 70 km away.

The sufferings of infants

When Rupali and her husband with five others reached Medchal camp, she had a 21-day-old infant in her arms. Tears welled up in the eyes of people who saw how weak the child was. Rupali had set out on foot at 4 am from Yadaram at Gajwel. It took her seven hours to reach Medchal camp. Rupali's village is located between Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. When the police at the borders chased them off, the couple had to take a 400 km detour to get home. She was keen to show her baby to her kith and kin. "If we stop, we don't know whether we'll live or die," she said and started walking again. The baby became ill due to insufficient milk supply from the mother who was fasting during the postpartum period when nutritious food is recommended. Eventually, some volunteers felt sorry for their plight and gave them a special vehicle to drop them. Some donors helped her with the milk powder, to be mixed with hot water and fed to the baby. Many of the activists and officials at the Medchal Camp were left moist-eyed at what the young mother and her baby had endured.

Women are taken for granted

An incident at the Medchal Camp shocked many as a drunk man began beating up his wife mercilessly. The lockdown announced by the Central Government without any prior information created a stir in the lives of migrants. Unable to stay where they were and with no vehicles to get back home, the problems faced by the women were beyond imagination. If not violence at the hands of the husband, it was the challenge of being a single mother and raising children, or caring for bedridden in-laws. So many women migrant workers were subjected to insults, barbs, harassment and torture on their way home due to the lockdown.

Given how unsafe women are even in so-called safe cities in India, one can only imagine the plight of the women journeying hundreds of miles, walking day and night with strangers, men who could turn predators any moment. The lack of toilets made the journey that much more difficult. Despite this women looked out for each other even tearing up sarees to provide sanitary pads to those menstruating.

We have all seen pregnant women walking barefoot for days during the journey on the hot roads. After giving birth on the way, many mothers had to carry their new-borns baby in their arms. Everyone knows what kind of nutrition is needed postpartum. In addition to food, rest is also important for those mothers. But none of that happened in the case of those mothers. The breasts of those mothers who were starving and unable to eat dried up. Their infants remained hungry.

Divya Madan, Commissioner, Department of Women Development and Child Welfare, said her team immediately responded when it was learnt that many migrant workers were walking through Medchal. Funds were set up and kits made separately for women and children. "We provided about 7,000 kits which included sanitary pads, water bottles, hand wash, sanitiser, mask, biscuits. Children's kits include biscuits, milk powder, water bottles, energy bars and snacks.

(Translated from Telugu)



When Hunger rides piggyback with Corona

Nikitha Nellutla

Sarathi Media

Hyderabad, September 30, 2020

They are those who lived by the dint of their hard work, driven by a belief that they can survive even without education or wealth. These women champions of 'Dignity of Labour' take great pride in their self-esteem. This confidence has been hit hard by this pandemic and slowly the belief that they will overcome and survive is fading. When there is no food to eat for days on end such beliefs fly out of the window. After all, hunger and hope rarely go together. Though it didn't infect them Corona ruined their lives.

The total number of migrants who walked back due to the Corona pandemic and lockdown has not even been estimated. The worst-hit here too are women - single women, elderly women, women who live with domestic violence. Many of these women worked as domestic help and have been rendered jobless due to Corona.

Don't come to work

People from all districts of Telangana migrate to Hyderabad. Most of the men are here for daily wage labour. Some work for salaries of Rs. 8-10,000 per month, unable to even pay rent for a home in the metropolis. Their wives then work in homes nearby as domestic help adding to the family income so that there is enough food for all. However, many of these were laid off due to fears that they would spread Corona. Even after the lockdown was relaxed, only some allowed maids back into their houses, that too with several conditionalities.

Many women have been working as domestic help for two decades. Nearly 30 % of them are single, says Dr Lizzie Joseph, founder of the Domestic Workers Movement and chairman of the National Workers Welfare Trust. 'Most of the domestic help are in their 50s, 60s and 70s. They have no choice but to continue to do this work. Now fearing Corona, this elderly help is being retrenched. Nearly 70% of domestic help lost jobs in this manner. Many who came here from villages did not even have a ration card and managed with doles from the union and volunteers. Single mothers among them are the worst off with no work and no money. Many haven't got even the Rs 1,500 provided by the government as aid,' She said.

No response from the Government

Usually, those in this field have very little or no education. They don't know who to talk to about their hardships. Members of the Telangana Domestic Workers Union have taken forward the grievances of many domestic workers across the state. The union has nearly 1.6 lakh domestic workers registered from Hyderabad and Rangareddy districts. The union has demanded Rs 10,000 crore in financial assistance to domestic workers who were out of work during the Corona pandemic, adequate rations even for those without ration cards and ESI for health problems. Union members say they have not received any help or information from the government for months.

Work which they are habituated to is gone

A couple from Mahabubnagar migrated to Hyderabad to be able to feed themselves. The husband earns up to Rs 10,000 a month as a watchman in a Srisailam cement sacks warehouse but it was not enough for the family with two children, so his wife Kavita worked in six homes and made Rs 7,000 as domestic help. They were pulling along with difficulty when Corona came and turned their lives topsy turvy. The husband

lost his job at the cement company. Kavitha too was jobless. They headed back to their village but began going hungry there too. So they came back to Hyderabad and began selling fruits on a cart. Within 15 days he had a minor accident and fractured his leg. Now that he can't work Kavitha is struggling alone to ensure the family doesn't starve.

“Our's is a joint family in Nalgonda district. 20 years ago, my husband and I came to Moosarambhag, Hyderabad. While my husband worked as a driver, I worked as a domestic help in nearby homes. 7 years ago he had a heart attack and died. After that, I went to work in two new homes to raise my two children. Until March 2020 I made Rs 9,000 per month when I worked in five homes. None of them wants to let me work since the lockdown. Now I have worked only in one house and they too put a precondition that I shouldn't work in any other house. I now make only Rs 2,500 a month of which Rs 1,500 goes in rent. “Corona shattered our lives, we'd be better off to get it and die,” Suguna says with tears in her eyes.

Restrictions from housing societies

Devi's family has been living in Hyderabad for 10 years and they hired a woman to cook, sweep and mop. The maid was told not to come for two months in the lockdown. The family decided to call her later, but their neighbours in the other flats opposed this and fought with them for 10 days. Finally, they relented and let her come and do non-cooking chores. “We never saw her as an outsider. We know her financial condition. Besides, she is the only earning member in her house so we pay her Rs 2,500,” said Devi who expressed shock at the “stone-hearted” neighbours.

Corona pushed us back into ages behind

- With the Centre announcing a lockdown suddenly, many have not even received the monthly salary they worked for. Some left for their villages and haven't returned to even ask for their dues. To top it salaries have now been slashed. Stressed and anxious about keeping the kitchen fires going, women are now forced to sell vegetables, fruits, flowers, masks, etc.
- Many women worked in 4-5 homes because each home pays them only a paltry amount. But now with the fear of Corona, they can't work in more houses than one.
- Both authorities and doctors say that Corona is a risk factor, especially for women over the age of 50.
- Many companies are letting employees work from home due to Corona. With (wo)men staying at home, they are doing office work as well as housework to reduce costs. As a consequence, many domestic help have lost jobs.
- Corona has brought back old caste and class prejudices and domestic help face increasing discrimination. When they go to work in a flat/apartment, they are told not to use the elevator or touch the staircase balustrade or even gates.
- Some gated communities/ housing societies/office complexes have issued circulars that domestic help who have had Corona should not be allowed to work even if they are cured.
- While some in the apartment and gated communities are willing to give the domestic help jobs, many have asked for a no-objection certificate, Covid negative report, employee ID etc some of which are expensive and/or difficult to get.

(Translated from Telugu)



Covid-19 pandemic: Impact on mobility of women

Ninglun Hanghal

The Sangai Express

Imphal, July 22, 2020

Roselyn was among the first batch of people who boarded the Shramik special train from Chennai on May 10. The 19-year-old undergraduate was an employee of a restaurant in Chennai. Her train reached Jiribam, the only railway station in Manipur on May 13. From there, she and her co-passengers travelled 200 km in government-arranged buses to reach the state capital Imphal. Roselyn had to undertake another journey of 65 km to reach her hometown Lamka the next day.

Due to the pandemic lockdown, Roselyn's workplace is closed indefinitely. "I got half of my monthly salary," she said. Roselyn earned a monthly salary of Rs 10,000. "Although the restaurant shut down I was not told to quit, in fact, my manager told me to come back after lockdown," said Roselyn. Many like Roselyn whose workplace was shut down, decided to return home. Roselyn said that most of her co-passengers on the train worked in restaurants or beauty parlours. Others are mostly students or people who are visitors or taking medical treatment in Chennai. Another passenger on the same train was Leena, a trainee beautician.

She said, "The parlour where I worked as a trainee is closed, so I had to return". She shared a room in a Chennai suburb with fellow beauticians like her. "It became difficult to stay on, we don't know when it will open again," she said. Leena and Roslyn's income has stopped since then.

By June, roughly 20,000, mostly young people, returned to Manipur alone from big cities across India. There were thousands of others who returned to other Northeastern states.

In mid-May, a group of 18 nurses working in private hospitals in Kolkata hired a bus and left the city. It took them two nights and three days to reach Imphal. One of the nurse returnees said on condition of anonymity that the hospital she worked with was sealed and declared a containment area. She said, "We were locked in our shared flat for already a month, our rations were getting over and there was no salary". Moreover, the other residents in the colony were not comfortable with them due to the stigma attached to Covid-19 patients and healthcare workers.

For 22-year-old Somi, a fresh nursing graduate from an Andhra Pradesh nursing school, the joy of getting her first job was short-lived. The lockdown changed the situation even for paramedics. "It was my first job at a private hospital in Kolkata, but we were not provided with PPE kits nor was there any segregation of patients. It was a difficult decision to make, but it was getting too risky," said Somi eager to return home in the hill district of Kamjong. As a fresher, Somi earned Rs12,000 every month. Another nurse Aneri said that it was made clear to them that the management will not take responsibility. "This means if we were infected with the virus we would have been on our own as there would be no specific care or facility provided for us," said Aneri. "PPE is one thing, what about food and essential needs if the lockdown continue?" she asked.

Anxiety and uncertainty pushed them to return home. But even at home, there is no certainty. Will their jobs be still waiting for them after the lockdown?

What plans do they have in mind, once the lockdown eases and hopefully things get back to normal? Roselyn is undecided. She cannot tell if she will return to Chennai to resume her work. For Somi, she would prefer to work in her home state, provided she gets a job otherwise she may have to go to the city again. Aneri is doubtful, “I don't know right now, if I don't get a job in Manipur, yes I will have to think of looking for it outside,” she said.

Currently, Somi is helping children in their studies at her village since schools are closed. Roselyn is helping her parents in cultivation and weaving pua – women's wear on the traditional loom at her village.

Leena and Roslyn are not aware of the state government's new initiative calling for returnees to register themselves online mentioning their skills on the newly launched portal www.mssd.in. Somi and Aneri say they heard about some job vacancies in the state health department but were unable to seek details. Aneri hopes that something will come out of the skill mapping initiative of the government. “I have registered for the skill mapping,” said Aneri while Somi is yet to do so.

It was for employment opportunities that these young women ventured out into new places. The majority were employed in the hospitality sector, BPOs and shopping malls. Cities provide earning opportunities, but they also pose huge challenges. These young women are vulnerable in the city. Moreover, not highly qualified and unskilled they mostly land up with low paying jobs.

According to a study on Northeast women, migrants by the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi (2014), 60% of women who migrated to cities like Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata reported harassment and discrimination.

The study states that two-third of the respondents frequently faced unjust treatment in everyday life.

Beerjurekha Samom, a Delhi-based journalist notes that while discrimination against people from the region was always an issue, the pandemic has made it worse. “Earlier, they were stereotyped as ‘momo and chinky’ and now they are being called ‘coronavirus’. It is tragic,” said Samom.

Madhuchandra, who started the Delhi-based North East Support Centre Helpline conducted a survey in 2011. The survey reported that over 414,850 people from Northeast India migrated to megacities of India from 2005 to 2010. The survey has two sets of respondents; 107 respondents from field interviews and 96 case studies of survivors who have reported to the North East Support Centre and Helpline during the said period. Of the case reported, 58% are violence against women (34% molestation, 8% human trafficking, 7% beating, 4% rape, 2% attempt to rape). Other cases include; non-payment of salaries, issues with landlords and others.

The last decades also saw a large number of young women migrants. Duncan McDuie-Ra, Associate Dean of Research at the University of New South Wales, Australia, in his research book, “Northeast Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge and Retail (2012)” finds that earlier it was a small group of elites from Northeast who left their homes. Things changed after the year 2000. Violence and conflict were the main reasons earlier. But today many people from even a peaceful background and less privileged groups leave their home states, mainly for jobs and better incomes, which the home states do not offer. This is especially true for women. Another reason is the aspirations and the evolving economy of Indian cities.

Duncan observes that women enact roles that are required of them in their jobs – that are mostly the hospitality sector or fashion outlets. Duncan found that women get jobs easily and find their “independence” in the city and mostly preferred to stay on.

An income makes these young women feel a sense of freedom and empowerment. Most of these women migrants support their siblings and are key contributors to the family’s sustenance.

Now their small income too has stopped with the pandemic and has thrown in a new dimension wherein they are placed in a difficult circumstance. Though their employers have told them to return, there is no assurance that a job will be waiting for them.

Meanwhile, restrictions are placed on them. As Somi said, “My parents do not want me to return to the same workplace”.

For Roselyn, to go to Chennai and work was a breakthrough. It was the earning of a small income that gave her the freedom to travel out of her home. She has four siblings who are still young. No one in her family has formal employment. The job and regular earning gave way to the restrictions at home.

“In fact, my parents had not fully agreed to my going to Chennai,” recalled Roselyn. “Now, they are not going to allow me anymore.” Her parents want her to stay home and not venture out anymore.

Aneri convinced her parents that she needed to get experience as she was fresh out of training college. She said had it not been for that training, she would never have been allowed.

While Covid-19 has severely impacted the earning means, it has also reinforced restrictions. It curbs their mobility and disempowers young women who otherwise had some sense of independence as they earned an income away from their homes and villages.

(Translated from Telugu)



Working women and laws: Indian Women Suffer Gender Discrimination Due To Well-Meaning Laws

Raksha Kumar

Forbes

Mumbai, September 27, 2020

Laws should not perpetuate existing social discrimination, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg had once said. Any differential treatment among genders must not “create or perpetuate the legal, social, and economic inferiority of women,” she had argued, according to a New York Times report.

Women benefit from positive discrimination, especially at the workplace, but lawmakers need to ensure there are no unintended negative consequences. At a time when the pandemic has disproportionately affected women’s employment, it turns out one of the worst enemies for Indian women are, ironically, the well-meaning laws meant for their benefit.

Let’s take the example of India’s Maternity Benefit Act of 2017. The law increased women’s mandated paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. But, since paid paternity leaves are not mandatory, the law ends up reinforcing women’s role as primary caregivers and increases employer bias. “We don’t say it, but we would rather not employ women in their 30s. If we employ someone in their 20s and they stay with us long enough, we grant them paid maternity leave,” said a Mumbai-based HR manager of a multinational corporation. The person requested anonymity as they were talking about unofficial company policy.

Clearly, social change is needed to reverse the “motherhood penalty”, it is not the place only for laws. But, India might not have time for slow-brewing changes.

It has become an urgent need to set some of these laws right because of the country’s speedily contracting economy. GDP has shrunk by around 24%. For context, the GDP of the US contracted by around 9%.

One way to pull the GDP numbers up is by increasing women’s participation in the formal economy. A 2020 United Nations Global Compact study found that raising women’s participation in the labour force to the same level as men can boost India’s GDP by 27 %.

India’s Female Labour Force Participation rate - the share of women aged 15-64 who report either as being employed, or being available for work - is 24.8% in 2020. This number is down from 34% in 2006.

And things seem to be spiralling downward

Some states have proposed changes in labour laws, with the hope that this might stimulate greater monetary inflow into the economy. Uttar Pradesh, which houses as many people as Germany, Spain and Italy put together, has suspended 35 of its 38 labour laws for three years. Worryingly, laws like the Minimum Wages Act, Maternity Benefit Act, Equal Remuneration Act (ERA) are gone. (Some observers believe it needs a humongous social push to get them back).

Contrary to boosting the economy, the suspension of these laws might push more and more women out of the workforce, which can be detrimental to the intended purpose.

Without the Equal Remuneration Act, the gender pay gap is bound to widen. The states have passed a law that increases the mandatory minimum number of work hours from eight to twelve. Women cannot work extended hours as they are mostly primary caregivers at home. In any case, the suspension of public transport had reduced women's mobility, making it tougher to reach their respective workplaces safely.

In India, women are also not allowed to work in any factory overnight, according to the Factories Act of 1948. The law was meant to ensure women's safety in the workplace. However, apart from some exceptions such as the garment industry, the manufacturing sector sees disproportionately fewer women. Factories prefer to employ men over women.

Researcher Ashmita Gupta focused on the impact trade liberalisation had on the employment of women by big firms. In a 2015 paper, she wrote that the policy of constraining women's work hours had an adverse effect on women's participation in the labour force.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 is a positive step towards addressing harassment at work. Yet, 84% of companies surveyed in 2018 by the Observer Research Foundation and World Economic Forum report being unaware of the policy.

More women work in the informal sector compared to the formal sector. This puts them at a disadvantage, to begin with, as the laws do not apply in the informal sector.

Even for the small number of women who are governed by these legislations, they are obstacles at best.



Quarantine diaries: In which I ‘killed’ two news editors & my mom

Revati Laul

The Quint

New Delhi, June 22, 2020

It happened on Day 6 of the new world I was in. You travel for work, and the price you pay for your ‘sin’ is self-isolation. Especially when you live with an ageing parent and young infant. I had been to Western UP for a reporting assignment and the condition laid down by my mother, who I live with, was this: I had to be confined to my room for fourteen days after because she did not want to live with the paranoia of sitting next to me and imagining virus-like goo dripping off my skin and onto hers. Or my five-year-old nephew’s.

Food would be laid on a tray outside my room. I would have to soak my clothes in soap water and leave them in a tub outside for my mother to bung into the washing machine. Any surfaces I touched to leave clothes at the door or take in the food tray would be sanitised. My communication with the outside world would be through a big glass window on the wall of my room.

I decided this had to be chronicled for posterity. People all over the world were writing lockdown and quarantine diaries and I wanted to be part of that conversation. And use this space to ask me what isolation meant, and what price we must pay as storytellers to do what we do. And whether the experience is different for different genders.

It didn’t take long for it to come to murder.

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#MyQuarantineDays – Day 6

The imagination is a dark place, and if you are brave enough to allow it centre-stage, turn on the arc lights and give it a mic, you may never need to watch an M Night Shyamalan or Hitchcock movie again. It’s why I’ve never kept a diary.

Today was a day like that. I wanted to kill the editors who promised to publish my Covid-19 story but had not done it yet. I wanted to slay. Editors. My mother – who is the most important person in my life. But she too had sinned. By being paranoid about me leaving traces of disease all over the house via objects that enter and leave my room. Separate plate and glass and spoons. Separate ‘jhadu’ and ‘poncha’ so that if there were germs lurking on my body after I got back from a Covid hot-spot, they wouldn’t crawl off the mop I touched and worm their way around other members of the house. This Covid panic put my mum firmly on the chopping block. Off with her head.

Speaking of jhadu-poncha, I found it interesting how the domestic space was finally the front and centre of all conversations. Was this a tiny step forward for womankind – from home-makers to home-workers? For this work to finally start to be seen as productive?

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#MyQuarantineDays: Day 1

In our house, what really makes or breaks us, is our washing machine. On Day One of my fourteen-day quarantine, it wreaked havoc as a longstanding issue came to a boil. It was over the very complex and divisive matter of whether to use the Normal Wash or Delicate.

It wasn't about the machine; it was about raw power and control. My mother insisted clothes be put in 'Normal Wash,' while I insisted on 'Delicate'. Being confined to my room meant my mother felt this war was hers to win, and she put my clothes in Normal Wash.

"Please take them out, Ma, and put them in Delicate Wash!" My mother was offended and enraged. How dare I tell her what settings to use when she was doing me the favour of washing my clothes. "Nothing will happen to your clothes in one wash," she shouted back. Having seen evidence to the contrary and wearing my only good pair of black pants with ripped hems as a result of one wash, I did not agree. I brought up the story of these pants that jabbed her in the jugular. And then, like all wars, this one ended in steely silence. There was no armistice, but then, when has there been a workable one in so many decades? It was like those Israel-Palestine or Indo-Pak peace summits and accords, where the silences were louder and more menacing than all the guns and bombs and IEDs.

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Was this just self-indulgent banter, I asked myself as I wrote this diary. Were there themes that had a wider resonance? In a world where we are all in our own isolated bubbles, who are we? I wrestled with these as I went along, fully aware of my privileged position, to be able to be fed and kept safe while thousands of workers were going without food and dying just to be able to find their way back home.

In my little world of my friends and those who read my quarantine posts on Facebook, I asked if the universal response to Covid-19 was male in its character, and not just male but patriarchal. If New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Arden's handling of the pandemic contrasted with Trump's or Modi's, and if, pushing this argument to its most extreme, preposterous position, was empathy a more feminine trait?

#MyQuarantineDays: Day 4

Lockdown. Confinement. In a purely psychoanalytic sense, from Freud to Foucault, what has it meant around the world to have a universal response born out of primordial social conditioning? What we don't know, we talk about endlessly with great fiat and pretence. So male! Not being able to deal with the unknown has produced the typical reaction – to discipline and punish. The post started on this rather shrill note but eventually broadened out to the gender spectrum we are all on.

Giving people the flexibility to travel and shop at any hour they please? If you limit the time people step out, aren't you forcing them into tighter spaces as they queue up for their Rs 500 of Jan Dhan money or to buy groceries? Instead of containment, would expansion have been a less patriarchal, more inclusive way to deal with the virus?

A close male friend commented as follows: "Strange Brew. Supine logic. I am a lot embarrassed of my gender conditioning. Truth always escapes me. Since it is at the tip of my nose. Blind-spotted like the male virus." If I was going to spend my confinement tossing everything over, then I had to dwell on a perennial favourite – what I called 'The Jane Austen Conditioning.' If the personal is political – and I have always believed that – I had to look at the way I was conditioned and put it out there.

#MyQuarantineDays: Day 5

Has aloneness ever felt like a celebration to you? Each morning, you hear the loud 'tak' sound of the toaster popping, and the scratch-scratch of the butter knife, not drowned out by the insistent morning chatter of others.

Each night you close your door to the last drunk friend whose stench lingers on a bit. And heave a sigh of relief that you're finally by yourself. I am speaking here of the rich, freeing celebration of being able to walk in your house naked (with the chick-blinds turned down). Pepper this routine with a stash of different lovers – none of which fit the descriptor of a relationship. They come and go like the breeze that interrupts a hot summer. I didn't think I would like this person or be this person. I waited for Mr Darcy to walk out of 'Pride and Prejudice' and speak to me in dulcet tones as we hold hands under the stars or fall asleep under a tree with a book we're sharing.

Then I realised that if he actually did show up, I'd probably wretch and squirm and tell him to get out.

To my surprise, the most interesting reactions to this piece were from two very married women. One wrote: "Identified and resonated with every word. Hmmmmmm. At 80?!!!!!" The other said: "I think I'll watch Pride and Prejudice tonight to reimagine Mr Darcy with dentures and kick him around a bit." Encouraged hugely by these responses, I dwelt on a phenomenon that I felt was under-written in our Coronaworld and needed calling out.

#MyQuarantineDays: Day 7

Age. That's the most frightening word on the Corona-scape. It's taken the word 'old' and stretched it right upto death. It's made the disease hover overhead like an insistent invitation, to the point where every news broadcast underscores this doomsday prophecy with statistical progression.

Why are we taking the best part of the time away from time? Do any of us want to go back to adolescent stupid or their testy twenties, throwing up in every car and every parking lot?

Age. That thing that comes when you wait for it. The slow shaping of you into you, one cell and day and realisation at a time. Age is that sculpture that we've been chiselling away at our entire lives. What we've run the rat race or some race for. What we've hurried along, carrying kids and cases, to get to. Do we really want to speed through the railway track and then not rejoice when the train finally pulls into the station to say – 'I am here?'

This is that autumnal serenity that takes us past deceit and failure and success into that glorious place of just being. The comfortable sofa time, when we can just sit. Talk to the birds, not as bird watchers but for no particular purpose at all. We can see parts of our mind unspool and be terrified but also see how much we've carried and let a bit of good sense slide out from the sides.

We can let it all hang loose. Laugh very loudly. Your tea tastes funny. You want to have more cheese than you're allowed. You stare at the TV without really watching it and so effing what? Why does everything have to add up to some ridiculous purpose? Lose purpose. Throw it away for a few days.

We've plied the nth story about how India is great because of its 'demographic dividend.' I never heard anything so absurd. We're great because fewer of our unmanageable 1.4 billion strong population will die? What are we doing while we're alive and young and stupid?

What we need are our Amartya Sens (currently 86) and Medha Patkars (65) of the world, who've travelled barefoot and had their feet singed.

What is beauty without fragility? Give me the bright beady-eyed knowing face with its wrinkles of age over a plump know-it-all any day. Because right now, youth and the myth of invincibility masks the self-righteous, self-assured, self-contained bigot.

This post travelled quite a bit and came right back to me as a WhatsApp text from a friend's mother who said: "From all of us above 60, thank you."

As I got closer to the end of my quarantine, I moved away from these deep questions, to the shallow, happy freedom of making my entire day about nothing more than the way I do the eggs.

#MyQuarantineDays: Day 10

There are days when you just want to throw stuff at the walls, smash a few window panes, rip up the mattresses and cry. On a morning when hormones played their worst trick, making my pre-menopausal cycle a complete mess, I took all day to focus on the one thing that altered it. Eggs.

For a really wrecked day, it has got to be golden scrambled eggs, tossed lovingly in a pan full of butter, a bit of pepper crackling onto it just before eating. I place a whole wobbly lot on a crisp, nearly-burnt brown toast, and as the bitterness of the charred bread mixes with the creamy egg, it takes me straight to orgasm and back.

The masala omelette, the kind that can only be done properly in the street. This is for that time of day when you've sat in a meeting that made no sense. Or a day when your life feels worthless, you are telling yourself that you are a total loser, a failure. Then you pass by an 'anda-slice wala' and the masalas frying on top of eggs send a sharp tingle up your nose, breaking the circuitry of those grim thoughts.

Within less than three minutes of me publishing this post, my phone pinged with a WhatsApp text from a very dear friend in Boston. "In homage to your writing Rev." The accompanying picture said it all.

I could not end my tryst with myself without a nod to the one theme that defined me most to those I know. It had to end with a wholly primitive, provocative post about sex. Or in times of Covid, self-sex.

#MyQuarantineDays: Day 13

I am almost at the end of my 14-day quarantine, so it's only fitting, that when I emerge from my cave, I shed new light on a dark world. I preach from my pulpit about the way the fallen must be resurrected. So, here it comes, friends, women, not-children... my talisman to you is one word. Masturbate. When you're angry, masturbate. When you're bored, when you're sad, when you're on edge, just do it.

If your bills are piling up and there's no work coming in, masturbate. If your family thinks you are a cretin, masturbate. If the fat lizard on the wall that you've spent all afternoon avoiding, lobs missile-like turds on your freshly-washed pile of clothes, take your clothes off right there and show the helpless reptile what's what.

Let's just say my mother wasn't thrilled with the post, but quarantines had to be used and I thought I had put mine to some. I had killed, cooked, self-flagellated and given myself love. I had no idea what turgid reality awaited once I crossed back. Or how the math of five days of reporting leading to 14 days of confinement would play out going forward. Would there ever be separate quarantine centres for journalists? There were no answers. But as far as I could tell, when everything was out of control, all that I could do was to use the quarantine as my vaccine, to prepare for whatever was hurled at me next.



Household and the patriarchal stranglehold in times of Covid-19

Yogesh Pawar

The Free Press Journal

Mumbai, June 16, 2020

Bhanu Pankajakshan and her husband Hari are barely speaking to each other. “I’m waiting for the office to reopen,” fumes the FMCG marketing exec who has been working from home since the lockdown began.

“It’s got to a level where I can feel my hair bristle when he’s around. We’re forever sparring over his selfish behaviour and unwillingness to help with household chores,” complains the Hindu Colony, Matunga resident who adds, “While the government has announced a relaxation of the lockdown, trains/cabs are still only accessible to essential workers approved by the government. BEST buses are far and few in between with more than kilometre-long queues. Looks like I’ll have to live with this situation for longer,” she sighs resignedly.

Hari blames what he calls Bhanu’s “crabbiness” to her spoiled upbringing. “She was brought up with a full-time live-in help in her parent’s Coimbatore home apart from a gardener-driver and another maid who came to sweep, swab and wash the bathrooms and toilets. She finds every household chore a pain. Since our marriage, we’ve always had two kaamwalis, one for cooking and one for the other chores. With no kaamwali bai she tries to take it out on me or our nine-year-old daughter Uma,” says the 32-year-old who teaches Calculus and Physics at a coaching class. He feels his wife’s anger began erupting since his elderly widowed mom flew to his sister’s Thiruvananthapuram home for her grandson’s birthday on March 10th. “Amma was supposed to come back in a fortnight but the lockdown changed all that and she has been stuck at my sister’s and most of the chores have now become Bhanu’s responsibility. But all women do it. I don’t know why she cribs so much,” he smirks.

When egged on about pitching in to help he insists he is already doing his bit. “I’ve been washing all my plates, bowls and spoons after every meal and sometimes I wash Uma’s plates too. What else can I do?” he asks.

Bhanu rolls her eyes and laughs, saying: “True. That is supposed to square up with my cooking, sweeping, swabbing, washing the bathroom, watering plants and helping Uma with her bath, tying her pigtails when I am not navigating youtube cooking videos because my sambars and dosas are not as good as his mom’s.” She recounts their latest argument over the laundry, adding, “I am expected to load and unload the machine, hang out the clothes to dry, fold and arrange them in each of our cupboard sections and yet while on a video call to his mom he was making it out to be like he’s doing the laundry just because he was pressing buttons on the panel when needed.”

Maybe Hari has not been following how the washing detergents brand Ariel had to delete its '#ShareTheLoad' advertisement, after a severe backlash for its 'misogyny.' The ad had men sharing home chores because 'unequal division of chores is keeping women awake' during the lockdown.

Maybe Hari has not been following how the washing detergents brand Ariel had to delete its '#ShareTheLoad' advertisement, after a severe backlash for its 'misogyny.' The ad had men sharing home

chores because 'unequal division of chores is keeping women awake' during the lockdown.

Ariel had tweeted: “Times of crisis bring people closer. They push us to play roles unimagined and to be the best versions of ourselves in every little moment. Here's to all those spectacular men who've begun to #ShareTheLoad and made it a joyful, loving part in their homes.” Once the video was shared on Twitter, users called out the Ariel ad for “overhyping” the little a man does.

Across the city in Mumbai's suburb of Goregaon, banker Raghu Kishore is busy with the vacuum cleaner. He's done with the drawing room and calls his homemaker wife Sameera to seek approval. Though she is unloading the washing machine herself he insists she comes and sees how his efforts have left the drawing-room spick and span. “I've cleaned the fans too,” he points out and slips in a request. “Can you make me some coffee?” Sameera rolls her eyes and walks to the kitchen. The used utensils pile stares at her from the sink as she sets water to boil for coffee and goes back to attending to the washing machine.

Whether the high-tech mop or the vacuum cleaner, Raghu uses these regularly to clean the house. “My mother raised me to help in the house and I realise that since I'm working from home I must do my bit to help, especially since there's no maid,” he says but admits he does not help with stuff like cooking since he does not know how to. Sameera quickly defends him, “He is good with gadgets and tech stuff so I leave that to him. Also unlike me, he is the sole breadwinner. I think it is only fair that he only helps as much as he can.”

In distant Bengaluru, the situation is reversed. Nidhi and Kaustubh Pai live off the Yelahanka suburb of the Karnataka capital and work for rival software majors. “I admit I don't see household chores as my prime priority and do them only as and when. There's a lot going on at work with so many layoffs and my mind is completely caught with that,” admits Nidhi and smiles about how Kaustubh has always taken the initiative to keep house, cook and attend to any errands to buy groceries among others. “He really goes after it and wants everything to look like some interior magazine home. Even if he's cleaning and putting back a vase in place he really labours over its direction, the angle at which light will hit it and how that will affect the overall look, etc. Even when he cooks the kitchen is left glistening clean and almost looks like it was never used.”

Kaustubh, an only child, was raised by his mom single-handedly in South Karnataka's Karkala after his father died when he was only four. “Mom was a clerk at the local state transport depot and raised me to help out with everything, right from plucking vegetables and flowers in the garden outside our house, getting water from the well at the back and even using the South Indian grinding stone to make idli batter, chutneys etc,” he recounts and adds, “She was very strict and gave me quite the tongue lashing if she felt I'd made even the slightest mess. 'Don't do things in a way that'll increase my work,' she'd rebuke. Over a while, I imbibed that quality and now everything has to be just right otherwise it bothers me.”

Exacting Standards

Nidhi says she loves this attention to details but does not appreciate Kaustubh applying the same exacting standards to her. “I'm not the type who will guilt-trip herself over things like dirty curtains or a pile-up of unwashed clothes and bed linen. I'll get to them when I get to them at my own pace but they have to wait till I finish off what are my priorities,” she explains. She was raised with two brothers in Mangalore and still resents how her mother insisted she help at home through school, college and the beginning of her career. “My brothers would leave even the damp towels after drying themselves on their beds. I was supposed to tidy their room, help mom, do well in studies and look presentable all the time,” she says despite her discomfort she complied. “I didn't know better or just did not have the articulation needed to question her though I would simmer within.”

At the beginning of their two-year marriage, Nidhi used to be amused that Kaustubh laboured till late night in the kitchen to “ensure it is fresh and clean for the morning” even if he had come home late. “But after the lockdown, I realise that he not only wants to foist these standards on me but seeks appreciation for everything he does, even ever so casually listing and pointing out stuff to me,” she says and adds, “It’s almost as if in some unsaid way he is underlining what all I did not do or wants me to keep thanking him or praising him for what he's done. All I'm saying is that it is not like I won't or haven't done all the chores at home by myself ever! When he's away on a work tour or unwell I do it all by myself even if we entertain or have my mom or his visiting.” She says she never insists “on instant appreciation or excessively saccharine-tinged thank yous,” and scoffs, “All that belongs in those ads and films where everything is fake and unnecessary.”

Patriarchal pushback

Despite the rapid march for gender equality, patriarchy has always pushed back. In boardrooms, in policymaking and in courts of law. But the enforced lockdown has brought the focus on this playing out in our homes. One of India's leading Women's Studies experts and faculty with Tata Institute of Social Sciences Dr Lakshmi Lingam says: “In India, like most South Asian countries, historically derived gender roles, spaces and stereotypes of the ‘public’ male breadwinner (provider) and ‘private’ female caregiver are espoused even under changing situations. This is due to the association of household status with ‘women’s non-work that has been perpetuated by the circumstances of women having to supply their labour in the paid market work spheres under extreme economic stress and poverty,” she points out and adds, “It is ironic that at times even the opposition to changing gender roles comes from women themselves who have internalised its social construction.”

She further explains how this is intrinsically linked to cultural and traditional values which constrain recognition of women’s economic participation. “The interaction between religious beliefs and economic forces reinforces patriarchy. Clearly, the value or self-worth of women might have been set very high if it were measured based on their indispensability to the household,” she says citing the work of pioneering Dutch feminist Hanna Papanek which highlights the outcome of such ‘symbolic’ work rather than its content and terms them as 'family status-production work.'

Women & self-worth

Papanek, in her works, talks of a shift from emphasising upon woman’s worth or ‘value’ to others in the socialisation process, to focus upon their own sense of value to themselves – their sense of self-worth. This she has underlined as crucial to understanding the persistence of inequality and evolving basic strategies for change following in the footsteps of John Stuart Mill.

Both Bhanu and Sameera might see Papanek's point about how failure to address the issue of justice within households is significant because the family is the first, and arguably the most influential school of moral development. Sociologist and cultural historian Nandini Sardesai echoes that thought and underlines how the household is the first environment in which human beings experience how persons treat each other. “We learn most of how to be just/unjust very early on there. If children see that gender leads to different treatment, this leaves a lasting impact on their psycho-social, personal and moral development. Injustice then gets socialised in the child's mind. S/he learns that just by being born male, a person has enhanced entitlement. On the other hand, being born female is enough to have inequality heaped on you to accept subordination and worse even abuse as par for the course,” she laments.

Incidentally, Hanna Papanek has said in the context of poor countries: “Domestic groups in which age and gender difference confer power on some over others are poor environments in which to unlearn the norms

of inequality,” and “given the persistence of gender-based inequalities in power, authority, and access to resources, one must conclude that socialisation for gender inequality is by and large very successful.” Such a comparison of most families in rich countries with poor families in poor countries—where distinctions between the sexes often start earlier and are much more blatant and more harmful to girls.

Third World inequality

Several Third World households, it seems, are even worse silos of justice, because they are more extreme inculcations of the inequality of the sexes as natural and justified than their developed world equivalents. And thus there is even more need for attention to be paid to gender inequality in these contexts.

For as long as women's access to paid work is constrained, both by discrimination and sex segregation in the workplace and by the assumption that women are ‘naturally’ responsible for all or most of the unpaid work of the household, this will not change, says Sardesai. “The lockdown and its unique circumstances might be highlighting this injustice for now but how many households will really change to a gender-just and gender-equal ecosystem for good once this Corona crisis blows over? Will we just as easily go back to the way things were? Most importantly why should women who have waited for generations for this to happen to be willing to put this genie back in the bottle?”

As early as 1991 a UN report had highlighted that except for North America and Australia, time-use statistics considering all work (paid and unpaid economic activity as well unpaid housework) reveals that women spend more time working than men in all developed and developing regions. Lakshmi Lingam points out how it is then an irony that most of the women's work is not paid, not considered ‘productive’ and rarely if ever given a low down position in the hierarchy of economic participation. “The perception that women's work is of less worth, largely because either unpaid or poorly paid (even though in most places they do more of it, and it is crucial to the survival of household members) contributes to women's being devalued and having less power both within the family and outside,” she sighs and adds, “In a way this worsens the likelihood that the division of labour between the sexes will continue, reinforcing women's complete or partial economic dependence upon men, a vicious cycle society allows to go on unbroken without once thinking of how it is shackling half of humankind in it.”

According to her, this is what makes society look down on the large band of largely women unorganised labour who work as domestic help in our homes. “We want to mock them, undercut their pay and make it seem like we are doing them a favour when it is actually the other way around. Our very way of life can collapse without their contribution,” points out Lingam. “I hope this becomes an important takeaway from this lockdown.”

Women's work's worth

She extrapolates from the help to all women and points out how this pecking order traps them in a downward spiral of socially caused and distinctly asymmetric vulnerability. “The devaluation of women's work, as well as their lesser physical strength and economic dependence upon men, in turn, allows them across the world to be subject to physical, sexual and/or psychological abuse by their husbands or other male partners. In India, like many poor countries, this power differential goes far beyond the abuse and overwork of women to deprivation in feeding, healthcare and education of the girl child. Sometimes it takes on an even uglier form like foeticide where patriarchy actually gets to sit in the decision whether they will even be born or not.”

Wonder what Hari or Raghu make of that.



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